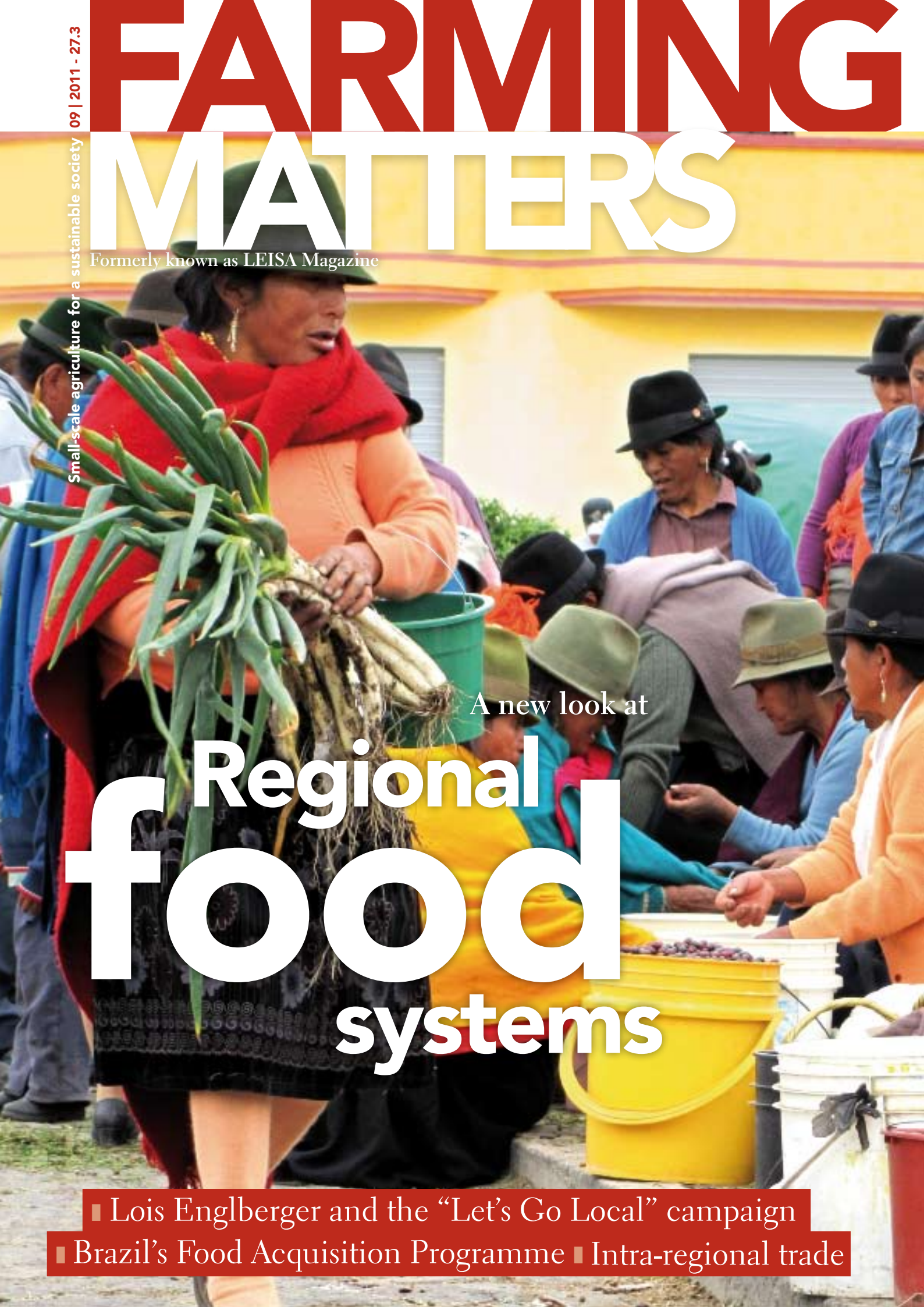


FARMING MATTERS

Formerly known as LEISA Magazine



A new look at

Regional food systems

- Lois Englberger and the “Let’s Go Local” campaign
- Brazil’s Food Acquisition Programme ■ Intra-regional trade



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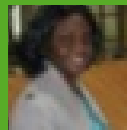
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FOUAD LAKHAL
STUDENT FAIR TRADE MANAGEMENT

'In the future, I would like to have a positive influence on the less privileged in rural areas, to enable the people in these regions to channel their experience, knowledge and strengths so that they can manufacture quality products.'



IRENE ASARE from Ghana
ALUMNUS RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD SECURITY / AGRICULTURE COORDINATOR OF THE GHANA EDUCATIONAL SERVICE.

'We not only need to study food production but also food accessibility and utilisation. After returning to Ghana, this will help me broaden my view with regard to the Ghana School Feeding Programme.'

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Try this out!

One of the main objectives of EcoBorborema, an organisation of family farmers in Brazil's northern state of Paraíba, is helping with the commercialisation of their products, providing the local population with a wide range of healthy fruits and vegetables while ensuring farmers earn a higher income. Orlando Soares Correia is currently in charge of some of the tasks that help them achieve these goals (such as co-ordinating farmers' meetings or negotiating with the local authorities), and at the same time joins his fellow farmers at the weekly market fairs which take place in the municipalities of Campina Grande and Esperança. Together with his wife, Joaceli, he

brings mangoes, oranges and avocados and many different vegetables grown on their four-hectare agro-ecological farm. EcoBorborema has been rewarded with a contract with PAA, Brazil's food procurement programme, which guarantees them a fair price and distributes their products through social efforts such as the National School Feeding Programme. Just as important, their work is being recognised by the growing number of people who buy their products directly at the market fairs in Campina Grande and in Esperança. *Bom apetite!*

Text: Adriana Galvão Freire

Photo: André Telles / ActionAid



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San Isidro's "Food Circle"

"Rather than having ten families going to the nearest market town, and each spending \$10 each week, we could have \$100 going around in San Isidro...". This idea led to the establishment of the "Food Circle" which now links producers and consumers in an alternative model. The former have a say in terms of prices and destinations, the latter safeguard their access to (healthy) food.



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"Let's go local"

There have been drastic changes in consumption patterns in the Pacific Islands during the past 50 years, leading to a rise in nutrition-related disorders. Since 2004, Lois Englberger has been the main driving force behind the "Let's Go Local" campaign. This uses a combination of methods and approaches to raise people's awareness, influence policy-makers and promote traditional foods. Communities are now increasingly turning to their local foods.



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No longer neglected

Nepal's National Agriculture Policy stresses the importance of food security, but most efforts concentrate on producing or distributing the major staples. Neglected or underutilised species have received little attention, even though they contribute to at least 40 percent of the average diet. By helping establish seed banks in different parts of the country, ActionAid is supporting the production and consumption of these crops.



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Incredible Edible Todmorden: Eating the street

The English village of Todmorden is not known as a tourist destination, but it has a thriving urban agriculture, which provides "open source food". This is the result of a project which, starting with a few enthusiastic advocates of growing and eating locally, now involves many villagers. This idea is now being replicated in other towns in Europe and beyond.

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This issue was produced
in collaboration with
Bioversity International



Preparations for Rio+20 are now in full swing. In a recent meeting in Paris with experts from all over the world (among them several farmer leaders), FAO and OECD discussed the roadmap towards a *Green Economy with Agriculture*. It was widely agreed that the lack of sustainability of current food and agriculture systems makes change inevitable. Food security, resilience to shocks and equity within society and across regions need to be the guiding principles for change. More regionalised (or even localised) and diverse food systems are emerging all over the world: they provide a useful answer to these challenges and a way to respect and support family farmers. They are local responses that can help inform the global debate. Consumer choice is playing a leading role in greening the economy, especially schemes that strengthen the links between consumers and producers of food. Sustainable diets based primarily on local products are healthier and can be an important lever for greener, more localised food systems. Diverse cropping (growing a large number of products in relatively small quantities) can better be commercialised through local markets and enhances smallholders' resilience against market or climatic shocks. There is mounting evidence that "ecological intensification" can significantly increase the amount of food produced, the incomes of farmers and could generate up to 200 million full time jobs by 2050. But the economic framework in which producers and consumers operate continues to encourage unsustainable practices. Producers are deterred from shifting to greener alternatives because of upfront transition costs, perceived risks, and misinformation. Many ideas for a greener food and agriculture sector are not new. What has changed is the recognition of the urgency of making fundamental changes to our global food system. Among the experts gathered at the FAO-OECD meeting there was a consensus that the transition to greener and more localised food systems will require a cultural change, one that reasserts the centrality of the right to food, that embraces and reflects human dignity and guarantees decent livelihoods for all. It is up to us, as farmers, consumers, traders, policymakers or politicians to make right choices and be part of the change. (see www.fao.org/rio20 and www.timetoactrio20.org)

Edith van Walsum

Edith van Walsum, director ILEIA



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American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)

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Farming Matters welcomes comments, ideas and suggestions from its readers. Please send us an e-mail to ileia@ileia.org or write to P.O. Box 90, 6700 AB Wageningen, the Netherlands.



Retiring

Thank you for many years of keeping me informed on your excellent work on the part of small farmers around the world. You have always been one of my most valued sources of information where agro-ecology and sustainable rural development meet. Keep up the good work, and I know you will continue to impact people, land, and communities well into the future. Thank you.

Steve Gliessman, University of California, U.S.A.

SRI and SWI

Thanks for the inspiring interview with Hans Herren (*Farming Matters* 27.1). The dependency of the less-developed countries for their basic needs (including food and fibre) is increasing daily. The popularity of hybrid seeds and GMOs will increase the problem of global food security significantly. If immediate action is not taken, the costs will be very high. The promotion of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and of the System of Wheat Intensification (SWI) has shown very good results in combating hunger among marginalised farmers. These technologies will help make farmers depend less on multi-national companies for seeds, fertilizers or for their livelihoods. That's why development agencies should think about these issues seriously.

Ram Bahadur Khadka, Programme Co-ordinator, Forum for Awareness and Youth Activity, Nepal

The importance of agro-forestry

Farming Matters' coverage of agro-forestry systems in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and developing countries is both timely and relevant. The series of articles provides a well-timed analysis on how the promotion of sustainable agro-forestry systems can potentially address two burning social and environmental issues simultaneously: sustainable development and climate change adaptation/mitigation. At Face the Future we develop forest projects around the world in order to combat climate change. Thanks to the latest issue of *Farming Matters* we are now working with one of the authors on this subject.

Justin Whalen, Project Manager at Face the Future, the Netherlands

REDD

Godfrey Mwaloma's article "Farmers benefit by providing environmental services" goes in search of ways that can help farmers arrest declines in forestation and biodiversity. While acknowledging that money isn't the only reward farmers are looking for, we all know that it sure helps. I was interested to read about the role that carbon credits can play as a market-based solution for encouraging farmers to plant trees. I wonder if the author is aware that recently methodologies have been developed whereby carbon credits can be issued for preventing deforestation (as opposed to afforestation/reforestation). While not yet accepted on compliance markets (such as in the EU ETS, or Kyoto),

REDD credits are now accepted on the voluntary market. In 2010, the voluntary market standard VCS approved its first methodologies for developing REDD projects for use. These methodologies helped to improve buyers' perceptions of forestry's reputational and investment risks. Last year \$76 million of REDD investments were made through forward sales, making REDD the most commonly transacted project type. It looks like the markets do have faith that REDD can be part of the solution to putting the brakes on deforestation.

Roger Bymolt, Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), the Netherlands

Plus ça change...

I really liked LEISA for its stories about individual farmers and what they were doing. There were some amazing articles that I can remember easily because I used them in my classes: HIV-positive women rearing goats; using *Mucuna pruriens* and creating a market for heritage crops at fancy hotels; or another one about alternative routes to organic certification. These were really interesting because they reflected what small farmers were doing and gave good ideas for others to follow. They were easy to understand, but had a lot of information and generated interest. I always found something new and interesting to share with my students at the EARTH University in Costa Rica. Somehow, *Farming Matters* does not resonate with me. While changes are welcome, I hope you keep presenting those very interesting stories!

Sara Thornton, South Carolina, U.S.A.

We can do better

One of the greatest challenges facing the world is to ensure that everybody has access to adequate food that is healthy, safe and of high nutritional quality - and to do so in a manner that is environmentally sustainable. At present the current global food system is dramatically failing to deliver on this goal. It is estimated that a billion people go hungry or suffer from lack of vital micronutrients, while, at the other extreme, an even greater number of people are suffering from the effects of overweight and obesity as a consequence of eating unhealthy foods. The costs of treating the impacts of this double burden run into billions of dollars. Clearly, there is an urgent need for fundamental change.

Text: Danny Hunter, Jessica Fanzo and Edith van Walsum

Urban consumers can enjoy the advantages of globalisation with food from all over the world being available to them throughout the year. Farmers produce what they are good at growing, and we all benefit. At least in theory. In reality, vast areas of productive land are set aside to produce crops for livestock feed or for biofuels, while many small-scale family farms operate in unproductive environments and earn very little. Moreover, it is estimated that as much as half of all food produced is wasted through pre and post harvest losses, or being thrown away by distributors and consumers. The preference for a few staple crops comes at the expense of agricultural biodiversity, with increased areas devoted to monocrops which are more susceptible to pests and diseases, and need to be protected by ever higher levels of chemical inputs. Our diets are increasingly based on these few crops, even in countries which are famous for their biodiversity. (FAO estimates show, probably conservatively, that there are about 30,000 edible plants, yet 80% of the world's total dietary intake is obtained from only 12 species.) And often those who produce food are the ones who eat the worst.

Barriers to change There are many obstacles hindering a shift towards better or more

efficient food systems. All too often countries have inappropriate agricultural and food security policies and strategies in place, disregarding nutritious species such as millets, indigenous fruits, vegetables, roots and tubers. This may be further compounded by trade policies which undermine the promotion and consumption of such foods by allowing the importation of cheap foodstuffs. Tariff and non-tariff barriers place a considerable burden of proof on the commercialisation and consumption, at all levels, of biodiverse foods. The European Union's Novel Foods Regulation is one of the many examples of ways in which international trade is limited. Similar difficulties exist within regions, as shown by Fonseca and Burke (p. 24), or even within countries.

At the same time, the world has seen major shifts in diets. Globalisation, industrial development, population increase and urbanisation have changed patterns of food production and consumption in ways that profoundly affect ecosystems and human health. High-input industrial agriculture and long-distance transport increase the availability and affordability of refined carbohydrates and fats, leading to less nutritious diets and to a greater reliance on a limited number of energy-rich foods. This has resulted in a considerable disconnection between diets and local food sources, a situation that threatens the continued existence of

much of the world's biodiversity and the ecological knowledge associated with it. Fewer and fewer children know about where or how their food is produced or the types and varieties of species that their parents and grandparents would have known.

Well-tried solutions Clearly there is no silver bullet solution to such a complex problem. The challenge of reversing a dysfunctional global food system will require a sustained, co-ordinated and multidisciplinary approach – we need more than just “connecting” farmers and their products to the global markets. It will require the integration and application of the social and natural sciences, considering both public health and agricultural issues; looking at



Producers and consumers deserve a better deal.
Photo: Tristan Partridge.

how food is marketed and the policies and regulations which inhibit or promote different patterns of production and consumption. It is possible to simultaneously give producers and consumers a better deal. The articles in this issue, just a few of many examples from around the world, show the potential of regional food systems in achieving this. The benefits are many, and are not limited to lower transportation costs, less risky transactions, or producers receiving a higher price for their products. More diverse production (with benefits to farms, soil and biodiversity) leads to more diverse, and therefore healthier, diets. And, as shown by Partridge (p. 10), more personal forms of exchange help farmers and

consumers exert a greater degree of control over what is produced and consumed.

Challenges Developing local markets involves challenges, including overcoming the obstacles referred to above. Farmers' access to markets remains poorly organised, while efforts to increase the commercialisation of their products demand that these products are uniform, that large quantities are supplied on a regular and reliable basis, and that attention is paid to issues of food safety. In most places there is still a lack of market information, of transport and processing facilities, inadequate marketing infrastructure and a genuine lack of co-ordination along the supply chain. Overcoming these factors increases transaction costs, at least initially. Yet these problems can be tackled, as several experiences with strengthening local and regional chains show. Working with the Uchumi Supermarkets and with other local partners in Kenya, Bioversity International has helped farmers and communities to get their leafy vegetables to urban consumers. The results have been quite astonishing, with a growth in sales of more than 1100% in just two years and with networks of over 300 growers now linked to urban markets. Similar examples can be found elsewhere, involving large and small businesses, farmers' organisations, enthusiastic advocates and consumers. The *Incredible Edible Todmorden* movement described by Paull (p. 28), or the Formby Edible Gardens Project, the Transition Towns movement, and other community-supported agriculture projects, show that the development of more equitable and efficient food systems requires information, advocacy and motivated campaigners. Most important, perhaps, is the political will to achieve better results. The PAA policy framework developed in Brazil (p. 34) shows that political support can create an “enabling environment” and systems that support producers while increasing food security and food sovereignty. These are the examples that should illuminate the discussions in future events like Rio+20.

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Further reading

Mulvany, Patrick and Jonathan Ensor, 2011. Changing a dysfunctional food system: Towards ecological food provision in the framework of food sovereignty. *Food Chain*, Vol 1, Number 1.

DeLind, Laura, 2011. Are local food and the local food movement taking us where we want to go? Or are we hitching our wagons to the wrong stars? *Agriculture and Human Values*, Vol. 28, Number 2.

San Isidro's

// Food



Circle"

This article looks at a system designed and implemented by members of an indigenous community in central Ecuador, which, by localising food production, distribution and consumption, ties together a series of efforts that provide a safeguard against the precarious nature of local employment and fluctuating food prices. Results so far show that this collective action is strengthening community cohesion, and demonstrate how initiatives based on the concept of food sovereignty can address some of the clear inequalities of our globalised food system.

Text and photos: Tristan Partridge

The “global food crisis” is often presented as a shortage of food in relation to a growing world population, but such a simplistic definition pays little attention to the origins, perpetuation and deepening of the crisis. A more detailed observation shows that this “crisis” is in fact a paradox: millions of people experience hunger and malnourished, yet the world’s agriculture systems have the capacity to produce enough food for more than 12 billion people. We need to consider both (and differentiate between) a lack of food and a lack of power. This is especially relevant when looking at the role and possibilities of small-scale farmers, the largest group of food producers, in making their own choices about what crops to grow and where those crops go. In short, over their access to food.

The comuna and the circle A recent initiative in Ecuador addresses these issues, and has given rise to weekly exchanges of food in the village square of San Isidro. Located in the province of Cotopaxi, San Isidro is a “comuna”, or a community of 500 persons (84 families) in Ecuador’s central Andes. The plan to support producers and consumers was born out of discussions that took place among friends, supporters and staff of a local education organisation which regularly hosts youth workshops, village-council meetings, seminars and language classes. The idea of a village-based food exchange system quickly attracted participants keen to create an alternative outlet for their home-grown products, and interested in having a greater degree of control over where they end up.



Food production is tied to distribution and consumption.

The idea was initially outlined in economic terms: “rather than having ten families all going to Pujilí [the nearest market town] each week and each spending \$10... they could stay here and, all together, start a wheel, or circle, of products... In this way, we can have \$100 going around in San Isidro, benefitting us all...”. The weekly meetings of the “Food Circle” started immediately, bringing families together and connecting them as producers and consumers. Deals are struck between them every week, and agreements are made in relation to what is available, and what can be exchanged, in the coming week. Access to food is thus negotiated directly.

Farmers in San Isidro grow a variety of traditional and staple crops on small plots, all of which are rain-fed or watered with the *comuna*'s own irrigation system. These include a number of beans and kidney beans, together with staples such as *habas* (broad beans) and maize. These are sold and exchanged in the local and regional markets, and nowadays through the Food Circle itself, together with potatoes, onions, beetroot, lettuce, carrots, and fruits such as *mora* (or blackberries). While a wide variety of potatoes are grown and traded, there are fewer people growing other Andean tubers such as *ocas* (*Oxalis tuberosa*) or *mashua* (*Tropaeolum tuberosum*). So, the Food Circle encourages participants to cultivate these crops, increasing their availability and visibility in the area. Some families are also cultivating *kinwa* (quinoa) and amaranth and share the grains with their neighbours.

The range and quantity of products available for exchange every week varies according to changing weather conditions, crop cycles and labour patterns. Detailed planning and co-operation is needed among participants in order to meet their food requirements in the best way. Currently, a production schedule with an emphasis on neglected or under-cultivated crops, and on the region's traditional crops, is being formulated. It aims to be flexible enough to absorb quantity variations yet broad enough to ensure that the requirements of consumers are met. This is helped by an overlap between the farmers and consumers within the Circle.

Collective safeguards The Food Circle is the first commercialisation programme to be tried in San Isidro. There have been previous projects in the region, such as those set up with the guidance of organisations like MICC (*Movimiento Indígena y Campesino de Cotopaxi*), which encouraged the cultivation of certain crops (such as quinoa) or addressed the unequal concentration of productive resources in the province (such as water, which largely remains in the hands of large agribusiness units). But the Food Circle is unique in the way it supports small-scale agriculture and focus on the availability of, and access to, food. But while the Food Circle focuses on retaining or regaining control over food production and consumption, all the villagers experience economic re-

alities which are in marked contrast to these efforts. Many of the men in the village travel away to work in the oil fields in the Amazon region – while their families cultivate plots of land in the village to which they return after a few months. These migrating villagers recognise an increasing level in the “precariousness” of their jobs, having only temporary contracts, with many not being renewed – for no apparent reason. The Food Circle is not large enough, nor strong enough, to provide families with a sufficient income. But it does secure their access to affordable food, and ensures that the land in the village continues to be cultivated. The Food Circle offers a more dependable market for the small amount of produce being grown (in comparison with the regional markets, attended by both producers and merchants), resulting not only in a source of income, but also providing an opportunity to directly negotiate the purchase-price of staple crops. These advantages can be seen as part of the “collective safeguards” which effectively protect the rural areas against uncertainty.

Aiming higher Increasing the diversity of crops on a farm can have many positive conse-

quences: it can improve the fertility of the soil and increase a farm’s resilience against adverse weather conditions (avoiding the shortcomings of “conventional” cropping systems). These benefits are experienced directly by the participants of the Food Circle. Even though reducing the consumption of some non-local foodstuffs is not an explicit objective of the Food Circle, crops that once were in danger of being forgotten or abandoned are once again being grown, exchanged and enjoyed, and participants are benefitting from a more diverse diet.

The Food Circle complements existing efforts to collectively manage the region’s natural resources, and further promotes the principles of small-scale and agro-ecological agriculture. By encouraging local production systems, securing local incomes and maximising the level of community and producer control over food prices and destinations, participants safeguard their access to food. The Food Circle is thus an interesting model for a national food sovereignty programme.

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Policies, sovereignty and agro-ecology

San Isidro’s Food Circle is one of many efforts to modify food systems in Ecuador. These initiatives are occurring in a political environment that, at least notionally, supports the idea of food sovereignty. Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution specifies that “a strategic obligation of the State” is “to guarantee its people self sufficiency in food that is healthy and culturally appropriate, in a permanent form”. The same document further specifies the state’s responsibilities, which include the promotion of redistributive policies to permit farmers access to land, water and other productive resources; the preservation and rehabilitation of the country’s agro-biodiversity; the generation of just and equitable systems for distributing and commercialising food, and also to “impede monopolistic practices and any type of speculation with food products”.

The country’s legislation does not officially recognise an agro-ecological approach to production. Yet, while agro-ecology and food sovereignty can be seen as “separate concerns”, the majority of those involved in advocacy groups around each issue, and the majority of producers and rural citizens, see these issues as two sides of the same coin. Questions about what crops are grown and in what quantities are directly related to those about how those crops are grown. If there is a gap between these issues in governmental policies, the two issues are becoming increasingly intertwined in rural areas, where “theories” are continually being developed, tried out and reformed in the field. Visitors to San Isidro can see a large poster hanging in the communal meeting hall, proudly stating that “San Isidro is an Agro-ecological Community”.



Located in the western Pacific ocean, Pohnpei Island is the largest island of the state of Pohnpei, one of the four states that make up the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Although rich in biodiversity, in recent years there has been a steady decline in the use of traditional agriculture and local foods, and a subsequent rise in nutrition-related disorders, such as vitamin A deficiency, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Thanks to “Let’s Go Local”, a campaign launched in 2004 by the Island Food Community of Pohnpei, communities are gradually adopting healthier diets based on the richness of local foods. Lois Englberger, Acting Director and Research Advisor, and one of the founders of the organisation, explained to us what makes a community project successful.

Interview: Teresa Borelli

“Just saying ‘go local’ didn’t sound participatory enough”, explained Lois Englberger over the crackling line. “When we needed a slogan for our project we decided to adopt a phrase that was coined by local officer Bermin Weilbacher in the ‘80s to make people realise that their own food systems were valuable. We wanted a catchphrase that would engage people more”, she continued. “The slogan was famous and was already rolling off everyone’s tongues, so we decided for ‘Let’s Go Local’, meaning ‘involve us’”. “Our project is not about helping people do something, but about doing it together. The approach we adopted is not top down, but very much a grassroots effort”.

What has changed in Pohnpei over the past 50 years? Like everywhere else in the world, traditional food systems in Pohnpei are changing. Modern lifestyles are bringing new ways of eating, of growing and producing food that’s cheaper and easier to prepare. Lifestyles have changed. People are now employed and no longer work on their traditional food systems like they used to. Imported foods are much easier to come by. If you’re working you go to a shop and it’s much easier to buy a bag of rice than it is to dig a hole to get out a taro or climb a tree to get breadfruit. Things have also changed due to feelings about what is valuable and what is not. As well as being cheaper and more convenient, imported foods have a higher status with the community. To make matters worse, the market system for local foods is poorly developed; commercially, local foods have been neglected. Furthermore, the general perception is that farming is an unprofitable and outdated way of making a living and is generally looked down upon by the younger generations, whose views are fully justified since commercial agriculture has not yet developed in Micronesia.



What are the health problems associated with this change? Studies carried out after World War II in Pohnpei showed no evidence of malnutrition among the population and an almost complete absence of obesity. In 50 years health in the FSM has gone severely downhill. Nowadays, stunting, vitamin A deficiency and dental decay among children is abundant, not to mention that one in three Pohnpeians are affected by diabetes, and overweight is so common that it’s seen as the norm. These changes in health are directly linked to changes in lifestyle and diets, in which traditional foods such as fish, root crops and starchy fruits (breadfruits and banana), vegetables and fruits have been substituted by imported foods such as white rice, flour products, sugar, fatty meats, soft drinks and other sweet processed foods.

So why start the Let’s Go Local campaign? The campaign encourages people to value their food systems, and revert to using and producing traditional foods. Not only are they more nutritious, but local island foods are important for disease prevention. These include *karat* and other varieties of yellow/orange-fleshed banana, and giant swamp taro and pandanus, that are rich in beta-carotene, the most important of the provitamin A carotenoids. These foods can help protect against vitamin A deficiency, diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers. These foods are also rich in other essential vitamins, minerals, and fibre, providing important health benefits. That said, we are not proposing to completely drop all imported products – nothing wrong with some modern food. But the aim is to help communities rediscover the nutritional and health benefits that local foods can offer. Furthermore, many of these foods are associated with local traditions. For instance at the beginning of the yam season, it was a custom to present the village chief with a basket of yams before all the village could start partaking in the harvest. These traditions are gradually breaking down, with yams being substituted by rice or money. By encouraging people to eat and produce local foods, we also hope to preserve the culture and knowledge associated with it.

How easy is it to get the message across? A few people understand, but spreading the word further is a challenge. It takes time and a lot of patience. There is still a strong stigma attached to health problems, diabetes especially, and many people deny being affected by it. The idea is to start small and win over smaller communities first and then to reach out to wider audiences. In 2005 the Island Food Community of Pohnpei joined efforts with

a global health project led by the Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE), to document the diversity of local foods and gather information about health and diets. Target villages were selected based on their willingness to participate in the project, and on the availability of local foods. When survey results were published the communities were surprised to find out the high incidence of diabetes. It emerged as a collective problem and people really started to realise they are neglecting their health.

What were the most successful means to raise awareness for the Project? Local leaders, such as Adelino Lorens, Chairman of Island Food Community and Chief of Agriculture, played an essential role in raising awareness about the importance of local food systems. With their help, the project adopted a community-based approach targeting both older and younger generations. Community leaders would stand up during gatherings and explain the serious health risks people faced and how they could improve their health by changing their diets. All the regular raising awareness methods were used: T-shirts and caps, which are really popular; but what really worked beyond our expectation was our *Let's Go Local* song, which is sung to start or end meetings, and has been used as the theme song for the video "Going Yellow" and as the jingle for our regular radio releases. High school students have become involved in the campaign and formed the "Let's Go Local High School Club", giving talks on the value of local foods and singing the song in school plays. Food posters showing the different varieties of carotenoid-rich food have also become a symbol of our campaign and are exhibited at every workshop to help reintroduce varieties of taro, pandanus and breadfruit that are now less known or neglected. Another activity that has proved highly successful is food-growing competitions, because large yams and breadfruits are culturally highly prized within Pohnpei. Experience has also shown that the message can have a larger impact when organised within the framework of larger events such as World Food Day, held every year on the 16th of October.

What didn't work? Because the FSM is traditionally an oral society we found that written documents, like newsletters, worked for some groups – leaders especially – but not for the community. Furthermore, we found that people were reticent when simply advised to plant more local foods. Cooking classes and recipes thus proved to be a very effective means of motivating people, and inspiring them to want to grow local food. In general, however, perceptions are very difficult to change. Although community members were told on a number of occasions that their unhealthy lifestyles were to blame for their fail-

ing health it seemed like the message didn't really sink in. People close their ears to messages, so we learnt that repetition is important.

Is there any marketing that tries to promote traditional food? People do it, but only on an informal basis. For instance, although the *karat* banana was known for its highly nutritious properties and traditionally given to babies once they stopped breastfeeding, it wasn't being sold in markets, but was only being grown in homegardens. In 1998, as a result of scientific findings confirming the nutritional properties of the orange *karat*, the Head of the Health Service, Dr Pretrick, started promoting the fruit that can now be widely found in markets throughout Pohnpei. Coconut products are also being developed but are still marketed only on a small-scale because of the lack of an adequate transport system. Farmers wanting to sell their extra crops are reluctant to trek long distances to the nearest market, without the certainty of being able to sell their produce. Misperceptions (often coming from abroad) about certain foods have further hindered the commercialisation of local crops such as taro, which is usually considered to be just starch. Yet food analysis for this root crop show that some varieties are rich in beta-carotene, high in essential nutrients like iron, calcium and zinc and packed with vitamins and fibre that can help protect against diabetes. The lack of a real food industry in the country hasn't helped, and limited efforts have been made to market local products, which are perceived as being "old" by the younger generations who are more attracted to the flashy packaging of imported foods. So, we can safely say that the marketing of raw crops hasn't worked. On the other hand, what has worked is the marketing of small, cooked takeouts made with local foods that are sold on roadside stands as lunchtime



snacks. Sales of coconut taro balls for instance, which are hard to make at home, have boomed thanks to the “Let’s Go Local” campaign.

Were you able to influence policy-makers to promote local foods?

The project has been successful at many levels in winning over the support of decision-makers. Luckily for our campaign, Pohnpei is a very small island and we know all the policy makers on a personal basis, including the President of FSM, Emanuel “Manny” Mori, who is very active and close to the project. Invited as a keynote speaker at the World Food Day (October 16th), the President ended his speech with the “Let’s Go Local” slogan, as well as symbolically planting banana and breadfruit trees during official visits to promote our cause. Also noteworthy is a Presidential Proclamation of 2010 encouraging the use of local food at all FSM government events. Collaboration with the FSM’s Department of Health and Social Affairs and Pohnpei’s State Department of Health has led to the drafting of a bill to increase taxes on food imports, particularly soft drinks, which are responsible for many of the health problems in FSM. The bill is currently being considered for adoption. In 2005 the *karat* was proclaimed as the Pohnpei State Banana, based on its traditional value and exceptionally rich nutrient content, giving prestige to this neglected species. The Project also worked with the philatelic bureau to produce a *karat* stamp series, a Micronesian banana series and a coconut commemorative stamp series, which in turn led to proclamation of National Coconut Day. Furthermore, the Governor of Pohnpei is keen on launching a school lunch programme that incorporates traditional food items in school menus.

Has there been a follow-up investigation on the health status?

There hasn’t been a follow-up survey since the health assessment that was carried out two years after the project started. The health problems we are dealing with in FSM are on-going chronic diseases that take a long time to develop and a long time to change, just like people’s behaviour. In addition, some of the plants we have been promoting as part of the project take at least five years to bear crop, too short a time to positively impact on people’s health in any way. A follow-up survey carried out to assess the adoption of healthier diets, however, showed that vegetable consumption had not increased, with production ceasing after the project pulled out. This was true for all local foods except for taro, probably because of its cultural importance within the community, and its importance as a valuable security net in times of food shortage. From this we have learnt that the greatest benefits can be achieved by promoting foods that are already valued.

As a country, the Federated States of Micronesia reports to the “STEPwise approach to surveillance” (or STEPS) launched by the World Health Organization, which collects and analyses data on chronic diseases and health promotion. The most recent data submitted to STEPS dates back to 2005, but the Chief of Public Health feels that there has been an overall improvement in diabetes, particularly with regards to control. Overall things are harder to change and overweight and obesity are still a problem. So the challenges are still there, but there is much to be happy and hopeful about. We now serve the four states of the FSM. Stories of how communities are slowly turning back to an increased use of their local foods are on the rise and interest in the project is reaching beyond FSM, as far away as the Marshall Islands.

More information

Read more about the project on the organisation’s site (www.islandfood.org), on the site of the Indigenous Nutrition project (www.indigenousnutrition.org/pohnpei.html), or in vol. 1/2010 of the “Sight and Life” magazine.

Lois Englberger passed away on September 29th, 2011. Our condolences to her family and friends, with our enormous gratitude and admiration for her work (Ed.).

Call for case studies

Diversifying food and diets: Using agricultural biodiversity to improve nutrition and health is the title of a forthcoming book to be published by Earthscan, in association with Bioversity International, which will focus on local foods and food systems. The book will be part of the series *Issues in Agricultural Biodiversity* (<http://www.earthscan.co.uk/?tabid=102725>). The editors are requesting case studies which clearly demonstrate how agricultural biodiversity is deployed to enhance dietary diversity and nutrition. The editors particularly welcome case studies which illustrate experiences from developed countries. Case studies of about 2000 words should describe how agricultural biodiversity was deployed and the evidence for impact. Drafts of case studies are required by December 1st, 2011. For further information about the book and specific criteria for case studies please contact Jessica Fanzo (j.fanzo@cgiar.org) or Danny Hunter (d.hunter@cgiar.org).

Neglec

With less than one percent of the world's area, Nepal is home to a disproportionately large number of plant species. Yet large numbers of the population are food insecure, and hunger and malnutrition are prevalent. Statistics show that the situation has worsened during the past two decades.

The worst-affected segments of the population are the tribal and nomadic communities, whose local agriculture and natural resource management systems are jeopardised by public and private programmes built around a high-external-input agriculture. Isn't it time to try a different approach?

Text: Bed Prasad Khatiwada, Bhim Chaulagain, Surendra Osti, Dinesh Gurung, Man Bahadur Dangi and Krishna Thapa

For many centuries, Nepalese farmers have been growing thousands of plant species and using them as part their diet, including – but certainly not limiting themselves to – many varieties of millets, barley and buckwheat. The country is currently facing considerable socio-economic and political difficulties, all of which are having a serious impact on agriculture and on the country's food systems. Low yields and poor harvests are only adding to the difficulties in the rural areas and in the country in general.

Policies put into practice Given the prevalence of hunger and malnutrition, it is not surprising that the National Agriculture Policy stresses the importance of ensuring food security. These policies, however, don't always seem to be headed in the right direction.

They expect an open market economy to help all consumers have access to cheaper products, even if these come from abroad. And the policies that focus on what the country needs to produce in order to feed its population concentrate on just six crops (rice, maize, wheat, barley, finger millets and buckwheat), disregarding all other crops, even though these contribute to at least 40% of the average diet. National regulations are also supportive of “the use of hybrids and GMOs for increasing productivity”.

These general guidelines shape many of the public efforts to tackle food insecurity. One of these, for example, has been seen in the Karnali region, in Nepal's far west, an area that has seen severe food shortages for more than 20 years. Instead of developing programmes designed to raise yields or diversify outputs, the efforts of the government, and also those of the non-govern-

ted

no more

ment sector, have focused on providing free (or very cheap) coarse rice brought from other regions or from abroad to farmers and the rural population. Another example is the Maize Mission Programme. This programme tried to help small-scale farmers get higher yields by distributing seeds of different hybrid maize varieties. The aim was to sow 34,000 hectares of hybrid maize in the central and eastern parts of the country, but the modern maize varieties responded poorly to the environment where they were expected to grow. Thousands of farmers suffered the consequences of the total failure of these crops and the seed companies blamed the failure on technical problems and climate change.

Local crops In spite of the difficulties they regularly face, Nepalese farmers contribute most of the country's staple foods; their contribution goes far beyond the six staple cereals. In addition to growing millets and local landraces of rice, wheat and maize, it is not uncommon to find fields with *Amaranthus*, or to find farmers growing or collecting *Urtica dioica* ("shishnu" or stinging nettle), *Diplazium* ferns, *Bauhinia purpurea* or *Dioscorea alata* (purple yam). These species are appreciated for their medicinal and nutritional qualities: *Amaranthus* and *Urtica* have a high iron content; foxtail millets are rich in carbohydrates and *Bauhinia* in minerals. These local crops help families meet their needs in terms of staples, vegetables and pickles, and on many occasions also contribute in terms of income. This was recently shown in a research study carried out in Chitwan, in central Nepal, with the Cherpang tribal community. This identified 46 species that were used locally, of which 25 were vegetables or medicines. Villagers described how these crops complement each other in terms of taste, and how some are prized because they



Attracting the interest of the population: the seed bank in Jumla. Photo: Bed Khatiwada.

fill the gap in the "hungry months" when no other foodstuffs are available. Farmers in Chitwan also described the agronomic advantages of these crops: they are well adapted to the local agro-ecological conditions and tolerate pests and diseases. Moreover, these local crops are known to be "low-input", mostly requiring no irrigation, no fertilizers, and allowing farmers make productive use of marginal lands.

Yet, although their advantages are many, most of these local crops are seen as "poor people's food" – both by the authorities and by consumers themselves (finger millets, for example, are known as "kuanna" in Nepal, literally meaning "bad cereal"). There is little or no research, and little investment for technological devel-

opment. Farmers lack extension services or information on how to get higher yields, and they also find it difficult to find seeds or propagation material. Not surprisingly, most local crops are easily described as “neglected” or “underutilised” species.

Securing the seeds Fortunately, there are many organisations that recognise the potential of these neglected crops. One of these is SEDA, the Sustainable and Equitable Development Academy. Building on the regular seed exchange initiatives that are widespread in rural areas, SEDA has been encouraging farmers to get together, with each of them bringing seeds of different species and then taking other seeds from their neighbours. These ideas have been developed further into a “seed bank” initiative, which SEDA started with the support of ActionAid Nepal.

In short, the idea of a seed bank consists of

- developing a “seed map”, highlighting the availability, most important features and productivity of different species and their suitability to local conditions;
- the selection of seeds and the implementation of a breeding programme at a local level (with farmers, on their farms);

- the establishment of the seed banks (or actually the “seed storehouses”), where seeds of locally promising varieties are stored in sacks, mud pots or using other indigenous techniques and structures; and
- the distribution of the seeds to farmers during the planting season, with farmers returning the same amount of seeds after the harvest.

Perhaps the most significant criteria for selection is that only the seeds of local crops are stored, not those of the hybrids and improved varieties developed by national research institutions.

These ideas have been put into practice since 2007 in the Jumla district, starting in the Village Development Committees (VDCs) of Lamra and Talium, where the local banks now store seeds of more than 60 local varieties, including cereals and legumes. This initiative was extended later to Kartikswami, Garjyangkot and Badki, other VDCs in the same district, and other organisations are now supporting the programme. The Rural Development Group Programme (RDGP) and the Radha Krishna Jana Sewa Center are both working in order to “conserve through use” promising local crop land races and varieties. These efforts are helping farmers have the necessary seeds “close to hand and in time”, and thus to be able to grow the local crops that interest them.

International support



The use of neglected and underutilised crops (NUS) has also been promoted at the international level by two organisations: the International Centre for Underutilised Crops (ICUC), established in 1992 and operating out of Sri Lanka since 2005, and the Global Facilitation Unit for Underutilized Species (GFU), set up in 2002 in Rome. ICUC and GFU merged in 2009 to become Crops for the Future (CFF), now based in Serdang, Malaysia. Its mission is to contribute to agricultural diversification through greater use of NUS for poverty alleviation and dietary diversity. CFF seeks to achieve this mission by: (1) acting as a knowledge broker and information portal for NUS; (2) enhancing awareness of the value and functions of NUS; (3) advocating policies that do not discriminate against the use of NUS, and (4) assisting countries to build capacity in NUS education. In recognition of the importance of CFF’s mandate, the government of Malaysia has recently made available considerable resources to launch the CFF Research Center. With Nottingham University in Malaysia and the Malaysian Government as its guarantors, CFFRC will provide a sizeable research and training facility exclusively dedicated to NUS. [www.cropsforthefuture.org]

A step in the right direction Seed banks contribute enormously to food security by ensuring the timely availability of seeds of useful crops. They encourage the cultivation and consumption of these crops, benefiting producers and consumers. Both farmers and the organisations behind the seed banks see them as a step in the right direction and see the need to develop these initiatives further to ensure the cultivation and consumption of neglected local crops. Nepal’s Seed Laws, for example, only provide patent rights to breeders, and there are no provisions for farmers’ varieties. Local seed banks have no legal recognition. ActionAid is therefore also engaged in advocacy programmes, lobbying in favour of these organisations and of the use of local crops. Farmer-friendly policies can help ensure that seed banks remain operative and, through them, that the local crops are no longer neglected.

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These opening words, and the complete poem written in 1942 by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, could well have been written after the recent election of José Graziano da Silva as FAO's Director-General. Drummond's hero José felt weak and powerless in a particularly hostile situation. Sixty years later, an even more difficult context makes us also think of another Brazilian, who held the same position at FAO between 1952 and 1956: Josué de Castro. The author of "The geography of hunger" artfully described, back in 1946, the direct relationship between large-scale industries, an economic model designed for exporting raw materials, and the hunger and hopelessness shown by Drummond de Andrade.

A new version of Josué de Castro's work would surely come in handy to FAO's new José. More than ever, food is the object of greed of a few. While millions face hunger, food has become a market good (seen as a set of commodities), and "citizens" have become "consumers". Profits determine the production and distribution of food and ethical concerns are left behind. The world's hunger crisis is exacerbated by persistent increases in food prices, something that FAO itself expects to continue. And as if this is not enough, different forces stimulate the production of non-food crops, driving farming ever-further into an industrial process maintained artificially, and in an unsustainable way, by agrochemicals and public subsidies.

Since FAO's mandate is "to achieve food security for all and ensure that people have regular access to good quality food", we hope that José Graziano's leadership will lead to a change in the dominant agricultural models. This is surely the greatest challenge facing our José. We therefore hope he has read the reports of his future colleague at the UN, Olivier De Schutter, who recommends a profound shift in agricultural policies in order to ensure food security worldwide, and of the IAASTD (the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development), in which hundreds of scientists recommend major changes in order to stop the degradation of the environment and to produce more (and more healthy) food.

José Graziano da Silva's job will not be easy. Still, we have hope. Graziano da Silva inspired a whole generation with his sharp criticism of the "painful modernisation" process, so we hope his work will support the structural changes needed to acknowledge the current and potential role of small-scale farmers and to reduce hunger in the world. We only recommend him to invite all civil society organisations to join him, especially those representing and working with family farmers, and jointly build a robust transition programme. This will ensure a democratic path towards social and environment sustainability, and towards a reduction in hunger.



Francisco Roberto Caporal, lectures at the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco, Brazil. He is also President of the Brazilian Association of Agroecology
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And now, José?

Aiming at **more** **sustainable** diets

Our global food system is under enormous stress and there has never been a more urgent time for collective action to address food and nutrition security globally. New, sustainable approaches to improving the quality and variety of food produced and consumed around the world are needed, and nutrition must be front and centre as a major goal of agricultural systems.

Text: Jessica Fanzo



biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimising natural and human resources.”

Moving forward

As an outcome of the symposium, the Cross-cutting Initiative on Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was identified as the framework through which to promote further the sustainable diets’ concept in order to counteract biodiversity loss. The participants also called upon the FAO, Bioversity International and the CBD Secretariat (in collaboration with other relevant organisations and institutions) to establish a Task Force to promote and advance the concept of sustainable diets and the role of biodiversity within them, as contributions to the achievement of the MDGs and beyond.

The development of sustainable diets models will foster a broader consensus for action and will serve to raise awareness about the sustainability of our food systems. By building on the potential for integrating production, marketing, consumption and the health of both rural and urban people, we aim to secure the world’s food and nutrition security.

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Together with FAO and other partners, Bioversity International has been focusing on the importance of “*sustainable diets*” through the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity and promoting its role in our diets. Interspecies and intraspecies variations of plants and trees, animals, and marine life represent a considerable wealth of biodiversity and have the potential to contribute to improved nutrition. Many of these species have multiple uses, are highly nutritious, and are strongly linked to the cultural heritage of their places of origin. During last year’s World Food Week celebrations, experts gathered in a symposium in Rome to present and share evidence and further define what a sustainable diet should entail. The meeting positioned sustainable diets, nutrition and biodiversity as central aspects of sustainable development. The sustainable use of food was highlighted as fundamental to the achievement of broader goal of sustainable development, as it connects the nutritional well-being of individuals and communities to the need to sustainably feed the planet. We all agreed that sustainable diets are “those diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to a healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of

Friends or foes? Our love/hate relationship with insects

Insects pollinate crops, are a source of food and other products and work as natural predators in the field. Yet insects often have a negative reputation in agriculture, with the words “insects” and “pests” often used interchangeably. Billions of dollars are spent every year fighting them. Insect populations are affected, sometimes seriously, by many different factors. The decline in bee populations and in pollination, for example, is increasingly attracting media coverage, and is coming to be recognised as a serious problem. It is thought that about one third of all the food we eat is dependent on bee pollination. The use of pesticides, a loss of habitats, light and air pollution, the use of mobile phones, the cultivation of invasive exogenous species, the spread of disease; all provide potential threats for insect populations. What are the implications of this for family farmers? Can they contribute to efforts to restore insect populations?

As Miguel Altieri wrote in our magazine back in 2006, “the successful integration of plants and animals can strengthen positive interactions and optimise the functions and processes in the ecosystem.” How do insects contribute to strengthening the functions, processes and resilience of ecosystems? How can farmers support their “successful integration”? Our March 2012 issue will look at these issues, focusing on the many ways in which small-scale farmers benefit from insects, and on the steps they take in order to increase these benefits.

Please send us your articles! We also welcome your suggestions about people or organisations with expertise in this area. Contact Jorge Chavez-Tafur, editor, before December 1st, 2011. E-mail: j.chavez-tafur@ileia.org



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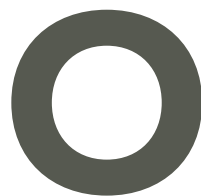
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Breaking down the barriers to intra-regional trade

Getting produce to market at the right moment and in the best condition is the priority for producers. It is at this moment when the farmer can reap the rewards of months or years of hard work and investment. After having successfully negotiated weather conditions or animal health issues, getting the produce to market should be a smooth process. This, however, is far from true in many African countries where reaching the marketplace often presents the biggest challenge.

Text: José Filipe Fonseca and Thérèse Burke



nerous non-tariff barriers significantly hamper intra-regional trade in Africa and other continents. Transaction costs – in terms of the time and expense of getting to market – can be crippling. Checkpoints, controls, poor road

conditions and old vehicles all serve to significantly increase the amount of time in transit. Coupled with heat and humidity, it is hardly surprising that perishable products like fruit and vegetables are not in a saleable state upon arrival at their destination, or that the animals transported are in bad health, if they have survived at all. The net result is poor trade efficiency. The trader delivers goods to market that are not good quality and are in a significantly poorer state than at the start of the journey. This compromises food security and pushes up the price of the limited food that is available. Poor infrastructure and the persistence of red tape and abnormal practices such as extortion, blackmail and harassment, can seriously impair the development of agricultural trade between countries, rendering intra regional trade uncompetitive and unattractive. This is a tremendous economic waste for the countries and represents an impediment to food and nutrition security.

Despite these non-tariff barriers being a daily reality for traders in many regions, legislation does exist to counteract them. For example the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS) has a legal framework to address this issue, which seeks to liberalise trade across its member states. Yet this framework has to be properly implemented. Many would argue that nothing can be done to improve the situation. It is simply too great an issue with too many obstacles involved. However, one group of determined media professionals in West Africa have taken on the non-tariff barriers and won.



One of the compulsory checkpoints along the corridor. Photo: CTA.

Witnesses and reporters In 2008, CTA, along with the Conference of Western and Central African Ministers of Agriculture (CMA-AOC), the West and Central African Observatory of the Cattle-Beef Commodity Chain and the Network of West African Agricultural Journalists, organised a study visit for 16 journalists. With representatives from television, radio and press from six countries, they journeyed with animal traders along the Bamako-Dakar corridor (the 1,325 km route that links the Sahel with the port of Dakar, along which cattle and both local and imported goods are transported in both directions). Their objective was to experience the realities for themselves. They witnessed severely delayed journey times caused by several, often unofficial, checkpoints. Not only did the traders have to spend an unreasonable amount of time waiting to pass through these checkpoints, they also were expected to pay tolls. The journalists saw how these caused problems for traders, who had to cope with the health and stress levels of their animals over the longer than necessary journey, often placing the welfare and the lives of the animals at risk. Armed with their experiences, interviews and footage, the journalists set about denouncing the illegal practices, putting pressure on officials and taking politicians to task. In a series of articles and news stories in the press, television, radio and online, they drew public attention to the issues. They also contacted government officials, chambers of agriculture and regional organisations such as the Regional Agriculture Chamber Network (RECAO), demanding

change. Three years on, their campaign has yielded significant success:

- Malian and Senegalese authorities have committed themselves to reducing the number of official checkpoints as well as the duration of controls. In Mali the official checkpoints have fallen from 19 to eight and in Senegal from 27 to three;
- Senegal has reduced VAT on cattle from Mali from 6,900 CFA francs per head to 4,500 (or from 10.5 to 6.8 euros);
- There has been a reduction in the cattle tax levied on the Mali - Cote d'Ivoire border from 1,500,000 to 350,000 francs per cattle truck;
- Cattle export permits in Mali, which used to cost 15,000 CFA francs (22.8 euros) are now issued for free;
- In Mali, the taxes per truck have been reduced from 150,000 to 25,000 CFA francs;
- Today, the journey along the Bamako-Dakar corridor, which three years ago took five days, now takes just three.

More trade, more food The impact of this lobbying can also be seen in the growth of intra-regional trade. The number of cattle trucks travelling every day on the Bamako-Dakar route has more than doubled since 2008, and now averages 15 trucks per day. Prior to the study visit some 200 head of cattle and 600 sheep crossed into Senegal every day. This figure now stands at 350 and 1190 respectively. This has resulted in more money for the transporters through increased business, and more work for the truck drivers.



Journalists and traders discussing during the field visit. Photo: CTA.

Although it is difficult to say that the volume of food is substantially greater at this stage, these positive trends are only expected to increase. Animal welfare has also improved with herders travelling with the trucks to ensure the cattle and sheep are cared for. Fewer deaths in transit have been registered. Before there were on average two to three animal deaths per truck journey. Today, there is only one death for every 50 journeys (with an average of 35 cattle or 170 sheep on board).

Animal traders have not been the only group to benefit from these improvements. There is evidence to show that fruit and vegetable traders within West Africa are also enjoying faster transit times with fewer tolls. This is increasing the quality, volume and flow of these fresh products within the region. Not alone does this make for a more dynamic, competitive market environment, but also offers greater choice and better prices for consumers.

The achievement of the journalists on the study visit and others inspired by them has been significant. However, the story does not, and should not, stop there. Much work remains to be done if intra-regional trade is to thrive and grow. Key areas to be addressed at a legal, regulatory and policy level have already been identified.

More to do Following their study tour, research was conducted and a workshop held as part of the CTA/CMA-AOC collaboration, to examine legal and regulatory issues affecting agricultural trade in West Africa. A number of issues were identified and it was recognised that several regional rules were not being applied. In addition, there were problems related to harmonisation between regional rules (those from the

Economic Community of West African States and the *Union Economique et Monétaire de l'Ouest Africain*), and also between these and national rules, making them less effective and sometimes unworkable. Many of the laws within the frameworks are obsolete and need to be re-examined and updated.

The next stage in the process involves advocacy and lobbying to encourage countries in West Africa and beyond to promote and harmonise legal and regulatory standards to create a more effective and transparent system. All the stakeholders in intra-regional trade need to become familiar with these legal and regulatory frameworks. They need to have access to these regulations so that they can police the system and highlight bad practices. Farmers' organisations have a particularly influential role to play. The Central African Observatory of the Cattle-Beef Commodity Chain is a group of farmers, traders and transporters who, are campaigning (alongside others) for better trade in agricultural produce. Their aim is to put these issues on the policy agenda.

Finally, media professionals need to continue to be vigilant for any practices that inhibit the development of trade and speak out against them. They should continue to put pressure on policy makers and other actors to make improvements and keep this topic in the public eye.

A unique role It is remarkable what one small group of journalists has achieved – and this is now being replicated by others who want to contribute to agricultural and rural development. Media professionals have a unique role to play in furthering agricultural development. The successes of the Bamako-Dakar corridor can be replicated on other trade corridors across Africa boosting intra-regional trade, creating new job opportunities, wealthier producers and happier consumers.

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More information

CTA, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, is an international non-profit organisation established under a joint agreement between the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries and the European Union. CTA's mission is to advance food security, increase prosperity and encourage sound natural resource management by facilitating access to information and knowledge, policy dialogue and capacity strengthening of agricultural and rural institutions and communities in ACP countries. CTA offers access to a wide range of products and services in numerous areas including youth in agriculture (www.cta.int).

Going local



Following the motto “education for action”, the International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC) has developed several educational programmes that pursue a twofold objective. The first is to show how the economic globalisation process is detrimental for the natural environment. The second is to persuade people that, to quote Steven Gorelick, US Programme Director, “the current direction we are headed in is not inevitable, and there are ways to steer onto a different path that is healthier for both people and the planet”.

Text: Nicola Piras Illustration: Fred Geven

Even though ISEC also organises workshops and conferences, its main activity is that of producing educational material that supports teachers, lecturers and activists, and provides a source of information for individuals in general. Through its books, articles, reports, films, factsheets and web-based materials, ISEC highlights the necessity of revitalising cultural and biological diversity. As Mr Gorelick says, “We believe that the solution to most of the crises we face today – social, ecological, economic, and even spiritual – lies in shifting away from the globalising direction we have been taken by our political leaders, towards economies that are more localised, smaller in scale, place-based, diverse, and ecological.”

“Food”, he points out, “is perhaps the most important of our needs to localise, since it is something everyone, everywhere, needs every day”. Hence, many of ISEC’s projects and programmes emphasise the localisation of food production. ISEC does not try to tell people what their local food system should look like, as “the details of what any local food system will look like – the foods grown or the methods employed – will vary widely from place to place”. ISEC tries instead to focus on those forces that impede peoples’ ability to be self-reliant in food; forces that are largely the same everywhere. “There’s a need”, Mr Gorelick says, “for widespread educational campaigns that spell out how ‘free’ trade treaties free up big

agribusinesses to invade local markets everywhere; or how subsidies make food from the other side of the world cheaper than food grown next door”. ISEC presents specific examples and individual experiences from all around the planet to show the catastrophic outcomes of globalisation, the necessity of a paradigm shift, and proof that such a shift is possible and desirable. This is seen in the story of an Australian farmer shared by Helena Norberg-Hodge, ISEC’s director. Having worked for many years as a grower for the industrial food system, this farmer told her he had felt like a serf, with little control over his own life. Everything changed when two years ago he decided to sell locally. “Rather than shipping his products to a faceless corporation, he now meets his customers face-to-face. Rather than the two or three foods he produced for the global market, he now grows close to 20 different products, and his land is healthier for it. Overall, he is much, much, happier now that he has ‘gone local’”.

The International Society for Ecology and Culture is a non-profit organisation operating since the late 1970s. Information about the programmes it offers can be found on its website (www.isec.org.uk; www.localfutures.org) or requested via e-mail: infousa@isec.org.uk.

Incredible Edible Todmorden: Eating the s

The Yorkshire village of Todmorden has taken local food to heart – and to the street. The planting of food crops at forty public locations throughout the village offer locals, and visitors, the chance to pick their own fresh fruit and vegetables, and it's all free. From the local police station to the cemetery, from the health centre to the elderly care home (with raised garden beds at wheelchair height), in tubs on the street and in plots dug by the canal, Todmorden is embracing "local edible" with a passion.

Text and photos: John Paull

Todmorden has a population of 17,000. It is not immediately obvious to a visitor what there is to recommend the town – it's not the climate, there is no coast, manufacturing departed long ago, and as quaint and pretty English

Fred Hunt has turned a barren roadside corner into a productive mini-market garden.



villages go, it is probably not in the top one thousand. Nevertheless, Todmorden is now talking up "vegetable tourism". It is a destination where visitors can see just what can happen when a group of dedicated local people decide to "liberate" public spaces and repurpose them for growing food. It is a curiosity, but, just maybe, it's the future. The *Incredible Edible Todmorden* movement is turning public open spaces into edible nooks.

Open source food Internet users are by now familiar with open source newspapers, journals, and software which are free at the point of consumption, but the idea of open source food took some time to catch on in Todmorden. The concept of picking and eating something that someone else had planted was a novel idea, and it took two years to catch on.

Pam Warhurst, co-founder and champion advocate of *Incredible Edible Todmorden*, describes the public space food plantings as "propaganda gardens" – something to use as a tangible expression of a set of bigger ideas – including growing local, eating local and fresh, eating seasonal, and knowing the provenance of food. She sees these as "Trojan horses" which can carry bigger ideas into the consciousness of a town – and beyond.

treet



The Incredible Edible Todmorden street-front garden outside the local Community College.

The project began in 2008 with an idea, a name, and a public meeting which sixty people attended. United by a common language of food, this grass-roots project has grown and now claims the involvement of more than one third of Todmorden's residents and some support from the local authorities.

As Pam Warhurst says, "We're bored to death and cynical about strategies and policies and rhetoric", so the essence of the Todmorden project is simple: "do something, take action". The project has appropriated neglected verges, and spaces around halls, council buildings, the canal, and the local railway station, for food growing.

The *Incredible Edible Todmorden* project has a participatory vision of "three spinning plates" – community, education and business. Each of the three are now involved. All the local schools now grow food. Businesses have donated goods and services, some shops have planter boxes, local farmers are now raising more free range chickens and eggs, they are marketing their produce as "local", and a local cheese has emerged. As Mary Clear, one of the co-founders, explains, local farmers benefit from the developing market for their local and specialist produce.

The keys to success The project began with no funding, just some "sweat equity" from participants. It did have two vigorous champions, co-founders Pam Warhurst and Mary Clear, and a team of perhaps a dozen strongly committed advocates who engaged in planting and growing, community engagement, producing newsletters and managing the website. Thirdly, there is a local paper, the *Todmorden News*, which has published many stories on the actions and vision of *Incredible Edible Todmorden*. Fourthly, food is a unifying theme ("if you eat you're in"); the common language of food cuts across barriers of culture, race, class and age. Fifthly, there has been an emphasis on action, replication and visibility – with promi-

nent propaganda gardens and associated signage reinforcing the *Incredible Edible Todmorden* "brand" and explaining the crops and the idea.

Incredible Edible Todmorden is also finding a fertile social milieu in twenty-first century Britain. As the country gets fatter and poorer, as the recession and now "Austerity Britain" begin to bite, and the reality hits home that the "greatness" of Great Britain is fading and seems unlikely to return, *Incredible Edible Todmorden* opens discussions about perennial questions such as how we feed Britain, and whether Britain can feed itself.

Bit by bit Todmorden is exploring these very questions one vegetable at a time. It claims to have spawned copy-cat projects in England, Ireland, Spain and Canada, so perhaps the *Incredible Edible Todmorden* meme is contagious. As Mary Clear sums it up: "We are an action group with no staff, just committed volunteers... a measure of our success is that there are now at least twenty other 'Incredible Edibles'".

Now, with a successful application to the Lottery Fund, *Incredible Edible Todmorden* has more than £ 500,000 to expand its vision of local food, with plans for a demonstration project including aquaponics, orchards, bees, and an "edible learning landscape".

Incredible Edible Todmorden is putting the otherwise unremarkable Todmorden on the map. It puts local food on the plate and successfully injects the twin issues of food and localism into the agendas of businesses, farmers, schools, and the community. And, if it works in Todmorden, why not elsewhere?

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MIND! > NEW IN PRINT



Value chains, social inclusion and economic development: Contrasting theories and realities

A.H.J. Helmsing and S. Vellema (eds.), 2011. Routledge. 294 pages.

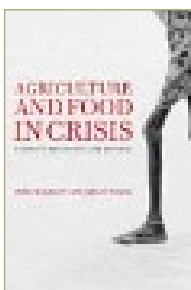
An increasing number of businesses, NGOs and governments are starting to see value chains as an instrument for development. This book presents a collection of articles that explore when value chains have pro-development outcomes and why. The question of whether small-scale producers, local firms and workers benefit depends, first of all, on the level and terms of participation of these groups in the governance mechanisms operating within the value chain. It also depends on how the logic of the chain is aligned to the strategies of the actors on the ground. The book also shows how development practitioners and policy makers can improve the configurations of inclusion and the alignment of the value chain, through development partnerships, so as to generate pro-development outcomes.



Growing a better future: Food justice in a resource-constrained world

R. Bailey, 2011. Oxfam, London. 73 pages.

Agriculture is in crisis. That is the starting point of this report which also forms the basis of OXFAM's new "GROW" campaign. The report argues the need for three major shifts. First, governments and international institutions must give priority to reducing climatic, economic and social vulnerability and the elimination of hunger. Second, public investment must be redirected from "unsustainable industrial farming" to "small-scale food producers in developing countries. For that is where the major gains in productivity, sustainable intensification and resilience can be achieved". Finally it highlights the need for government interventions to guide private capital in ways that align agriculture with the environment.



Agriculture and food in crisis: Conflict, resistance, and renewal

F. Magdoff and B. Tokar (eds.), 2010. Monthly Review Press, New York. 334 pages.

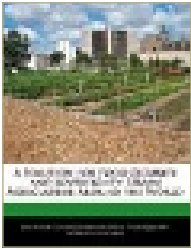
For agriculture to become sustainable it must produce more to feed the future population, halt the degradation of natural resources and become resilient to climate change, oil price shocks and capital speculation. Whereas many continue to look to science and technology for answers, the authors of this book argue that the problem is political, social and economic. The first part of the book looks at the causes of the crisis: the vanishing peasantries, free trade, biofuels and corporate investors. The second part looks at possible solutions: land reform, food sovereignty, energy and agro-ecology.



Participatory research and on-farm management of agricultural biodiversity in Europe

M. Pimbert 2011. IIED, London. 80 pages.

EU research institutes are partly responsible for the environmental and societal crisis in agriculture. Their reductionist perspective on farming means that they have failed to recognise the dynamic complexity between and within ecosystems. They have also excluded the knowledge, the "ways of doing" and values of local farmers. The result has been an imposition of inappropriate management practices. To overcome these problems, this report proposes radical changes in the way research is organised. The knowledge and practice of farmers must be officially recognised, farmers must be included in the research process and have a stronger voice in shaping research agendas. The training of agency personnel must shift from a focus on acquiring technical skills to one on communication. These changes need to be supported by an enabling legal and macroeconomic environment for small-scale farmers.



A solution for food security and sovereignty: Urban agriculture around the world

Gladys Speckman, 2011. Webster's Digital Services. 118 pages

This book has been created using an innovative approach to publishing: collecting and presenting material from Wikipedia articles and images under Creative Commons licensing. This collection of short passages and definitions looks at the problems of food security and food sovereignty, and the potential of urban agriculture to provide a solution. Examples from cities around the globe where different methods of urban agriculture have been attempted are taken and analysed in an interesting a novel approach to knowledge dissemination.



Save and grow: A new paradigm of agriculture

L. Collette, T. Hodgkin, A. Kassam, P. Kenmore, L. Lipper, C. Nolte, K. Stamoulis, P. Steduto 2011, FAO, Rome. 112 pages.

FAO presents here a new paradigm based on an "ecosystem approach", defining it as "sustainable crop production intensification" (SCPI). In contrast to an interventionist approach, which makes heavy use of technological interventions such as soil tillage, agro-toxins and chemical fertilizers control production, an ecosystem approach is characterised by minimal disturbance to the natural environment, the use of organic and non-organic fertilizers and the use and management of biodiversity to produce food, raw materials and other ecosystem services. The report provides an overview of the farming practices that follow this ecosystem approach and offers policy recommendations about how to promote them.

Regional food systems

The opportunities and challenges of regional food systems have been explored in a number of reports and articles. These include "Local and regional food systems for rural futures" (Jennifer Jensen, 2009) and "Are local food and the local food movement taking us where we want to go?" (L.B. DeLind, 2011). Articles such as "The big issue is ultra-processing" by Carlos Monteiro, and Peter Dizikes' "Good food nation" argue that regional food systems can help overcome contemporary health problems such as obesity, while IDRC's recent "The future control of food" (edited by Geoff Tansey and Tasmin Rajotte, 2008) look at the international negotiations related to

food security and the organisations behind them. Empirical examples of regional food systems are examined in "The gardens of biodiversity: The conservation of genetic resources and their use in traditional food production systems by small farmers of the Southern Caucasus" (FAO 2010), "The state of the world 2011: Innovations that nourish the planet" (World Watch Institute 2011) and in Practical Action's "Food chain: An international journal of small scale food processing and food supply management". The websites of the Transition Network and of Slow Food contain discussions, publications and events about regional food systems and links to local initiatives. The "Making



local food work" initiative's website provides ample information to (aspiring) community based food enterprises. (Lvdb)

Regional food systems develop around the crops grown in a particular area. Yet other “ingredients” are also needed to help the different stakeholders connect to each other, whether these are other economic activities or alternative approaches. Here are just a few examples from different countries.

Planning at the micro level

Many farmers who live in coastal areas are also involved in fishing. They provide a large proportion of the fish consumed inside their region and export quite some to other parts of the country, yet they are rarely seen as part of a food system (or as part of a value chain). Together with other organisations, the federal Ministry for Fish and Aquaculture (or MPA) has been working in Baixo Sul, in the state of Bahia, to explore how these activities can be strengthened, to the benefit of the local population and of the region’s food system as a whole. MPA’s research has shown the importance of social networks: some of these are absent and others need to be strengthened. One of the recommendations of their investigation was to run micro-level participatory planning exercises, aiming at developing strong “micro-systems” in which fisherfolk are proud and active members.

More information? Contact Tatiana Walter at the University of Rio de Janeiro.
E-mail: tatianawalter@gmail.com



Photo: Tatiana Walter

Trade and micro-enterprises

Humla, a district at the northwest edge of Nepal, has no motorable road connecting it to the rest of the country. Farmers grow maize, barley, potatoes, beans and several types of dry rice, but their total outputs are

not enough to cover the needs of the population. Every year, for several months, most families depend on government subsidised rice. Yet there is clear potential to produce other crops which could help in the fight against malnutrition, or help farmers to increase their incomes. Some villages, like Simikot, produce honey; others do well at growing apples, apricots and walnuts or *naru* (*Strackeyi* spp.), which is used to produce soap for which there is a large demand, inside and outside the district. Local development organisations are helping farmers set up small-scale industries so they can extract and market the kernel oils, and produce soaps. Equally important, they are also encouraging inter-village trade.

More information? Contact Mukunda Bushal, in Chitwan, Nepal. E-mail: omukunda@gmail.com

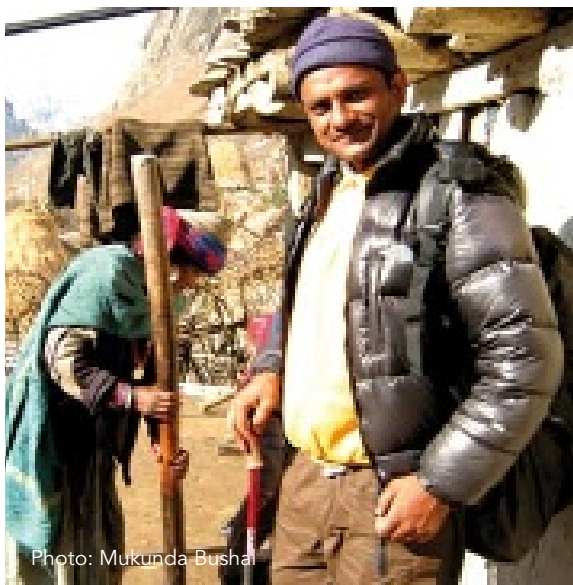


Photo: Mukunda Bushal

Malawi

New markets

Malawi has one of the lowest per capita consumption rates of milk and dairy products in Africa: just 5.5 litres of milk and dairy products per year (far less than the 200 litres/year recommended by international organisations). Yet different studies show that the traditional markets are saturated, and the local industries are imposing quotas on farmers so they limit their production levels. The Shire Highland Milk Producers Association is developing an alternative approach to marketing which is helping farmers find new consumers in Blantyre, the capital of the Southern Region. Supa Cream Milk is a sales concept whereby young entrepreneurs can set up their own individual business unit as a “social franchise”. They rent the brand and equipment, and receive the necessary assistance to sell the association’s milk in the city’s informal markets. Having started with seven entrepreneurs, there are now more than 40 milk business-people involved, most of whom are women. These growth rates are



Photo: Wouter Verelst

showing that more and more milk is reaching the consumers.

More information? Contact Wouter Verelst or Simeon Danger, marketing managers, at Supa Cream Milk. E-mail: w_verelst@hotmail.com

Papua New Guinea

A stronger value chain

As in many other parts of the world, farmers in Papua New Guinea generally only develop “opportunistic relationships” with input suppliers, transporters, wholesalers and consumers, all of which are limited to a specific

transaction or moment. As a result, they have little or no bargaining power, and no influence on the price they receive for their products. One project aimed to increase vegetable production in the area around Port Moresby and to supply the markets in the country’s capital city. It started by getting stakeholders together and building linkages between them. This process, which aligned the expectations of consumers and suppliers, led to agreements about what crops to grow, the quantities to produce, and the frequency of supply. Farmers in Rigo Koiari and Bautana, in the Central Province, are now growing these crops (which include tomatoes, capsicum, cabbages and many others). Greenfresh, the main commercial partner in the project, is helping these products reach the city by providing better transport and storage facilities.

More information? Contact Gomathy Palaniappan, at the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research/ University of Queensland, Australia. E-mail: g.palaniappan@uq.edu.au



Photo: Gomathy Palaniappan

Brazil's

Policy-driven



From the farms in Pernambuco to the schoolchildren in the region: an effective and efficient food system.
Photos: FETAPE and MDS.

The PAA started with two simultaneous objectives: increase the country's food and nutritional security, and ensure that family farms are strengthened and gain more recognition. Set up as part of the "Zero Hunger" strategy, the PAA involves a range of parties, including the federal and the state governments, municipalities, farmers' organisations and social service organisations. The PAA supports family farmers by stimulating the creation of regional markets which are more suitable for small-scale producers than the regular commodity markets. Food is acquired from family farmers and used by the public sector and civil society organisations involved in social programmes (in schools or hospitals, etc.). These actors distribute the products amongst people who have difficulties in accessing food or at risk of malnutrition. Since 2003, more than 3,5 billion *reais* have been spent on acquiring approximately 3.1 million tonnes of food (1 real = €0.44). On average the programme involves around 160 thousand family farmers per year. The food has been distributed by about 25 thousand organisations who, in turn, reach 15 million people.

Strengthening family farming... The PAA was established with the objective of guaranteeing access to a regular supply of high-quality food to people facing food or nutritional insecurity and to improve social inclusion in rural areas. The PAA has strengthened family farming by creating new markets and making existing ones more robust, guaranteeing sales at higher prices and promoting traditional and regional products and practices. The programme is helping to restore or recreate a "peasant way of life", an approach to farming that has for long been eroded by "agricultural modernisation". Since the 1960s, farmers throughout the country have been pushed towards specialisation, monocultures and commodity production, all of which have increased their vulnerability. The PAA is stimulating a "counter-movement", helping farmers to diversify their production. The PAA purchases a diverse range of fruits, vegetables, processed goods and animal products. This has also revalorised local products which have little or no commercial value in commodity markets. Research conducted in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, for example, has shown that 42% of the participating

PAA:

food systems

Brazil has designed and implemented several highly innovative policy instruments to enhance food security. Most of these fall under the “Fome Zero” or “Zero Hunger” strategy launched in 2003, under the presidency of Mr Lula da Silva. These have drastically reduced the number of undernourished people in the country. One of the most important elements of this strategy is the PAA, or the Food Acquisition Programme. This article explains why it is so highly regarded.

Text: Catia Grisa, Cláudia Job Schmitt, Lauro Francisco Mattei, Renato Sérgio Maluf and Sérgio Pereira Leite

farmers began to grow new products as a result of the programme. Such diversification has helped their incomes remain more stable, offsetting the seasonality of commodity production and the climatic, financial and other risks involved. As a result, farmers have become less vulnerable and more autonomous.

The PAA rewards farmers that work according to organic or agro-ecological production principles since these farmers conserve the natural environment and local biodiversity, use local resources, respect cultural diversity and improve local knowledge. The programme also promotes the production and distribution of the seeds of local varieties, supporting the conservation and management of agrobiodiversity.

...and enhancing food security

The support for small-scale production goes hand in hand with stimulating the consumption of local foods. These are important in maintaining local traditions, habits and cultures that are being forgotten, or that have come to be seen as backwards. In the north of the state of Minas Gerais, farmers’ organisations within the programme have promoted, and increased the demand for many different fruits (collectively known as *frutas do Cerrado*) that were unknown to the younger

generation. These now provide a new source of income for many farmers. In Tenente Portela, a municipality in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the income generated through commercialising local products has helped farmers to restore a group of colonial mills of enormous historical and cultural value, which are now used to grind maize and wheat into flour. The programme has provided an impetus to revitalise several other practices and regional foods in these states and throughout the rest of the country.

Equally interesting is the change in farmers’ own consumption patterns that have come about as a result of the PAA. Research carried out in different regions indicates that farmers linked to the programme have started to eat a wider variety of foods, including foods that had become less valorised or forgotten. Several schools that receive food from the PAA have drastically changed the composition of the meals they provide to their students. Students that used to receive industrial foods, such as instant soups, now find themselves eating a larger variety of high quality, fresh food during their lunch breaks. These new school meals have also increased the acceptability of “forgotten” foods amongst students who, in some cases, even began to ask for these foods at home. Studies suggest that as a result of improved



Changing our consumption patterns. Photo: DFRural.

school meals, children were absent less frequently and performed better.

Finally, the regional food networks created with the support of the PAA are helping “restore” the linkages between consumption and production. The relationships between consumers and producers are not confined to just financial transactions, but enable farmers and consumers to express and articulate their values and needs, and come to understand and respect those of the other stakeholders. In contrast to the main markets, dominated by large corporations, which are characterised by large distances, hierarchy, product durability and impersonality, these regional markets value seasonality, proximity, local knowledge and strong personal relations.

Developing new markets The PAA is a new way of supporting family farming. Its distinctiveness lies in the way it directly targets the commercialisation of farmers’ produce. With the sale of part of their produce guaranteed, farmers find themselves in a stronger position in their other market relations. The PAA enables farmers to engage in new market relationships, increasing their room for manoeuvre. The programme also operates as a price-support mechanism, buying up some products when agricultural prices are low. This is enabled by a special mechanism of the PAA called “Direct Purchase”. In some cases, farmers have also been able to sell their produce before the public purchases were made. Receiving notice of the programme “coming to town”, other buyers appeared, giving farmers a better alternative. Prior to the PAA, many farmers sold their produce

exclusively to brokers, who were often the only buyers around. This created a situation of dependency, where brokers and other middlemen were able to dictate prices. With the direct purchases begun by the PAA, rural families have been able to capture a larger part of the value produced. In some areas these buyers began to offer more money to farmers. In the north of Brazil, for example, the price paid by middlemen for nuts doubled from R\$ 5.00 to R\$ 10.00, before reaching a peak value of R\$ 18.00. Farmers have seen their incomes increase. In some cases, they have been able to give up their part-time jobs (such as labouring on large plantations) to dedicate all their time to working on their farms. Studies also point to an increase in the area that participating farmers cultivate.

The PAA has also strengthened rural areas by helping develop a type of social capital that is often lacking in these local communities. It has forged a new institutional configuration through which local communities can interact with public and civil society actors. Involving federal and local actors (including ministries, municipalities and extension services), social movements (unions, associations and co-operatives) and NGOs, these different configurations are substantially more horizontal and democratic. The flexibility of the PAA allows the institutional configurations of the regional markets to be adapted to different local/regional realities and serve different needs. And although PAA’s results have clearly been better where local organisations were more strongly involved, its presence has also triggered farmers to establish new co-operatives or associations.

The challenges ahead There is very little doubt that the programme has achieved considerable successes, but some challenges remain. Evaluations have shown that the programme has found it difficult to address specific groups that are not well organised or that have limited access to information (such as landless farmers or indigenous groups). There are also operational and logistic problems related to the high level of bureaucracy, resulting in delays in payments and in the transport, distribution or storage of food. The programme also needs more funds to reach more family farmers and consumers. The results so far, however, show how much can be achieved with well-designed policies.

Catia Grisa is currently following a PhD programme at the Rural Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ), looking at the public programme policies in Brazil’s rural areas. E-mail: catiagrisa@yahoo.com.br. Lecturing at different universities, Cláudia Job Schmitt, Lauro Francisco Mattei, Renato Sérgio Maluf and Sérgio Pereira Leite all work as researchers at the Observatory on Public Policies for Agriculture (OPPA) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Images of famine in Somalia have recently drawn the world's attention to the wider issue of food security in Africa. Unfortunately, the concept of "crisis" is still strongly associated with short, sharp, disasters such as drought and conflict. The unpalatable reality is that a largely silent, on-going, structural food crisis exists in many parts of Africa.

In the Sahel, the poorest rural households now purchase roughly 60% of their food from the market. For example, household economy studies in Maradi, Niger, show that the poorest 30% of households produce only about 17% of their basic food needs. They must sell some of this food to repay debts and meet other obligations. So even if improved agro-ecological farming methods enabled them to double, or triple their food production for their own consumption, they would still have to purchase at least 40% of their food from the market, from labour earnings. This leaves poor rural households highly exposed to volatile food prices. Even in good years, they need to purchase grain when prices rise in the lean season, but increasingly they cannot afford to buy enough. What we've seen in Niger is a startling correlation between increased millet prices and the number of hospital admissions of children with acute malnutrition. High food prices clearly reduce poor people's access to food, contributing to malnutrition.

In the Sahel, increased food reserves and buffer stocks at the regional, national and local levels can be a valuable tool for improving access to food and for stabilising food prices. Purchasing locally produced foodstuffs when prices are low, and selling when prices are high, can keep prices in check, protect farmers' incomes and mitigate the effect of steep price rises. They can also counter concentrated market power over grain sales and distribution, if complemented by improvements in the market information system, and by decentralised national support for village cereal banks. But because this type of price stabilisation storage involves price regulation, donors who support liberalisation find it politically less acceptable than other forms of support. Several international conferences, however, have started to consider ways to overcome the many political, regulatory and financial challenges. The reason is compelling evidence that *as long as no mechanism for market regulation and control of food price volatility is in place, the current national systems in the Sahel for mitigating chronic food and nutrition insecurity will remain undersized and ineffective*. The poorest households will sink ever deeper into debt and poverty, and become more vulnerable to the slightest shocks. There has been a shift. The question now is no longer whether to support food reserves as a way of controlling food prices, but how.

Peter Gubbels works for Groundswell International as co-coordinator for West Africa. He has lived for 21 years in West Africa and recently completed a major study for the Sahel Working Group: "Escaping the hunger cycle in the Sahel: Pathways to resilience". E-mail: pgubbels@groundswellinternational.org



The potential of food reserves



While only part of the world's population is directly involved in producing food, we are all part of the world's food systems. Whether in the rural areas or in an urban setting, in more or in less industrialised countries, we are all involved – as consumers. What choices do consumers have? Can we, as consumers, contribute towards regional – and more efficient – food systems? Network colleagues look at some of the issues to take into account.



Dawa Sherpa: "More than money"

Bhutan is a predominantly agricultural country, with up to 95 percent of the population involved in farming. But production is not consumer-driven. According to Dawa Sherpa, now working as a livestock research officer with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, it is the large wholesalers, retailers and traders who largely determine what is produced and the prices and quantities it is sold at. "Their business policy is simple: they distribute the country's

foodstuffs, and we are told to buy it, or leave it". Yet a positive trend has emerged in recent years, with more and more people becoming conscious about their diets and health. This leads them to choose specific products, which encourages local production systems and is slowly contributing to changes in production patterns. "We see that more people prefer domestic products over those grown in India with chemical fertilizers and pesticides, even though these are cheaper". Naturally, "those with thicker wallets are better able to choose and get what they want": economic factors still determine much of what is bought. But money is not the only issue. As Dawa explains, the Bhutanese are willing to go to great lengths to get what they want: "we often identify contacts or friends who help us get the products that we are interested in. We are good at keeping track of these people and know-

ing where the good products are". Although large consumer groups do not formally exist yet, these contacts and the strong relationships which are still found between urban and rural areas, can help consumers exert more pressure.

Patrick O. Aboagye: "Taste rules"

Because of Ghana's open-market economy, consumers (especially in the urban areas) have a wide array of products from which to choose. As elsewhere, money plays a big role, but the selection of one product over another is also based on other criteria. When it comes to a product like meat (chicken, lamb, beef), both rural and urban consumers prefer local products, as these are known to be tastier and healthier, or at least to present less risks. But the opposite is true for one of the most important staple foods: rice. Consumers prefer

imported rice, as it is perceived to have a higher quality (aroma and taste). Consumers say they'll even pay a higher price for it, although it is not always necessary. Patrick Aboagye, an agricultural engineer working with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, says that "some of the local rice on the market is more expensive than that brought from abroad, and sometimes it is more difficult to find it. Local rice has a bad image, so it is no wonder that people prefer not to buy it." The government aims to "revitalise the rice industry" and cut down imports, and has started large projects to support and increase local production (involving the Ghana Rice Inter-Professional Body, the Inland Valley Rice Project and the NERICA Rice Project). There is little doubt, however, that these groups need to dedicate some of their efforts to building a consumption preference for local varieties.



Photo: Nathan Cooke / Flickr

Anna Madalinska: "We need information"

Consumers' opinions and choices also play an important role in Poland: "We all have a preference for 'swojskie', a word that translates as 'your own', or 'from your own farm'". According to Anna Madalinska, currently following an MSc programme at the University of Copenhagen, this preference is particularly evident in the summer, when fruits and vegetables are sold on street corners. People prefer to buy here than from a supermarket because they know that what they are buying is a local product, and expect it to be tasty. However, there are limits to how much choice consumers really have over the goods they buy. As a result of a strong lobbying campaign in favour of GMO crops, more and more farmers are starting to cultivate genetically-modified maize. Reflecting negative public opinion, the President recently vetoed a bill which attempted to expand the list of GMO recipes available in the Polish market beyond those already allowed by the European Union. "Polish consumers tend not to like GMOs. However, what we find on our shelves also depends

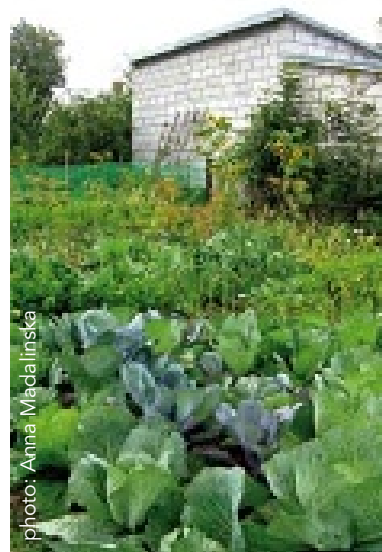


photo: Anna Madalinska

on the choices of neighbouring states. Different restrictions in neighbouring countries mean that GMOs will inevitably remain in our products." As in many other countries, consumers find that they do not have sufficient information about how to identify products containing GMOs, and therefore find it difficult to translate their reservations about GMOs into their purchasing practices. "Consumers need more information."

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“IN ETHIOPIA, A TOP PRIORITY IS STRENGTHENING THE VALUE CHAIN TO HELP SMALL-HOLDER FARMERS SELL THEIR PRODUCTS AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL MARKETS”

Hillary Rodham Clinton speaking about US policies to address food insecurity in the Horn of Africa, at the IFPRI special event “From famine to food security: Meeting the challenge in the Horn of Africa”. August 11th, 2011.

“THE FOOD SYSTEM MUST BE TRANSFORMED. BY 2050 DEMAND FOR FOOD WILL INCREASE BY 70%. HOW WE GROW THE EXTRA FOOD REQUIRED WILL MATTER AS MUCH AS HOW MUCH IS GROWN. THE KEY TO MEETING THE EQUITY CHALLENGE IS INVESTING IN SMALL FARMERS”

Duncan Green, Oxfam’s Head of Research, at the launch of Oxfam’s GROW campaign. June 1st 2011.

“The present global economic and food crises are a wake-up call”

Jose Graziano da Silva, addressing the 37th FAO Conference, the day before being elected as FAO’s Director-General.

“RECOGNISING THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF TRADITIONALLY MARGINALISED GROUPS, THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME IS HELPING SET UP COMMUNITY-LED GRANARIES TO BREAK THE BOOM AND BUST CYCLES OF HUNGER WHILE EMPOWERING SMALL HOLDER FARMERS, MANY OF WHOM ARE WOMEN”

Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme, writing for CNN (“You have the power to end hunger”). August 14th, 2011.

“Let’s recognise where we have been wrong: hunger is neither the result of demographic problems nor just the result of a mismatch between supply and demand. It is primarily the result of political factors that condemn small farmers, the main victims of hunger, to poverty”

Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, on The Guardian’s “Poverty Matters” blog, 16th June 2011.



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