Organization Profile: The ATC
Rural Workers’ Association

The Rural Workers’ Association (Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo, or ATC) is an organization dedicated to defending the rights of workers and improving the quality of life in the countryside. The organization was officially founded in 1978 just before the triumph of the Sandinista Popular Revolution, a leftist revolution which overthrew the half-century long, US-backed Somoza dictatorship in this small but mighty Central American nation. The ATC played an important role in the historic agrarian reform and literacy campaigns of the 1980s and continues to defend today the gains of the revolution in the countryside.

Today, the ATC represents two main sectors of the population. The first are workers who are organized into unions and work principally on larger farms or factories in export-focused crops like coffee, banana, sugarcane, tobacco, and palm. The ATC engages in dialogue with the government and the business sector to defend worker interests, including a just wage, healthcare, social security benefits, putting a stop to gender-based violence in the workplace, and trades education.

The second major group that the ATC organizes are small farmers who are organized into cooperatives and grow a range of crops—including basic grains (corn, bean, sorghum, millet), coffee, tropical fruits, vegetables—and tend to animals (chickens, cows, pigs). Many Nicaraguan peasants gained access to land during the period of the pro-industrial agriculture Green Revolution, leaving behind a legacy of conventional agricultural practices in rural communities. The ATC organizes to encourage transition toward agroecological models of food production.

ATC members study in the organization’s system of technical, political, and ideological training schools located throughout the country. Young people participate in the ATC’s Movimiento Juvenil del Campo, and women participate in the Movimiento de Mujeres del Campo. Both spaces organize activities and lobby to advance the interests of youth and women, respectively.

The ATC is a founding member of La Vía Campesina, the international social movement with an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal, and anti-patriarchal platform that coined the concept “food sovereignty”, or the right of peoples to define, create and defend their own food systems. In La Vía Campesina, the ATC, together with 182 organizations in 81 countries, struggle locally and globally for native seeds, popular agrarian reform, migrant worker protections, and protection of territories. In December of 2018, La Vía Campesina celebrated the approval for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.