



[Grisa Catia]
 [Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul - UFRGS]
 [Brasil]
 Forum Origin, Diversity and Territories
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Politics of food, public procurement and agro-ecology: Opportunities and constraints between policy development and implementation

The construction of sustainable food systems is up to date because of the environmental, food, nutritional, health and social problems generated by the hegemonic food system. Different actors are involved in the problematization, visibility and litigation of the different models and practices of food production, distribution, marketing, preparation and consumption. Criticisms of conventional ways of farming, marketing and consuming food take place in public debate, expressing political and social positions, and are manifested in individual actions through political consumption, diets and food styles (vegetarianism, veganism, climate diet. ...); in the actions of social movements and civil society (slow food, community that supports agriculture, consumer groups...); in the actions of private initiative and solidarity economy (cooks, restaurants...); and also in government actions and public policies. The organization of the food system, in its different dimensions (production, circulation, processing and consumption), is increasingly questioned and challenged in government plans, institutions, policies, programs and actions. Public procurement has become an emblematic case of these challenges, disputes and proposals for change, either through the demand for guaranteed participation of family farming or through the inclusion of sustainability criteria and guidelines. In several countries, these challenges and disputes have already led to changes in public procurement rules.

In the case of Brazil, these issues led to the creation of the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) in 2003, which articulated the purchase of food from family farming with the demands of public agencies responsible for food and nutrition (public canteens, social assistance); to the change in the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) in 2009, which guaranteed the participation of family farming with a minimum of 30% of resources; and to the definition of Law No. 12.349/2010, which included the promotion of sustainable development among the objectives of the calls for tenders (sustainable purchases); and the institutionalization of Decree No. 8.473/2015, which guarantees the minimum participation (30%) of family agriculture in food purchases made by the Federal Public Administration. In addition to actions at the federal level, several subnational governments (state and municipal governments) have created their own programmes and actions for the supply of food from family farming (some of them in the wake of the new coronavirus pandemic). In the mapping exercise carried out in May 2020, we identified 12 state governments (out of 26 plus the Federal District) with programs and actions for the procurement of food from family farming. The objective of this work is to analyze how, in this process of politicization of public food, these mechanisms for the acquisition of food from family farming (federal and sub-national) have integrated the treatment of agroecology as a fundamental element in the construction of sustainable food systems.

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More specifically, the document analyses the place of agro-ecology in the objectives and motivations of the programmes; the standards and instruments established to support agro-ecology and how they are implemented. The results highlight that agro-ecology is present and stimulated in all programmes through differentiated pricing and/or priority acquisition. However, it was secondary in the motivations for the creation of the programmes and faces many difficulties in their implementation.

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