

Brazil (Food Availability)

Organisations and Transitions of Horticultural Organic Producers in a Peri-urban Area of São Paulo (Brazil)

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Introduction

A few years after enacting the Organic Law (December 2003), Brazil is becoming a world leader in Organic Farming (OF), which covers a wide range of production and certification systems. Besides developing an export capability, there is also a growing demand for organic fresh vegetables in cities, especially in the south-eastern States. However, the ways small farmers adopt OF in “green belts” to meet urban demands for organics have not been investigated extensively. We explored this issue in the community of Ibiúna, located in a hilly area at about 100 km from three main cities of São Paulo (São Paulo, Sorocaba and Campinas). This case study shows how small farmers were organised or organise themselves to meet urban demands and develop OF, and analyse its further implication in terms of social benefits. The approach was based on interviews with farmers, technical and political officials, organic inspectors and leaders from various organic producer associations. It then served as a basis for additional case studies in São Paulo and other States, with the extension of agro-ecological initiatives (Brandenburg, 2002).

Results

Watersheds in Ibiúna not only provide irrigation water for vegetable growing but also contribute to human water supply. The region has a significant concentration of small-scale organic producers who have taken this option due to the economic crisis in conventional farming and other commercial activity. Most participants in the study were located in the same river basin, including approximately 90 small farms, 72 of which are organic.

We identified four distinct forms of social organization, collective and entrepreneurial, that express *a priori* different concepts about the market and organic farming (Bellon & Abreu, 2006). These organizational forms not only reflect different existing market relations but also illustrate the emergence of new economic relations among farmers and between farmers and consumers with new food purchasing priorities. Although these four basic forms of organisation dedicated to OF share some common objectives, namely in visual quality and “fair price” of products, differences appear in their magnitude and internal operation, their values and relations with consumers, their technical and environmental contents. They are combined in the same territory, but they have been following diverse evolution pathways (Table 1).

Development in Ibiúna, and the diversity of its organizational forms, result from a three steps process. Local Catholic Church initiative in the late 80’s led to generate a strong link between many farmers from Ibiúna and citizens from poor communities of São Paulo, generating the first organisational model (Association in Table 1). Its further articulation with local AAO²’s activists and the creation of a specialized organic product selling enterprise in the middle 90’s have been progressively driving farmers to others forms of organisation (C and O in Table 1). Finally, a disruptive evolution within Company (C), led to the creation of the most recent form of organisation (Group cooperative G in Table 1) in 2003, and is about to originate another associative form in 2007.

² Organic Agriculture Association. Created in 1989 in Sao Paulo state, the AAO is now one of the most important actors in the Brazilian organic farming movement.

Table 1: Classification of organizational forms encountered, in order of historical development (vertically)

Case type (year of origin)	Farmers in 2007	Production and certification	Marketing	Values
Association (A) of small farmers (late 80s)	50 farmers, including 2 organic farmers Interaction with city consumers	Food autonomy and diversity through box scheme No formal certification, but consumer-validation	Solidarity (pricing) and integration among farmers Food sovereignty communities	Fraternity Cooperation Congruence between principles and practices
Company (C) (mid 1990s)	57 organic farmers in the micro basin Hierarchical and technical relationships	Global land use planning Inputs and technical assistance Group certification	High visual quality City supermarkets Conversion stimulated by market demand	Economic realism Technological orientation High environment impact
Organic (O) association (mid 1990s)	15 scattered farmers Mutual exchange Strong leadership and market investment	Individual initiatives Exchange experience and information Farmer (Self?) certification	Marketing agility and efficiency Fairer prices for producers	Social justice, respect and liberalism
Group (G) cooperative (year 2003)	Mixture of 15 neighbouring organic plus 105 conventional farmers	Based on organic farmers experience Possible impact on conventional coop members	Outer-city supermarkets Secure markets and fair prices for producers and consumers	Timing Collective vision Regeneration Proximity

Except for the Company, the organizations investigated do not operate with an exclusive contract. Thus they allow farmers to spread risk by selling to cooperatives, associations, consumer's groups and restaurants. It is mostly this exclusivity clause that led farmers to quit the Company in 2003 and that is leading to a new disruption today. By organising themselves in small groups, these farmers are looking for more autonomy and pretend enter new markets, mostly direct sale or short pathways allowing them to add more value on their production. Self-organisation of the production (regularity, diversity) and cooperation is thus a new challenge for these farmers who until now have been under the guidance of the Company.

The on-going reorganisation of communities and networks is also related with a change in farmers' practices. Beyond a mere interpretation as OF as input substitution or market opportunities, such transitions could contribute to redesign more profitable and autonomous farming (Sylvander *et al.*, 2006), and possibly new food systems or even "foodsheds". Driving forces in such changes in practices are not only economic but also linked with agronomic and environmental issues such as soil compaction, accumulation of phosphorus (Bellon *et al.*, 2005). This justifies further monitoring and comparative analysis, based on extended networks of initiatives (Embrapa, 2006).

Discussion and conclusions

Small farmers created collective entities and experienced new social and agricultural practices, sustaining both on their needs and those of consumers. They ensure a steady quality food supply both for their household and different social groups. Increase and stability of incomes not only provided for the farmer's family basic needs but also strongly improved their livelihoods and allowed many of them to increase farm's capitals. The various forms of organizations demonstrate the vitality of Ibiúna's OF. Both organic products supply and consumption increase. However, competition on the organic market is increasing, leading to new challenges for small farmers. High innovation capability for both production and marketing are more and more required, as well as cooperation abilities.

After a first "social including" step, with shared benefits for all farmers, the risk that OF in Ibiúna excludes part of the farmers in its further development is high. This is due to reductions in price paid to farmers and increased competition among organizations when they address the same market. Improving farmer rationalization and supporting agriculture-related forms of social practices are still needed. These phenomena are increasingly recognized as important mechanisms for rural development in a global economy. Social equity is also at stake for consumers, since many of them cannot afford to pay high prices. Transitions among production models also open a new space to redefine the role of family-farms in rural development and their relationships with the market and with urban consumers, feeding a new ecological ethics and social autonomy.

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Biography

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