
Food Production and Consumption: Resistance against domination

To begin to discuss in depth the production and consumption of food, especially in a country like Brazil, it is necessary to recall and mention a series of points.

First, we must always remember that eating is a fact of human existence, nothing less. Forty days without eating can be fatal for anyone. We do not have the ability to absorb minerals directly and sustain ourselves with them, as plants do. We need food produced by plants and animals (1), which nature alone is not able to produce for the billions of human beings. That is why it is necessary to grow crops and raise animals to produce food.

Second, we live with a capitalist mode of production, wherein Capital is obsessed with its own reproduction and accumulation. It transforms everything and everyone into commodities produced to sell and generate profit. Thus, the more the capitalist mode of production "develops, the more mercantile logic invades, penetrates and saturates social relationships"; that is, commercialism becomes universal (2). Using this logic of production, food is also transformed into commodities. In other words, they are "units that synthesize value of use and value of exchange" (3), that is, they are produced to sell. In the country, this entire logic is called agribusiness, which in Brazil — more than just a system of production — is a direct association between financial capital, multinational biotech and chemical corporations, metallurgical industries and state trading enterprises.

In this context, the production and supply of food has been transformed to cater to the interests of Capital. Reducing food to mere commodities has generated and continues to generate a set of contradictions and, consequently, problems in the countryside and in the city — most notably hunger and malnutrition.

Third, most food is produced by peasant farming (in Brazil, 70 per cent) (4). Therefore, selling the farm production is necessary, and all farming families do it. There are various ways to sell products, such as at farmer's markets, or through intermediaries, industries, exporters, grain traders, etc. These forms of marketing depend on a set of factors, such as the products produced, the distance, and the size of the city supplied.

Finally, people currently suffer from a number of diseases directly related to an inadequate and toxic diet (diabetes, hypertension, gastritis, cardiovascular problems, obesity, cancer). This is the result of pesticide use in agroindustrial production, but also industrial production that adds chemical preservatives to products. Another serious threat is the specter of hunger, which once again threatens millions of low-income households in Brazil, either due to a loss in these families' income, or to the increase in the price of food.

We therefore start from these four findings: we need food to live; it is produced and circulated in a context of capitalist production (5); most food is actually produced in non-capitalist systems of production (6); and the current agroindustrial food model is a public health problem and a profoundly unjust social problem.

Domination in Food

Under capitalist logic, the first space that capital occupied was as an intermediary between food producers and consumers. By occupying this space, it seeks to alter the food standard and production system, in order to generate greater profit. For example, soybeans comprise almost 60 per cent of the Brazilian agriculture crop harvest. In 2016, the bean harvest was very meager. Beans are a staple food for most Brazilians. Soybeans and other beans are similar plants; they come from the same family, and where one is produced, it is possible to produce the other. The question is, therefore: Why were there not enough beans? The answer is simple: beans are not a good commodity; their storage life is short, and they have only one purpose: to feed humans. Even though there are many recipes, most beans are cooked unprocessed. Meanwhile, soy is used to produce oil, fats, milk, juices, chocolate, cookies and meats — that is, an infinite number of products.

Corporations functioning as intermediaries in production earn a lot by buying low and selling high; and they end up determining what and how farmers produce, and what and how consumers consume. In this way, the market is not an intermediary, but rather a determining factor in the agroindustrial food model.

The problem with this model is that it is centered on profit generation and capital accumulation, and not on (feeding) human beings. At one end is the farmer, always in precarious economic conditions, and at the other end is the consumer, who pays dearly to consume poisoned food. Indeed, the agroindustrial food model imposed by agribusiness requires the intensive use of chemicals in food production, and mainly in its circulation, when preservatives, radiation, and fungicide baths are added, and other practices are used to increase the shelf life of food.

The consequences of this model include serious public health problems on a global scale and the continued decline of populations in rural areas. This rural exodus has slowed but the process continues. To a large extent, it is not families that migrate, but young people. This is due to the interaction of several factors: i) production costs increase without a corresponding increase in the sales price of products, thus diminishing peasant families' income and forcing some members to seek outside sources of income; ii) there is insufficient infrastructure in the countryside to provide adequate living conditions — including medical care, schools, cultural spaces and sports spaces, etc. — which discourages people to remain; iii) prejudice against peasant and manual labour makes young people, in particular, feel ashamed about living and working in peasant farming; iv) the propaganda about cities as the land of opportunities; v) gender relations that oppress young people, especially women.

In this context of domination in food production, there is a process of violence and persecution against rural peasant production, which includes health legislation, restrictions on banking credit for food production, opposition to farmer's markets, and intense pro-agribusiness propaganda that claims it is the only possible way to produce food.

The Resistance

It is in this scenario that Brazilian peasant movements, in particular the Small Farmers Movement (MPA, by its Portuguese acronym), is calling on all farming families to intensify their food production — both for their own consumption and to supply cities with healthy food at a fair price. How can this be done?

As farmers, we have already done a lot on the production side. We thus have a lot of practical and theoretical experience to promote the conversion to agroecological production. Our greatest

challenge is marketing. With the State Food Acquisition Program (7) we were making good strides, but the government-by-coup that took power in 2016 has since dismantled that policy (8), we have to find other ways. There is no recipe for this, but we will briefly share some principles, in addition to some of our experiences.

First of all, it is important to understand that it is possible to have a scenario in which all farming families are practicing agroecology, in conjunction with a popular and massive distribution policy. This should be based on a clear and substantial State policy that has humans at the center, rather than capital; thus, an anti-capitalist policy.

Secondly, we must be clear about the magnitude of what we are doing, in terms of agroecological production, experiences and various ways to sell and distribute directly to the consumer. We are proving, in practice, that we are able to provide healthy food to humanity. We are demonstrating that we peasants are part of the future and not a holdover from the past. We are also proving that it is possible to produce food without pesticides, and we are breaking down barriers between producers and consumers.

Thus, marketing at this historic time, according to the MPA farmers' political strategy, GOES FAR BEYOND SIMPLY SELLING. Our marketing process must complete several functions: it must legitimize the farming profession; it must be a tool of social agitation and propaganda for peasant farmers; but mainly, it must be a tool of social agitation and propaganda for urban populations, who need to understand the issues of the countryside and join the fight to defend peasant farming. In a way, their stomachs are the way to reach urban populations and invite them to join the anti-capitalist struggle.

Therefore, everybody must understand that producing, selling and consuming healthy foods is a political act of profound resistance to the global order, and directly challenges the agroindustrial food logic promoted by capitalism. In this sense, marketing is the bridge that connects the countryside to the city.

What we are doing and what we can do:

- **In small, inland cities** where we have a presence: encourage families to organize **farmer's markets**; have discussions in churches, schools, urban unions, organizations and associations about the importance of healthy food and farmer's markets; make farmer's markets spaces for political education about food and the struggle and resistance of farmers; **popular markets** and **farmers' stands** are also important mechanisms to sell products and share information about the MPA and its views.

- **In regional cities:** strengthen existing farmer's markets and encourage families to meet the requirements to participate. We can organize collective transportation of products, organize storage and distribution structures in these cities, and open new points of sale for healthy food. Other possibilities include selling food boxes, creating healthy food consumers networks, creating popular markets in collaboration with urban organizations, and supplying to restaurants and community kitchens. These cities have more possibilities in terms of political relationships, and we can reach a larger number of people. Thus, our political arguments can reach more people; but we must do our part in creating links and relationships between the MPA and other organizations, as well as direct relationships with consumers.

- **In capitals and large centers:** this is where the most acute contradictions of the agroindustrial food

model exist. On the one hand, we have a wealthy, obese and sick city center, and on the other hand, an urban periphery living with food scarcity and having to make choices to put on the table. In these large cities there are many organizations; so small marketing-related actions could generate a great political impact. All of the possible points of sale mentioned previously are also feasible in these city centers, but they demand a greater level of organization, in order for high-quality food to reach the city at a good price. This would produce concrete results for families and for the MPA, and simultaneously propagandize and agitate people around food.

We have said little here about public policies on marketing and sales. We must fight for such policies, and for them to respect the logic shared above. That is, they must serve to combat the agroindustrial food model. In practice, we must invite people from popular neighborhoods to join us in the fight to restore the public policy on direct purchase of food through the Food Acquisition Program, jeopardized by the current government. After that debate and the struggle for food, we must have the debate on health, the situation of rural farmers, and the fight against the capitalist system.

It is therefore essential to see marketing as a way to engage in politics; not in an electoral sense, but in the sense of debating major issues and the direction of our country, in the sense of raising awareness about the reality in which we live and the need to transform it. This is the political activity in which we must engage in these times of coup in Brazil. We must resist the stripping of rural and urban workers' rights. We must always keep this in mind in our planning processes; or else we will have good economic experiences with no political impact, and therefore our successes will be in the short term, without sufficient support to be sustained over time.

The path walked thus far has shown us that our work can be sustained when it has organizational support; since agribusiness, with the full support of the State, quickly acts to dismantle our work. We have two emblematic cases in Brazil. The first occurred in São Gabriel da Palha, Espírito Santo, in the Popular Food Market: after a few months of operation, the Ministry of Agriculture carried out an operation in which it seized products, denounced the association and issued threats. Following this incident, consumers organized public hearings, demonstrations, petitions, and other actions, forcing the Ministry to retreat; since then, no new actions have been place on the part of the Ministry. The second case occurred in Alta Floresta do Oeste, Rondônia: a farmer developed a way to make an alternative mineral salt for his cattle; his cattle were captured, he received threats, and the perpetrators said they would slaughter his whole herd. Through the MPA's local and national mobilization, these actions were impeded, and an analysis of the farmer's mineral salt was demanded. That analysis revealed no problems with the salt, except for the fact that it was produced by the farmer and not purchased from agribusiness companies. These two cases show that building alternative paths is not easy, and that agribusiness reacts, criminalizes and fights all of our work.

Therefore, in order to resist, we must organize as peasant farmers and consumers, and in direct relationship with each other; because in order for healthy food to reach families' tables, it is necessary to face the power of agribusiness.

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(1) There is extensive debate on the matter of animals and human consumption. We will not discuss

that here, but we believe that sustainable agricultural systems require the integration of animals and plants—it is enough to see how plants depend on pollinators. Thus, albeit indirectly, food production depends on animals. Additionally, there is a huge difference between the industrial system of raising and feeding corn and soy to animals in confinement; and peasant systems of animal husbandry.

(2) NETTO, José Paulo, and BRAZ, Marcelo, 2010. *Economia Política: uma introdução crítica*. São Paulo: Cortez, p. 85.

(3) *Idem*, p. 80

(4) O Estado Da Segurança Alimentar E Nutricional No Brasil: Um retrato multidimensional. RELATÓRIO 2014. Pages 8 and 55.

(5) We understand circulation to be the entire post-production process, from minimal processing to industrialization, as well as storage and distribution.

(6) They are produced in a family or community context, where there is no third-party exploitation of labor and no surplus production; however, when these foods are circulated, capital appropriates them and turns them into commodities used to generate profit.

(7) A program that purchased food from farmers and distributed it to people in situations of food insecurity; this program was created in under the FOME ZERO program (ZERO HUNGER), by the Lula government.

(8) In reference to the impeachment process of President-elect, Dilma Rousseff, in 2016; which resulted in her vice president assuming the presidency in Brazil.