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REFORMIST TRENDS IN CORPORATE FOOD REGIME: INDONESIA'S RESPONSE TO THE FERTILIZER SUPPLY CRISIS DURING THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

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ABSTRACT

The Russia-Ukraine war triggered a global fertilizer supply crisis that exposed the vulnerability of import-dependent agricultural economies. For Indonesia - one of Southeast Asia's largest fertilizer importers, sourcing over six million tons annually and relying on Russia and Belarus for more than 15 percent of its total supply – the disruption led to a sharp increase in fertilizer prices, rising production costs for farmers, and inflationary pressures on the national economy. In response, the government expanded subsidies for urea and Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium (NPK) fertilizers to stabilize access and contain price volatility. This study examines Indonesia's policy response to the 2022 fertilizer supply crisis through the lens of the corporate food regime, identifying how the response represents a Reformist trend within Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's typology. Employing a qualitative approach and drawing on secondary data - including policy documents, fiscal reports, and statements from international organizations – the research analyzes how the state managed the crisis within global structural constraints. The findings show that Indonesia's policy actions exemplify reformist governance: the state reasserted its role as a stabilizing force to manage market disruptions and maintain political stability, yet without transforming the underlying dependencies that sustain the corporate food regime.

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INTRODUCTION

The Russia-Ukraine war has reverberated across global food and fertilizer markets, disrupting supply chains and driving unprecedented price volatility. Fertilizers – particularly nitrogen, phosphate, and potash – became emblematic of the fragility of globalized agriculture, as sanctions, shipping bottlenecks, and energy costs reduced the availability of

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Russian exports (FAO; WTO, 2022). In 2021, the Russian Federation was the world's top fertilizer exporter, accounting for 19 percent of global supply, or nearly 29.7 million tonnes (FAO, 2022). The disruption of Russian and Ukrainian exports affected agricultural production worldwide and contributed to rising prices of staple goods across both developed and developing economies. This escalation in food and input prices has deepened food insecurity, particularly in countries dependent on imported agricultural inputs such as fertilizers (Utami & Maliki, 2024).

For Indonesia, these global disruptions exposed the structural vulnerability of an agricultural system that remains heavily dependent on imported fertilizers. Rising international prices and constrained supplies quickly translated into domestic inflationary pressures, increased production costs for farmers, and a heavier fiscal burden on the state (Junaedi, 2022). These macroeconomic strains were most visible in the fertilizer market, where the combination of rising input costs, disrupted trade routes, and export restrictions from major producer countries sharply elevated domestic prices. Fertilizer prices in Indonesia increased by as much as 125 percent between 2021 and 2022 – an escalation that revealed how deeply global volatility is embedded within the country's agricultural input system (Sarwani et al., 2023). This surge not only highlighted Indonesia's dependence on external supply chains but also set the stage for the government's subsequent policy response. Confronted with mounting production costs and growing pressure to secure agricultural stability, the state turned to its long-standing subsidy mechanism as a primary instrument of crisis management (Rahmatika et al., 2024) rather than initiating long-term strategies aimed at reducing structural dependency.

To interpret these impacts and policy responses beyond their immediate economic effects, this study tries to situate them within food regime analysis. Food regime analysis conceptualizes agriculture as a central mechanism in the historical organization of global capitalism (Friedman & McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2009). Friedman and McMichael identify three successive food regimes that correspond to shifts in global political economy. The first food regime (1870s–1930s) was structured by British imperial trade, linking colonial raw materials and tropical commodities to European industrialization. The second food regime (1950s–1970s) emerged under U.S. hegemony during the Cold War, characterized by surplus grain exports, food aid, and the Green Revolution, which integrated postcolonial states into industrial and market-oriented agriculture. The third and current corporate food regime, shaped by neoliberal globalization since the 1980s, is defined by the dominance of transnational agribusiness, global value chains, and the subordination of national policy to international trade and finance institutions.

Within this corporate regime, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) identify four political responses that shape how states and movements engage with crisis: neoliberal, reformist, progressive, and radical. The neoliberal trend privileges free markets, privatization, and trade liberalization; the reformist trend reintroduces state-led financing and safety nets while maintaining structural dependency; the progressive trend supports local and sustainable food systems within capitalist frameworks; and the radical trend pursues food sovereignty and systemic transformation.

Despite the growing literature on Indonesia economy relation with the fertilizer crisis, existing studies have yet to interpret this case through a food regime framework. The research gap lies in explaining how Indonesia's fertilizer policy during the Russia-Ukraine war fits within the broader structural dynamics of the corporate food regime. Thus, this study seeks to answer how does Indonesia's policy response to the 2022 fertilizer crisis represent a reformist trend within the corporate food regime which is characterized by state efforts to stabilize economic and social order during periods of crisis while maintaining the overarching structures of corporate food governance.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach, which emphasizes an in-depth understanding of social and policy phenomena by interpreting meaning and context rather than relying on numerical measurement. As Neuman (2013) explains, qualitative research seeks to capture the complexity of a situation through detailed explanation, focusing on the "what" and "how" of social realities to construct a comprehensive picture expressed through words rather than numbers. In this sense, the approach aims to uncover how policy actors construct responses and interpret crises within specific institutional and economic contexts.

The scope of this research focuses on Indonesia's policy response to the fertilizer supply crisis triggered by the Russia–Ukraine war, analyzed through the lens of trends in the corporate food regime. Data were collected from a purposive selection of documentary sources that reflect both the domestic policy framework and the global governance environment surrounding fertilizer markets. The materials include government budget notes, ministerial policy briefs, statistical publications, reports from international organizations, academic journal articles, and analytical commentaries from credible institutions and media outlets. Each document was evaluated for its relevance to Indonesia's fertilizer subsidy system, trade dependency, and crisis management strategies. A total of 28 documents were analyzed, consisting of 9 government and policy reports, 3 international institutional reports, 7 journal articles, 4 analytical publications, and

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5 news articles, published between 2022 and 2025. These materials were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify the discursive framings, institutional dynamics, and policy instruments that demonstrate reformist tendencies in Indonesia's response to the fertilizer crisis.

The analysis proceeds by positioning Indonesia's fertilizer policy response within Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) typology of political trends in the corporate food regime – namely neoliberal, reformist, progressive, and radical. This typology serves as a heuristic tool for interpreting how states, corporations, and social movements respond to crises in global food systems. The study systematically examines Indonesia's case through four analytical dimensions drawn from this framework: model, key actors and institutions, approach to crisis, and key documents.

Each dimension guides a specific layer of analysis. The model identifies the dominant logic and organizing principles shaping policy responses – whether they reproduce or contest the structures of the corporate food regime. The section on key actors and institutions maps the networks of state agencies, corporate entities, and international organizations that operationalize and legitimize the policy. The approach to crisis evaluates how the state framed and managed the fertilizer supply shock, assessing whether interventions prioritized stability and governability over structural transformation. Final ly, the key documents dimension examines the policy texts, international frameworks, and institutional reports that provide ideological and normative reference points for state action.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The 2022 Russian "Special Military Operation" (SMO) assisted by Belarus against Ukraine – followed by economic sanctions from the west – severely disrupted international food markets, trade flows, and supply chains – most notably fertilizer (Simola, 2022). The blockade of Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea, combined with soaring global energy prices, constrained transportation and international trade, leading to a sharp increase in fertilizer prices (Kee, et al., 2023). Before the war, Belarus was a major global supplier of potash-based fertilizers, accounting for about 20% of world exports in 2019-2020. However, beginning in 2021, Western sanctions progressively targeted the country's fertilizer industry. In August 2021, the United States imposed sanctions on Belarus's two state-owned potash producers, Belaruskali (the main miner) and the Belarusian Potash Company (its export arm), which took effect between December 2021 and April 2022. In early 2022, Yara International, the world's largest fertilizer manufacturer, ended its purchases from Belaruskali, which had supplied 10–15% of Yara's potash. Shortly afterward, the European Union also halted potash imports from Belarus in March 2022, further tightening the supply of potash on global markets (Analytica, 2022).

From the Russian context, the fertilizer industry is dominated by private corporations such as PhosAgro, Uralchem, Uralkali, and EuroChem, which rank among the world's largest suppliers of nitrogen, phosphate, and potash fertilizers (Reuters, 2022). Before the conflict, Russia accounted for a double-digit share of global trade in nitrogen (N), phosphate (P), potash (K), and NPK compound fertilizers, earning approximately USD 7 billion annually and standing as the world's largest fertilizer exporter. Russia was also unique among major producers in being self-sufficient across all major fertilizer types. Although Western sanctions did not directly target Russian fertilizer firms, their operations were indirectly disrupted. Many Western traders began avoiding Russian supplies, and shipping companies faced higher costs, safety concerns, and insurance challenges on the Black Sea route (Analytica, 2022). In addition, several Russian business figures were individually sanctioned, including Viatcheslav Kantor, the largest shareholder of Acron; Andrey Guryev, founder of PhosAgro (UK, 2022); and Dmitry Mazepin, who previously controlled Uralchem and Uralkali (Reuters, 2023). In addition, several Russian business figures were individually sanctioned, including Viatcheslav Kantor, the largest shareholder of Acron; Andrey Guryey, founder of PhosAgro (UK, 2022); and Dmitry Mazepin, who previously controlled Uralchem and Uralkali (Reuters, 2023). These targeted measures were not merely economic penalties but formed part of a broader strategy to delegitimize Russia's industrial and financial elite as enablers of the invasion. The UK government explicitly framed these sanctions as both punitive and moral acts, aimed at isolating the Russian state and its business network from global markets. As Foreign Secretary Liz Truss (2022) declared:

"Today, we are stepping up our campaign to bring Putin's appalling war to an end with some of our toughest sanctions yet. Our latest wave of measures will bring an end to the UK's imports of Russian energy and sanction yet more individuals and businesses, decimating Putin's war machine. Together with our allies, we are showing the Russian elite that they cannot wash their hands of the atrocities committed on Putin's orders. We will not rest until Ukraine prevails."

In response, 19 WTO member states introduced 41 fertilizer-related policy measures, about three-quarters of which involved trade policy instruments such as export controls and tariff adjustments. The remainder targeted domestic interventions, including subsidies to national fertilizer industries, financial support for agricultural producers, and, in one instance, regulations promoting the use of organic and waste-based fertilizers (FAO; WTO, 2022). International institutions governing the global food system, the FAO and WTO urged countries not to further exacerbate supply

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disruptions and to implement measures consistent with WTO disciplines. In their joint mapping exercise on global fertilizer markets and policies (2022), both organizations stated that "Considering the critical role of fertilizers in increasing agricultural productivity and hence in ensuring global food security, every effort should be made to keep international trade in fertilizers open to meet domestic and global demand."

In addition, they also called on governments to adopt targeted subsidies and financial support to ensure access for the most vulnerable countries; improve market and policy transparency through enhanced data reporting; and promote innovation and efficient fertilizer use to stabilize agricultural production. Building on these short-term measures, the FAO, WTO, and World Bank (2023) extended these recommendations to the G20, emphasizing coordinated international action to secure fertilizer access for developing countries, strengthen soil fertility management, and support transitions toward more efficient and sustainable fertilizer systems. Together, these policy recommendations established a global framework for government responses to the fertilizer crisis, encouraging market openness, fiscal intervention, and institutional coordination as key instruments for maintaining stability in agricultural input systems.

While these global recommendations outlined a coordinated framework for maintaining stability in agricultural input markets, their implementation varied widely across developing economies. Indonesia's experience exemplifies the structural vulnerabilities that such measures sought to address. As one of the world's largest fertilizer importers, the country's dependence on external supply chains – particularly from Russia and Belarus – made it highly exposed to the disruptions triggered by the war and ensuing trade restrictions. Indonesia was among the states most affected. In 2021, Indonesia ranked among the ten largest fertilizer importers worldwide and recorded one of the highest import volumes in Southeast Asia, spending approximately USD 2.2 billion. National demand for fertilizers is estimated at 13 million tonnes annually, but domestic production supplies only about 3.5 million tonnes. The remaining 6 million tonnes are met through imports, leaving the country structurally dependent on external supply chains (Rahmatika et al., 2024; UPLAND, 2023). According to BPS data, Indonesia's main sources of imported fertilizers in 2022 were Canada (1.7 million tonnes), China (1.06 million tonnes), and Russia (1.03 million tonnes) (BPS, 2024). This situation is further supported by a statement from I Gede Ngurah Swajaya (2022), Director General for American and European Affairs at Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who stated that,

"There is one particularly alarming issue for Indonesia, especially in relation to food security – most of the supply for Indonesia's fertilizer production comes from Belarus and Russia. At present, we are witnessing that, logistically, Indonesia's ability to import fertilizers or food from the conflict-affected regions has become an extraordinary challenge".

There are at least four types of NPK fertilizers originating from Russia and widely used by Indonesian farmers: Phonska 15-15-15, NPK 16-16-16, Pak Tani 16-16-16, and Russian KCL 125 (Hutagalung, 2022; Rahmatika et al., 2024). As a result, Indonesia's heavy reliance on Russian fertilizer supplies exposed the country to serious risk when global prices surged to around USD 1,200 per ton, compared to the usual range of USD 300-400 (KumparanBisnis, 2023).

As a counter measure ,the Jokowi administration increased fertilizer subsidies to cushion the domestic market (Kementerian Sekretariat Negera Republik Indonesia, 2023),

"As conveyed earlier by the Minister of Agriculture, the issue of fertilizer supply for late 2023 and early 2024 has been assured. He will continue to monitor the situation to ensure there are no problems in the field. The fertilizer subsidy will be increased, because the supply is available as well."

The government increased subsidies allocations for urea and NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium) fertilizers aimed at nine basic and strategic food commodities, namely rice, soybeans, corn, onions, garlic, chilies, sugar cane, cocoa and coffee (Limanseto, 2022). Based on data from the Ministry of Finance (2025), Indonesia's fertilizer subsidy budget has shown a significant upward trend over the past decade. Between 2014 and 2019, allocations fluctuated moderately but remained within the range of IDR 30–35 trillion annually. However, starting in 2020, subsidy spending began to increase sharply in response to rising fertilizer and energy prices. By 2022, amid the global supply disruptions caused by the Russia–Ukraine war, the budget allocation reached approximately IDR 40 trillion, reflecting the government's effort to stabilize input costs for farmers. The 2023–2024 period saw a continued expansion of fiscal support, with allocations surpassing IDR 50 trillion, while the 2025 projection indicates further increases as the government maintains subsidies to contain inflationary pressures in the agricultural sector.

While Indonesia responded to the fertilizer crisis primarily through fiscal expansion in the form of subsidy increases, other large developing economies adopted more diversified strategies that combined fiscal protection with industrial policy and technological adaptation. India, for example, coupled its fertilizer subsidy regime with a significant domestic production drive. During the crisis, Russia offered discounted fertilizer exports to India, providing 2.15 million tons between April and November – equivalent to 22 percent of India's total fertilizer imports (Jadhav, 2022; Ritter et al., 2023). Despite global price spikes, India maintained a fixed domestic urea price of USD 65.5 per ton under its national

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subsidy scheme (Ritter et al., 2023; Sj & Babu, 2022), insulating farmers from international volatility. This fiscal policy was combined with a long-term structural investment strategy resulting 80 percent self-sufficiency in urea production capacity by 2022, reducing its nitrogen dependence (Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers, 2023; Ritter et al., 2023). In addition, through its Task Force on Biofertilizers and Organic Fertilizers, India is aiming to promote diversification beyond synthetic inputs, while national programs such as Natural Farming and Zero-Budget Farming aim to gradually reduce chemical input dependency. The government's explicit target to eliminate urea imports by 2025, reaching an annual capacity of 6.5 million tons (Ritter et al., 2023).

Brazil pursued a similarly industrialized and long-term approach through its *Plano Nacional de Fertilizantes*/National Fertilizer Plan (PNF) 2022–2050. The plan seeks to cut Brazil's fertilizer import dependency from 85 percent to 45 percent by 2050 (Russo & Figueira, 2023). Brazil's National Fertilizer Plan outlines a long-term industrial strategy that goes beyond short-term crisis management by focusing on the modernization, reactivation, and expansion of fertilizer plants to boost domestic production capacity. It also aims to improve the business environment to attract greater investment in the fertilizer and plant nutrition sectors, while strengthening Brazil's competitive position within the global fertilizer value chain. The plan further prioritizes increased investment in research, development, and innovation (R&D&I) to advance technology and sustainability in fertilizer production, and calls for the adaptation of infrastructure and integration of logistics hubs to support new ventures and enhance supply chain efficiency (da Costa Teodoro et al., 2024). The PNF envisions fertilizer security as part of national industrial policy rather than short-term crisis mitigation, emphasizing technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy in agricultural inputs.

Indonesia's policy response to the fertilizer supply shock can be situated within the broader spectrum of reactions to food crises identified by Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011). At one level, the expansion of state subsidies appears to diverge from the neoliberal trend, which favours market self-regulation and trade liberalisation; yet the continued reliance on imported inputs and corporate value chains shows that neoliberal logics remain deeply embedded. Nor does Indonesia's approach fit the progressive or radical trends: it lacks the bottom-up mobilisation, agroecological transition, or redistributive reforms characteristic of those movements. Instead, the policy embodies the reformist trend, in which the state reasserts its role as a stabilising force — mobilising public finance to mitigate market disruptions and preserve political order without altering the underlying structure of the corporate food regime.

The fertilizer subsidy regime reflects the reformist logic of cushioning the social and political costs of market volatility while preserving the industrial foundations of agriculture. The policy sustains dependence on chemical inputs and imported fertilizers, defending the corporate food regime by reproducing the logic of capitalist overproduction that underpins it. The reformist orientation is visible in the use of public funds to stabilize a market-driven system. The state intervenes not to restructure production toward agroecological independence, but to manage volatility and ensure political stability. Subsidies became an instrument of crisis containment – absorbing shocks, maintaining productivity, and preventing social unrest – while leaving intact the structural reliance on imported nitrogen, phosphate, and potash. Thus, rather than pursuing food sovereignty through diversification and ecological reform, Indonesia reproduced a dependency consistent with the post-Washington Consensus emphasis on governability and resilience (Bello, 2008; Fine, 1999; Gore, 2000; Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011).

The 2022 fertilizer crisis unfolded within a tightly interlinked system of corporate, state, and international actors, each performing distinct yet complementary roles in preserving the corporate food regime. At the global level, fertilizer production and trade were dominated by a handful of transnational corporations – PhosAgro, Uralchem, Uralkali, and EuroChem from Russia, along with Belaruskali and the Belarusian Potash Company from Belarus. Before the war, these firms held commanding shares of global nitrogen, phosphate, and potash markets, creating an oligopolistic structure in which disruptions at a few corporate nodes produced cascading global effects. Sanctions on Belarusian producers, logistical bottlenecks on Russian exports, and avoidance by Western traders revealed the systemic vulnerability of states dependent on these concentrated supply chains.

In this context, the Indonesian government functioned as a fiscal stabilizer, absorbing external shocks through expanded subsidies and domestic financial interventions. Yet this response did not redistribute power away from transnational corporations; rather, it sustained their market dominance by socializing the costs of volatility. The crisis thus demonstrated a defining feature of reformism: the state's use of public funds to secure corporate continuity under conditions of disruption.

The international institutional layer provided the normative legitimacy for this process. The FAO and WTO, later joined by the World Bank, framed the fertilizer crisis as a governance problem solvable through open trade, targeted subsidies, and market transparency. Their joint 2022 mapping exercise and subsequent 2023 G20 report emphasized efficiency, risk management, and fiscal coordination – guiding states to intervene in ways consistent with global market

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rules. These institutions thereby sanctioned state involvement as a mechanism of crisis management while ensuring that such interventions remained aligned with the interests of global agribusiness. The Indonesian government's adoption of these prescriptions exemplified how international institutions legitimize domestic intervention to stabilize crisis conditions without disrupting corporate control.

The reformist approach to crisis prioritizes the restoration of market stability over the transformation of structural dependency. Indonesia's policy discourse emphasized food security and price stabilization through targeted subsidies rather than domestic input sovereignty or alternative production models. By acting within the boundaries of WTO-consistent measures and FAO-endorsed frameworks, the state managed volatility while reinforcing transnational integration. Fiscal interventions shielded farmers and consumers from price surges but simultaneously preserved the profitability of global suppliers. The result was a calibrated equilibrium: temporary stability achieved through the perpetuation of structural dependence on corporate-controlled input markets.

The reformist trend draws its intellectual and policy foundations such as from global frameworks that repackage neoliberal development logics within the language of social inclusion and resilience. International reference points such as the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the World Bank's World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development, and Gordon Conway's Doubly Green Revolution (1999) provide the ideological scaffolding for this orientation (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011).

This intellectual lineage continues to shape Indonesia's policy discourse. Policy frameworks such as the FAO-WTO Joint Mapping Exercise (2022) and the FAO-WTO-World Bank Report to the G20 (2023) codified the normative basis of reformist governance. These documents framed the fertilizer crisis as an issue of coordination and transparency within global markets, prescribing fiscal and technical solutions that preserve the existing order. They advocated open trade, targeted subsidies, and innovation in fertilizer use—measures that adjust the system but do not transform it. By endorsing these prescriptions, Indonesia's response aligned with the reformist consensus: state-led stabilization within a liberalized global economy. The documents thus functioned not only as policy guidance but as instruments of ideological legitimation, translating market-oriented crisis management into an international norm.

CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that Indonesia's policy response to the 2022 fertilizer crisis represents a clear manifestation of the Reformist trend within the corporate food regime. The state's intervention – expanding fertilizer subsidies and mobilizing fiscal resources – was not a rupture from global dependency but a domesticated form of crisis management legitimized by international institutions such as the FAO, WTO, and World Bank. These organizations framed the crisis as a technical governance issue rather than a structural imbalance, authorizing state involvement while ensuring conformity with global market disciplines. Through this process, the Indonesian government functioned as a stabilizing intermediary, absorbing the social and economic costs of global volatility through public expenditure, while transnational corporations maintained their control over production and trade.

Comparative insights from India and Brazil show that both countries have taken more ambitious steps toward reducing external dependency by expanding domestic fertilizer capacity, investing in innovation, and pursuing long-term industrial strategies. However, these efforts remain partial and technocratic, aimed at achieving industrial self-sufficiency rather than sovereignty in the deeper social and ecological sense. Both models continue to operate within the corporate food regime, prioritizing industrial efficiency and competitiveness rather than transforming the underlying logic of exportled, input-intensive agriculture.

From the perspective of La Via Campesina, genuine emancipation from global dependency requires food sovereignty – a condition rooted in agrarian reform, local control over land and resources, and agroecological production systems that center small-scale farmers rather than corporations. Agroecology offers the principles for achieving not only food sovereignty but also technological and energy sovereignty, enabling rural communities to produce sustainably with local resources and within ecological limits (Altieri & Toledo, 2011). By this measure, even India and Brazil have not yet realized true autonomy, as their agricultural systems remain embedded in industrial, trade-oriented models of production.

Indonesia's experience illustrates the limits of reformism as an institutionalized mode of crisis governance: it secures short-term stability but leaves structural dependency intact. To move toward genuine sovereignty, Indonesia must transform its agricultural paradigm from input dependence to food sovereignty rooted in agroecology. This requires not only diversifying fertilizer sources and reducing reliance on global suppliers but also empowering small-scale farmers through equitable access to land, water, and biodiversity, consistent with the principles long advanced by La Via Campesina. By promoting agroecological production systems – which integrate local knowledge, organic nutrient cycles, and sustainable energy use – Indonesia can build a resilient agricultural base that strengthens both ecological and

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economic autonomy. Such a transition would redefine sovereignty as the ability to sustain food systems within ecological limits and social justice, rather than merely managing volatility within the corporate food regime.

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