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EL FUTURO DE LA ALIMENTACIÓN Y RETOS DE LA AGRICULTURA PARA EL SIGLO XXI:

Debates sobre quién, cómo y con qué implicaciones sociales, económicas y ecológicas alimentará el mundo.

THE FUTURE OF FOOD AND CHALLENGES FOR AGRICULTURE IN THE 21st CENTURY:

Debates about who, how and with what social, economic and ecological implications we will feed the world.

ELIKADURAREN ETORKIZUNA ETA NEKAZARITZAREN ERRONKAK XXI. MENDERAKO:

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Why local food systems and territorial production and consumption are the new sexy solutions to the food system

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Why local food systems and territorial production and consumption are the new sexy solutions to the food system

Judith Hitchman

The global industrial food system is an integral part of the neoliberal capitalist control of systems in general. Corporations try to control the full chain, from land to seeds and inputs, through to production and commercialisation. Much has already been written about the dire effects of land-grabbing, biotechnology and control of seeds as well as all the abusive production techniques, failure to respect labour laws and decent work, and the sale of singularly unhealthy over-processed foods.

The answer that has increasingly becoming the focus of producers, consumers and also local authorities is how to building and strengthening of local food systems and the multi-faceted restructuring of social and economic fabric must be inter-linked and based on the producer-consumer duo. It is what lies at the core of relocalising the system, as well as the legislative framework and providing the support required to achieve the changes. This change involves many complex actions, from awareness-raising of the public on health and nutrition issues, including (re)learning how to cook from scratch, capacity building for producers and consumers in agroecology, and how to link the relocalisation to implementing a wide spectrum of soft law policy recommendations from various UN bodies in a way that protects small-scale food producers and connects them to territorial markets. This also needs to ensure that marginalised communities and individual are ensured access to fresh nutritious food, rather than cheap industrial processed foods that have negative impacts on their health. There is also some hard law framework legislation on various aspects that has been introduced at country level, on food and agriculture issues as well as on social inclusion. Many of these emerging changes also rely on the legal possibilities of producers and consumers to build these new systems, but they are frequently below the radar, creative and even overtly supported by local authorities.

It is therefore a very complex situation, with undercurrents of the relative forces of the corporate world, peoples' movements and organised CSOs, and a quiet determination to move forward together on the part of many producers and consumers without necessarily getting involved in the power struggles, but needing the support of those who are prepared to do so, as well as the delicate interface with governments at all levels. Some of these issues are now supported by excellent policy, such as the CFS policy document of 2016 on Connecting Smallholders to Markets.

What has clearly emerged in the last few years, are the many creative solutions and networks of producers and consumers to work more closely together at local and territorial level to implement solutions that are based in equal measure on solidarity economy and the right to healthy nutritious food for all. This article will examine a range of these possibilities that have emerged to take these ideas forward, their relative strengths and the challenges they face, and also try to critically assess their advantages and drawbacks. In many cases, the local or territorial approach has been captured and is seen as the new sexy solution. But the real question is as ever, how do producers and consumers maintain control of their food systems?

The need for cities to feed growing populations, pressure to implement the SDGs and mitigate climate change and reconcile the conflicting pressures of financial real estate speculation on land versus the essential need to preserve peri-urban and rural land for food production are key aspects that form part of this reflection.

The role of Local Authorities is key. The article will also try to evaluate some of these aspects and examine how some creative thinking can begin to tackle the need for an inclusive common food policy, from European to local levels.

Many different categories of collective solutions to (re)building a collective territorial food system have emerged in recent years. They have sprung from the collective desire to find alternatives to the all-invasive industrial food systems approach of agribusiness. They are respectively rooted in the solidarity economy/food justice movement and the food sovereignty movement, and represent a wide array of possibilities for empowering communities.

In order to consider how these different possibilities can contribute, I have first tried to identify them and analyse the respective benefits and challenges that they represent. This chart deliberately does not take supermarkets into account, as even when they claim to source local food, it fails to provide decent livelihoods to producers, and obliges them to go down the road of mono-cropping and mass production.

	Benefits	Challenges	Comments
Community Supported Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price is farmer-led and agreed with committed consumers • Direct connection between producers and consumers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obligation to sign up and commit for a given period is a weekly constraint • Weekly supplies of fresh veggies (or other chosen products, depending on the CSA) mean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important for producers to communicate with consumers, and share news. It also helps if consumers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct sales mean financial win-win for producers and consumers • Shared risks and benefits • Agroecological approach (wide sociological sense of the term) • Reconnection with food production for city dwellers • Very low use of fossil fuels and low food miles make a positive contribution to fighting climate change • Educational dimension for consumers • Food is always seasonal and local • Producer can plan crops with no waste • Producers have possibility to organise 	<p>an obligation to cook real food: this can require serious changes to habits for some people who are used to buying prepared/processed foods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food is always seasonal. This can take some adjustment for those used to buying out-of-season products • CSAs usually grow many forgotten veggies. Consumers may not know what they are, or what to do with them • It is important not have Local Authority support for social inclusion 	<p>share recipes etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm days and celebrations are also important for all consumers and their families (especially children) to learn more about how their food is grown. • It is highly significant that once this happens, consumers start to talk about 'my producer', 'my farmer' and truly re-establish the connection • It is also important to follow up on those who choose to leave a CSA to see why and improve. • CSAs can take many different forms: community farms, farmer or consumer-led etc
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	<p>their annual finance and investments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can involve several mechanisms for social inclusion and food justice (use of food stamps, local currencies, sliding scale of payment...) • Shared responsibility =co-production • Producers are freed from most marketing concerns and can concentrate on their core work: growing food, but still have the benefits of social contact with consumers so are not isolated. 		
Community gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for good community building and exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land needs to either be provided by Local Authorities or reclaimed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community gardens allow a community to exchange and commit to growing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food can become part of the Commons 	through occupation	food collectively
Collective purchasing groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulk buying on selected products can reduce prices • When/if this involves small coops of producers it can provide part of the solution in Alternative Food Systems • Buying in bulk can reduce the use of fossil fuels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No long-term commitment or involvement with producers who may be very distant from purchasing group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many such groups exist in cities. They sometimes use a Fair Trade / cooperative model, and also involve Fair Trade produce such as tea and coffee
Farmers markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the food system local • Allow for good interaction between producers and consumers • Allow consumers who can not commit to CSA to know their producer and buy local • No middlemen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that what the producer brings to market will be sold • Local Authority support needed to establish genuine farmers markets in right area to make food accessible to consumers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to be able to distinguish between genuine local produce and produce bought through middlemen •

<p>Collective farmers' outlet (solidarity shop)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an emerging trend in many European cities: groups of farmers collectively rent a retail outlet for direct sales. • Allows shops to be situated in accessible areas for consumers • As no intermediaries in the circuit, prices that are farmer-led can also be accessible to consumers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee of sales • Overheads include shop rental • Need for producers to cooperate rather than compete in terms of whose produce is on sale can be complex • No consumer commitment required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a partial solution to inner-city food deserts • It can also be part of the solution for those consumers unable to commit to CSA or to go to a local market (such markets are not always open at times when people are free to go shopping)
<p>Co-op shops</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can enable farmer-led prices. • Can be a useful regular outlet for local producers • Can be a good solution for consumers with irregular life-styles who can not sign up to CSAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The co-op is an intermediary, so prices are slightly higher • No regular commitment required 	<p>* Co-op shops do not refer to old-style big co-op supermarkets, but to new generation co-ops.</p>

Farm-gate sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows direct sales • Farmer-led • Mainly local clientele 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irregular and often seasonal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm-gate sales can provide a significant source of income in tourist-frequented regions during tourist season
Box schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow consumers some of the advantages of CSA but without the commitment (consumer benefit, but not for producer) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often pure corporate capture, increasingly offered by mainstream supermarkets as “CSA without the constraints” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As CSA continues to rise in popularity, there are an increasing number of “look-alike” capture schemes that fail to provide the same benefits to either producers or consumers • Can easily be distinguished from CSA as the latter is contractualised and involves a charter
Food Assemblies	A convenient way for some consumers to buy their food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Assemblies are based on a middleman paid as an independent worker 	* The fact that Food Assemblies are backed by companies that are quoted on the stock exchange means that there is serious funding for

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some produce is less local than others • Producers are paid less and consumers pay more for direct sales (CSA, farm-gate or even local farmers' markets) 	<p>marketing. They are based on much capture of local food systems and consumers' growing desire to buy organic, local food. They are a marginal part of AFS</p>
Direct sales to restaurants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be a real winner for producers growing diversified fruit and veggie crops • An excellent complement to a CSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a high level of quality • Less likely to accept "ugly" fruit and veg 	<p>* There is an increasing trend towards high-end restaurants including vegetarian options based on local seasonal food</p>
Collective response to public procurement tenders for schools, hospitals and homes for the elderly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Directives 24 and 25 allow for tenders to include privileged clauses for local producers in tenders • Local producers can work together to supply most or all of local canteen food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often requires rebuilding school/hospital cooking facilities that have been ripped out following industrial meal suppliers taking over • Easier in small villages/towns than in cities, but still feasible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to distinguish between national legislation that specifies a given percentage of organic food in childrens' canteens, and local peasant agricultural produce. • To achieve successful local public procurement in cities it is essential

			to overcome the urban/rural divide and work collectively with groups of local small-scale producers
Shared local processing facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can enable small-scale local producers to collectivise the costs and have access to facilities that respect health and hygiene norms. • Increasingly common • Allows for great added value for local produce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires Local Authority support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an emerging trend
Incubator farms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows a new generation of producers to train and join Alternative Food Systems • Many positive examples where Local Authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires Local Authority Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a new generation of young producers, many from urban areas, all interested in joining AFS. They need training and support for access to land

	support has been put in place		
Guerrilla gardening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can take over and use public space for growing food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not an organised legal solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May lead to increased access to food and legalised space for growing it

This chart is also largely based on the analysis of high/low consumer commitment and is digressive in nature.

CSA represents by far the highest level of commitment, and can also provide a useful nexus for social inclusion. This can be realised in many different ways, with or without local authority support. (This is largely dependent on the degree to which State support is given to low-income groups). It varies from Local Authority direct support through food stamps that can be exchanged for a CSA shares, to local currency use to decommodify food, to crowd-funding by a CSA to subsidise more low-cost shares (the producer never receives less), to working hours on the farm as part or total share contribution, and even to extreme form practiced by the German SOLAWI CSA network, where each member of a CSA places their possible weekly contribution in a sealed envelope at the annual general CSA group’s meeting. The total needs to add up to the amount required by the producer for his or her annual investment/income needed from the farm. If the total is less that the desired sum, there is a second round. In most cases, an experienced group now requires just one round to meet the sum! This is perhaps the best illustration and the ultimate implementation of Karl Marx’s famous quote “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”. It is worth noting that according to the Urgenci research group’s survey in 2016, there are now around one million people practicing CSA in Europe alone¹.

An illustration from the UK CSA group of full or partial payment against work is as follows:

Membership type	Minimum Work Hours	Annual Fee
Tier 1	14 hours per month	£0
Tier 2	7 hours per month	£75
Tier 3	4 hours per month	£150
Tier 4	7 hours per year	£250 (currently closed to new members)

¹ Urgenci, European CSA Research Group (2016). *Overview of Community Supported Agriculture in Europe*. p. 8. <http://urgenci.net/the-csa-research-group/>

Contributing hours in exchange for work requires serious commitment and organisation on the part of both producers and consumers.

The role – and indeed the responsibilities – of Local Authorities in the re-organisation of our food systems is an essential key to success. Many different tools exist that can be mobilised to support territorial food systems that break with the trade-based industrial agriculture model.

The first and all-important role is that of land zoning and preservation of agricultural land from speculation and land-grabbing. This instrument that best supports this are the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests, that include reference to the zoning aspects. This is also taken up in the New Urban Agenda (post Habitat III), in the reference to avoiding speculation on land. All too often, peri-urban land that has historically been used to provide food for cities and that constitutes the historical food-shed has been sacrificed to ever-greater expansion of the urban sprawl. This is an essential part of protecting local food systems.

Community Land Trusts can also be used in many countries to further protect farms and ensure that they can be transmitted in an affordable manner.

Local Authorities also play a leading role in terms of organising Food Policy Councils that ensure that all the dots are connected in terms of producers and consumers as well as public procurement. The policy document of reference here is in Connecting Smallholders to Markets, which was one of the most successful policy documents negotiated by the Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee on Food Security and Nutrition². Together with the CSM Analytical Guide to Connecting Smallholders to Markets³, it provides much support to all actors.

A key aspect of this process involves public procurement. At any one time, a substantial percentage of the population receives meals provided by schools, hospitals, homes for the elderly, prisons and also company and civil service structure canteens. This market has been dominated in recent years by the provision of industrial food, prepared in central kitchens. This food is provided by industrial agriculture, and is another way of squeezing small-scale producers out of territorial markets. There is a very significant move to localising public procurement and opening it to groups of small-scale food producers. This covered under the European Directives 24 and 25, and also recommended in the EU study on short food supply chains. It is largely taken up in the above-mentioned policy document. Examples can even go as far as using municipally-owned land, employing a farmer and successfully growing hyper-local organic food for the school canteen at no extra cost to consumers⁴! One commonly quoted obstacle to taking the road of local/territorial public procurement is that in many cases the local kitchens have

² www.fao.org/3/a-bq853e.pdf

³ <http://www.csm4cfs.org/connecting-smallholders-markets-analytical-guide/>

⁴ <http://www.unplusbio.org/mouans-sartoux-ville-100-bio-publie-les-resultats-de-son-observatoire/>

been ripped out and need to be (re)built. There are however an increasing number of inter-generational facilities (early childcare and educational facilities and elderly care-homes that are reintegrating catering and care, often at the request of the so called ‘sandwich generation’ of parents of young children who also need to care for their elders. There are also significant numbers of hospitals that have started growing and prescribing their organically produced hyper-local food for patients. These are indeed hopeful aspects of change!

Local Authority involvement is also essential in establishing and supporting such things as incubator farms, Community Gardens, and as stated above in social inclusion schemes that subsidize access to local food, be it through CSAs or local Farmers Markets... It is important to bear in mind that agroecology implies a holistic approach to territorial food systems, and involves social inclusion. The various practices listed above are all means of achieving this, through various entry points.

This is equally true for shared community processing facilities that can help small-scale food producers and processors meet regulatory requirements. Several such facilities exist already in Europe (Dublin and Basque country), and should be considered as a positive step forwards.

This article would not be complete without a mention of the fact that all this requires serious and joined-up system change. Today’s approach – especially to the food waste and loss issue – is based on shoring up a dysfunctional neoliberal approach where industrial food is over-produced, processed, packaged and wasted. The most revealing figures that have thus far been researched were provided to me by the late Nigel Baker of Coventry University.⁵ They are significant:

Food System	Supply chain FL&W	Household L&W	Total CFC F L & W
Canalside CSA (UK)	0.65%	6.1%	6.71%
Supermarket	36%	30%	55.2%

They clearly demonstrate how a system where producers grow according to pre-sold markets, such as CSAs (but this would also hold true for public procurement policies), where food is no longer a cheap commodity that fails to take externalities into account, but is based on consumer awareness and knowledge can be produced in local food systems that take agroecology, food sovereignty and solidarity economy fully into account. Food becomes valued and there is almost no waste (some parts of plants are inedible, but can be used in compost: this ‘waste’ is included in the 6.7% waste figure).

⁵ These figures are drawn from his comparative study between UK supermarkets and Canalside CSA in 2014.

A further aspect in local and territorial food systems is the need to reduce packaging that uses fossil fuels and pollutes our land and waterways. This is a work in progress, with countries at very different stages of evolution, even within the CSA movement. Where in Western Europe almost all CSA shares have reduced plastic or even paper wrapping to a minimum (some packaging may still be needed for salad leaves and delicate berries), in Eastern Europe and Asia there is still massive use in some countries of plastic bags... So although production methods have become organic, biodynamic and agroecological, much awareness still remains to be raised at consumer level. It is a work in progress!

This article would not be complete without some mention of the fact that in many countries (especially the USA and the UK, the dominant food model has become one of buying processed ready-made meals. If we are to succeed in gaining ground for Alternative Food Systems, people will need to (re) learn how to cook. This takes time and patience, and while many cultures still rely on home-cooked meals to feed the family, this is a serious issue that some Local Authorities and also schools are starting to address.

In conclusion, there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all. Territorial food systems are indeed essential to meeting the SDG objectives, and particularly relevant to SDG 12 on responsible production and consumption, as well as SDG 13, mitigating climate change. Both contribute of course to SDG 2, End Hunger... This article has shown most of the many different facets that need to be included, and indeed that have been a significant part of the work currently being carried out by IPES-Food over a 3-year period to develop a Common Food Policy for Europe⁶, in which Urgenci and the CSA movement have been actively participating. Combined with the UN Committee on Food Security and Nutrition policies mentioned above, the collective work of social movements such as the Via Campesina and Urgenci on the ground, and an increasingly empowered civil society movement, it is easy to see how and why local and territorial food systems are indeed the new sexy solution to food production and consumption!

⁶ <http://www.ipes-food.org/towards-a-common-food-policy-for-the-eu-ipes-food-launches-three-year-process>

Nazioarteko Hizketaldia

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