



Agroecology, a rural women's flag

By Bianca Coleffi & Florencia Arana. Source: ARG Medios.

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There are currently around 1.6 billion women farmers worldwide, representing more than a quarter of the global population [1]. In Argentina, family farmers produce 80% of the food consumed in the country. Among these farmers, women who head households often work triple or even quadruple shifts: caring for their families, producing food, managing cooperatives or associations, and, in the context of economic crisis, taking on additional informal work to supplement their income.

Janeth Choque Gutiérrez, a horticultural producer from La Plata and national coordinator of the Gender Area of the Rural Federation, highlights the critical situation on farms during the current economic crisis. The indiscriminate opening of imports—allowing products like lemons from Egypt, meat from Brazil, and yerba mate from Paraguay to flood the market—has caused prices to collapse. However, these low prices are not reflected on supermarket shelves, where products often cost three times what producers receive.



Photo: ARG Medios.

Low consumption leads to historically low prices. ‘A crate of tomatoes was worth up to 1,000/2,000 pesos. This makes it unprofitable when it comes to re-investing and returning to production’, said the producer from La Plata. ‘Many are even giving up horticultural production’.

In response to this crisis, short marketing circuits have emerged, facilitated by solidarity-based, public, or cooperative marketers. These circuits prioritize the quality of the product and ensure that producers receive up to 85% of the final price. Examples include the Pueblo a Pueblo cooperative of the Rural Federation and the La Justa cooperative of the National University of La Plata.

In both cooperatives, agroecological processes are central. These practices have not only increased consumer demand but also ensured the farms' independence from expensive agricultural technology packages (priced in dollars). Additionally, agroecology guarantees a better quality of life for both consumers and producers.



Photos: ARG Medios.



Agroecology: A Commitment Born from Women

Currently, a group of producer families from the town of Arana, organized under the Manos de la Tierra Fair, grow agroecological vegetables for the bags¹ of La Justa cooperative. In all cases, the transition to agroecology is led by women. They participate in direct sales stalls, assemblies following the fairs, and dialogues with technical teams supporting the agroecological processes on their farms.

Several producer families have shifted from conventional truck-stop² sales circuits to focus solely on direct sales, where most of their production is now agroecological. ‘When we sold to the trucks, we used agrochemicals because it was the fastest way,’ said Antonia Mallea, a producer from La Justa. ‘Now, with agroecology, the food is healthier and cheaper to produce.’

The adoption of agroecology on farms was not an overnight process. It involved slow, collective, and consultative efforts, including extensive technical exchanges with producer families and the building of trust.

Initially, women were the primary drivers of this transition, but eventually, the entire family became involved. ‘At first, it’s challenging, but then you realize you’re working on something your family will eat,’ said Ovi Alemán Ivarbol, a horticultural producer from La Justa.

‘We are always thinking about producing food, preserving seeds of different varieties, and promoting diversity on our farms,’ said Juana Almazán, a farmer from Río Colorado and a member and popular educator of the [National School of Agroecology \(ENA\)](#). While there is no single recipe for agroecology, experiences are shared from family to family, with crop diversity being a key principle.

Rethinking the care of nature and reviving ancestral practices is a challenge for modern societies, which have become standardized over time due to globalization. ‘My father is from Bolivia, and he produces agroecologically. We used to farm this way. When we came here, we started using chemicals to control pests,’ said Saida Solorzano Cardozo, a producer from Manos de la Tierra.

¹ The bag of vegetables (“bolsón” in Spanish) is a marketing strategy used by cooperatives and family farming organisations in Argentina. It consists of selling a 5 to 10 kg sack or bag of agroecological vegetables, with seasonal varieties, directly from producers to consumers.

² This refers to a type of sale in which the intermediary (truck driver) buys the vegetables in the farms and then sells them in centralised markets. In this type of sale, the producer has no control over the price and conditions of sale, as he is subject to the middleman’s willingness to accept his selling prices, having to lower them most of the time in order to be competitive.



In rural areas, ‘machismo is deeply rooted,’ said Janeth Choque Gutiérrez of the Rural Federation. Agroecology is one of the processes many women have spearheaded on their farms, eventually involving their families. Beyond technical and productive advancements, agroecology has become a banner for rural women.

‘Today, with the national government’s discourse undermining women’s rights and ignoring gender inequality, many men—though not all—feel they must dominate certain spaces,’ said Janeth.

‘There are many instances where a male delegate tries to silence a female colleague, perpetuated by networks and media that denigrate women and deny us the right to voice our opinions,’ she added.



Juana Almazan, productora agroecológica de Federación Rural. Foto: ARG Medios.

“Take the courage of a female comrade who continues to struggle in the field”

The current reality is critical: the rise in rents, services such as electricity, gas, inputs for production, and logistical costs - naphtha or diesel - does not make the outlook for production easy. ‘There are some families who are leaving horticultural production to



return to their homelands; Bolivia, Salta or Jujuy. That's where most of them come from,' says Janeth Choque.

Compounding these challenges are the structural impacts of the climate crisis, which is severely affecting production. From heavy rains flooding crops and storms destroying greenhouses to prolonged droughts and extreme heat damaging vegetables, the effects are widespread. 'All women producers in the country face the same struggles,' said Janeth.

Urbanization, largely unregulated, is another major issue for farm families. Real estate speculation is driving up land values, making the land where families produce more attractive for new neighborhood developments. 'Sometimes families are even paid to leave,' said Janeth.

Economic desperation forces producer families to sell their vegetables at low prices, while middlemen profit by selling the same produce at high prices.

Within the farms, 'women bear the brunt of family economic crises,' said Janeth. 'They are the ones who make adjustments, and this inevitably affects their children as well.' Rising food prices also exacerbate tensions within families. 'When there isn't enough money, violence increases,' she added.





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References:

[1] <http://web.archive.org/web/20071013235013/http://rural-womens-day.org/>
