



## Agroecological fairs are an alternative to conventional marketing

Source: Brasil de Fato, by Miguel Cela

Brazil, is one of the largest food producers in the world, yet currently more than 33 million Brazilians go hungry, according to data from the report [Look at hunger](#), from 2022. Guaranteeing access to food for everyone's table is therefore necessary and urgent.

But how can this be done when the production and distribution of food is concentrated in the hands of large companies that only aim to make a profit? The way out is agroecology and territorial markets.

[Territorial markets](#) are collective commercialisation spaces that follow the principles of the solidarity economy. Here, farming families sell their produce at fair prices and under fair conditions. An example of this type of market is fairs, an important place not only for the possibility of buying food directly from those who produce it but also for exchanging knowledge and experiences.



Maria de Fátima dos Santos, Fafá, is an agroecological farmer in the Jenipapo community in Itapipoca, Ceará. For her, the fairs are important for [empowering women](#) who previously worked alongside their husbands and partners and did not keep any of the money. "There was a freedom that we didn't have before, because before, if I wanted to buy something, I had to ask my husband. Not today. Today we have our own money, it's in our hands, and we buy what we want," explains Fafá.

But the freedom is not just financial. Going to the fairs "has changed the lives of women farmers in every way. There were a lot of women who never left the house and today they are there selling, they are at the talks, at the fairs talking to others. Some did not even want to speak and today they take the microphone," she adds.



A strong presence of women at the 4th edition of the National Agrarian Reform Fair, organised by the MST. Photo: Cecília Santos/Archive BAOBAB



In 2020 alone, the income of farming families increased by 71% in territorial markets. In addition to agroecological fairs, marketing takes place in greengrocers, in the community itself, and in institutional programmes, such as the [Food Acquisition Programme](#) (PAA, as in Portuguese) and the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE, as in Portuguese). The data is from a survey carried out in six Northeastern states by the Northeast Agroecology Ater Network and refers to information from 2020.

"They [agroecological fairs] bring the countryside closer to the city, they bring farmers closer to those who consume agroecological food. The fairs are an opportunity for consumers who are interested in buying agroecological peasant family farming products directly from the hands of those who produce them," says Neila Santos, coordinator of the Centre for Labour Studies and Worker Assistance (CETRA, as in Portuguese).

According to Santos, the importance of the fairs is also because they are spaces for breaking away from sexist and capitalist practices, as well as for fighting the [concentration of income](#) in the hands of a few large companies. From there, we can build fairer and stronger agri-food systems.

"It's the fairs that stimulate other economies, not just the profit economy: it's a circular economy, a solidarity economy, an economy of mutual aid, where other values and other principles are involved, such as the exchange of experiences between farmers and the exchange of knowledge between those who produce and those who consume," says the CETRA coordinator.

The contrast between conventional markets and territorial markets goes beyond the economic and management model - while the latter has its practices based on collectivity and collective interests, the former follows the norms and values of large companies. This disparity involves changes in social relations and the degree of autonomy of each person; the inclusion of women and young people as subjects, as well as transformations in production and consumption.

"Solidarity fairs and markets have very different characteristics from conventional markets. Conventional markets are characterised by the control of economic agents who are generally extraterritorial ([supermarket companies](#)) and which define prices, standards, and operating rules," explains



Paulo Petersen, executive coordinator of AS-PTA and a member of the Executive Centre of the National Articulation of Agroecology (ANA).



Photo from the 4th edition of the National Agrarian Reform Fair, organised by the MST. Photo: Cecília Santos/Archive BAOBAB

Petersen emphasises that one of the great challenges for public policies is to find ways to encourage the construction of territorial markets, because when we talk about "markets", we do not always mean physical structures, but the power relations that are intrinsic to them: "The market as a relationship of power, of who defines, who controls, who regulates commercial relations".

He goes on to say that the dispute over the construction and implementation of public policies is essential because conventional markets "are circuits that offer [cheap but poor quality food](#)". Therefore, the institutional environment (municipal, state, and federal governments) can favour the construction and strengthening of territorial markets.



"A food supply policy that ensures healthy, quality food for the entire population needs not only institutional purchases, such as PAA [Food Acquisition Programme], PNAE [National School Feeding Programme], and other institutional purchasing mechanisms but, fundamentally, we need to foster new marketing circuits that are under the control of the actors in the territories."



Maria de Fátima dos Santos (Fafá) is an agroecological farmer in the Jenipapo community in Itapipoca (CE). Photo: Mário Sabino/Agroecological and Solidarity Fairs

Agroecological fairs are spaces for struggle, resistance, and the democratisation of knowledge and healthy food [produced without pesticides](#) or transgenic seeds. Even with rising supermarket prices, farming families continue to resist and practice fair prices. In them, we find "products made locally, with a low level of processing, without the need for additives. So they are healthier products. You stimulate production, generate income for producers, and provide good quality produce for the population as a whole,"



Petersen tells us. Not to mention the variety - which can be the result of seasonality and local agrobiodiversity.

[Fight hunger with healthy, affordable food](#) is one of the premises of the agroecological movement that is gaining strength not only in the Northeast but throughout the country. There are countless fairs in various cities throughout Brazil's five regions.

But like everything else we do, organising and maintaining a fair requires investment, as the AS-PTA coordinator said. And support should not be restricted to the fair. Farming families need access to public policies to strengthen their community ties and their production.

Agroecological farmer Fafá says that there is little support for farmers who produce agroecological food. But she emphasises that this reality needs to - and is - changing. According to Fafá, public policies favour the continuity of work, because when you have financial incentives, you can improve your planning and produce more.

Hand in hand with male and female farmers from all over Brazil, environmentalists, researchers, people interested in and sensitised to the [agroecology agendas](#), organisations, and social movements have been building the agroecological movement and strengthening agroecological family farming by demanding public policies, projects, partnerships, and support. After all, "it is we farmers who sustain the country with food", emphasises Fafá.

### **Thinking about public policies for agroecology**

The way to build a fairer and more equal country is through the construction of public policies with the active participation of social organisations and grassroots movements. With this in mind, the [National Articulation of Agroecology \(ANA\)](#) held the "Public Policies for Agroecology in the Mouth of the People" initiative between September and December 2023, with the aim of collecting proposals for the construction of the Third National Plan for Agroecology and Organic Production (Planapo). Planapo is an instrument that establishes guidelines for the federal government to build and implement public policies on agroecology and organic production. Included in the Plan are



aspects such as access to agricultural credit, production support, promotion, science, and technology.

Gathering proposals, information, and analyses on Planapo was not the only objective of the action, which also sought to make a political impact in the states to build and promote existing or ongoing state public policies. This mobilisation of organisations, networks, and links in the agroecological field has therefore strengthened these individuals in the agroecological struggle, to foster the collective construction of proposals for the [State Policies and Plans for Agroecology and Organic Production \(Peapos\)](#).

With these local and regional groups becoming stronger, agroecology is becoming more and more robust throughout the country.



Strengthen agroecology in your state! Photo: Cacheado Braga/Archive CETRA

To find out where agroecological fairs are located in your city and state, find out about organisations, social movements, associations, cooperatives, and unions of family farm workers that work to promote agroecology.



In Ceará, for example, the [CETRA website](#) provides a list of agroecological fairs in the state, with opening times and addresses. The [Sabiá Centre website](#) does the same for the state of Pernambuco and the [Recife \(PE\) City Hall website](#) lists agroecological fairs and spaces in the city. In Rio de Janeiro, you can find information about agroecological fairs at the [website of the Rio de Janeiro State Organic Farmers Association \(Abio\)](#). In the South, you can check out the [Ecovida Network website](#).

There is also the [Map of organic fairs](#), of the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Defence (Idec), which maps and gathers organic and agroecological establishments, fairs, and marketing points.

Republished from Brasil de Fato

Original language: Portuguese

Translated into English by ROOTS

<https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2024/04/25/feiras-agroecologicas-sao-alternativa-a-comercializacao-convencional>