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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:

*Mundua nork, nola eta zer-nolako inplikazio sozial, ekonomiko eta ekologikorekin elikatuko duen izango da eztabaidagaia*

# ***The Azorean food system in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Food Sovereignty Challenges in a Globalized Food Market***

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# The Azorean food system in the 21st Century: Food Sovereignty Challenges in a Globalized Food Market

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## Abstract

This paper engages in an integrated discussion about the future of food in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in the Autonomous Region of the Azores (ARA), Portugal, considering the current practices taking place pre-, during, and post- food production. It is based on the author's Master of Arts (M.A.) research thesis dissertation<sup>1</sup>, which presents a community-centred perspective on the political framework (i.e. the actors, discourses and conditions) giving shape to the food system in ARA today. Arguing that food systems across the globe are facing common challenges in areas such as the environment, social and political inequalities and health concerns, this multi-sectorial and stakeholder-based analysis explores cross-cutting issues on sustainable food production, food security, food sovereignty and the right to food in ARA. Examining the Azores' case goes beyond a focus on productivity and economic growth. It engages in a fruitful, critical, and pressing discussion on people's food sovereignty issues, arguing the food system in the Region (as an institution) is dialectically constructed among people's beliefs, historical conditions and rules of behaviour.

**Key words:** *Azores, sustainable food systems, food security, food sovereignty, right to food*

The paper begins by identifying the processes and dynamics defining access and control over the means of food production and distribution in this agriculturally-based region, including the tensions and shortcomings posed by this arrangement and the circumventing ways being developed to overcome them. Subsequently, it examines the practices unfolding at the end point of the food scheme, by unveiling the role of consumers in ARA. The discovery of consumers' weakened negotiation capacity in ARA's food framework leads to the deliberation of the prevailing issues regarding food consumption, people's health and nutrition, and people's right to food in the context of a globalized food market.

To conclude, this paper proposes some feasible strategies toward

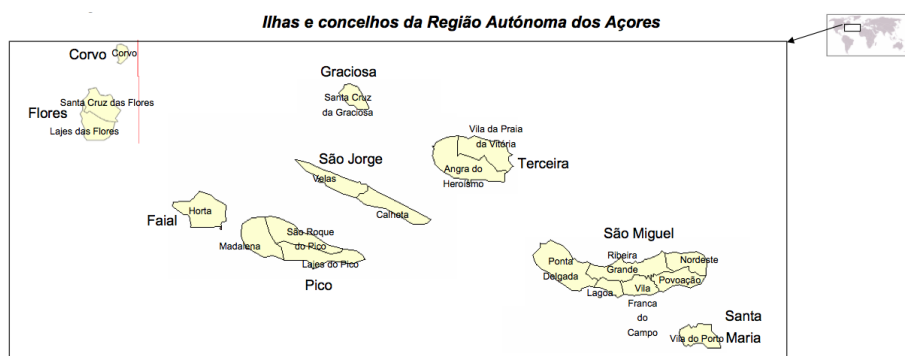
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<sup>1</sup> *Discussing Food Sovereignty in the Context of a Globalized Food Market – The case of the Autonomous Region of the Azores in Portugal*. M.A. Thesis dissertation (2016). University of Siegen.

guaranteeing a sustainable food system for ARA in the twenty-first century that serves the interests of all sectors involved in its making (e.g. food producers, consumers, merchants, coordinating bodies, etc.). These suggestions expand on current trends already addressing its shortcomings, and later explore the role of activism and research in the contribution of securing healthy, adequate and sustainable food production in the Azores.

### The current dynamics and processes in the Azores' food system

The Autonomous Region of the Azores in Portugal is a set of nine volcanic islands<sup>2</sup> located in the Atlantic Ocean about 1500 kilometers off the Iberian peninsula in Europe. Populated by Portuguese since the 15th Century and today part of the European Union (EU) as one of its outermost regions (OR), the Azores consist of unique cultural, economic, political and geographic traits shaping the archipelago's mechanisms to adapt and overcome its challenges. Since 1976, the Azores celebrates its title as one of the Portuguese Autonomous Regions.



**Figure 1: Islands and municipalities in the Autonomous Region of the Azores (ARA)<sup>3</sup>**

The ARA presents a low population density centred on large-scale cattle farming for milk and meat production. Milk production has followed quantitative and qualitative efforts and investments in the last 20 years towards the modernization and increasing production capacity of the agro-industry<sup>4</sup>. Today, ARA is responsible for 30% of Portugal's cow's milk production, while the meat chain presented a 384% increase in the volume of cattle slaughtered for export

<sup>2</sup> The nine Azorean islands are: Santa Maria, São Miguel, Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico, Faial, Flores and Corvo.

<sup>3</sup> From: Região Autónoma dos Açores: Potencial Sectorial (2009). Banco Espírito Santo. Espírito Santo Research, March 2009. Research Sectorial: Banco Espírito Santo. Pg.7

<sup>4</sup> Although a 28% reduction in the number of properties and dairy cows was observed between 1995 and 2012. Source: The outermost regions of the European Union: towards a partnership for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2013:21)

between 2005 and 2012<sup>5</sup>.

Fishing, on the other hand, encompasses a small-scale artisanal activity heavily focused on tuna fishing despite its economic potentiality from a vast marine diversity. The sector employs around 500 fishermen<sup>6</sup>, haulers and support staff on the land, plus around 1,000 jobs are generated by the fish processing industry (mainly preserves), the fish marketing chain and maritime and air transport. The tuna processing industry dominates this activity and centres on export, with little demand for fresh fish (*ibid.*:27).

The financial crisis hitting Europe in 2011 led to the slowdown of the European economy, subsequently reducing the levels of productivity in the primary and construction sectors of ARA. The increased unemployment rate added to a shrinking domestic demand, having a negative effect on the consolidation of growth and development in the Region.

### Actors, processes and dynamics, and discourses defining access and control over the means of production in the Azores

There are three (3), possibly conflicting, spheres where multiple institutions, discourses, conditions, and stakeholders interact to give form to the current Azores' food system design: the globalized food market, the European Union, and the Autonomous Region of the Azores (ARA):<sup>7</sup>



FIGURE 2: INTERLINKAGE OF SPHERES SHAPING ARA'S FOOD SYSTEM DESIGN

1) The **global food regime** indirectly sets the rules and trends that ARA is required to adopt to partake in food trade. Since the evolution of agriculture after WWII, the notions and capacities of food production were transformed through the

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*:22.

<sup>6</sup> It is essential to stress that women play an important role in keeping artisanal fishing alive in the Azores. Their main tasks include hook and net preparation, as well as supporting the fishing crew. Nevertheless, ship-owners and those licensed to carry out the fishing activity are mostly –if not always- referred to as ‘fishermen’.

<sup>7</sup> The state level (Portugal) was purposely skipped here. It is important to highlight that the Portuguese constitution contains a clause allowing the Azores' governmental autonomy over areas of special interest, including agriculture and fisheries. Other areas, such as foreign affairs, monetary policy and criminal jurisdiction remain in control from Lisbon (Murray (2012) quoted in Alison Neilson 2012:474).

specialization, expansion and mechanization of this activity. Social, political, economic and cultural transformations subsequently tackled along this new way of interacting. The rural exodus and the concentration of power in food production soon prompted more people relying on food grown elsewhere, either within their own borders in massive operations, or on imported goods from far away countries. In response to this, state reforms and the re-assessment of rural development policies were developed to satisfy the needs of a new global order.

Moreover, thanks to the innovations in transportation, storage and packaging, supermarkets emerged into storing containers with the miracles of food production. For over five decades now, these buildings have gained increasing terrain to determine how food should circulate and end on our plates. “Everyday, three times a day” (Patel 2007: 215-247, Pfeiffer 2006:19-28)<sup>8</sup>. Add to this the invention of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which by the end of the twentieth century had proven farmers’ dependency to responding to the environmental effects derived from intensive farming carried out throughout the century (i.e. detrimental soil conditions, pests, climate issues, etc.)<sup>9</sup>. With all of this in the pot, the food industry had with no doubt turned into a global and corporate business by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, centralized and dictated by a few giant businesses steering how modern societies should relate to food and consume it (Levenstein 2003, Stiffler 2005:32-52). The main institution orchestrating the global ebbs and flows of this food market – based entirely on cheap oil to fuel its agrarian food system and incorporating actors and landscapes from every corner of the globe – is the World Trade Organization (WTO), with the advise of key stakeholders from the agrifood industry corporations.

Becoming a competitive food-producing region has become, therefore, imperative for the Azores to attain any bargaining capacity in a globalized food market. Two essential aspects determine its success in today’s context: its food production capacity and the control over means of production (including access to natural resources, such as land, water and/or production inputs) and over the distribution channels.

2) The **European Union** contributes directly to ARA’s food system framework through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP dictates the ‘what’ and ‘how’ in food production, based on global trends and on principles of internal coordination among Member States. In unison with convergence policies specifically tailored for the Outermost Regions of Europe (OR), as in the Azores’ case, the EU provides technical and financial support to ARA to promote rural development and competitiveness of the region’s food production. The PRORURAL and POSEI Programmes steering the agrifood system in the Azores, orchestrating the institutions, stakeholders and discourses partaking in it.

<sup>8</sup> See Rosset, Peter (2006), *Food is Different*. Chapters 1-4 provide a historical review of the globalized transformation of the human relationship with food and how it became one more item of the stock market.

<sup>9</sup> GMOs cause a mixed reception around the world due to their dramatic effects on fauna and flora diversity, closed-loop dependency on chemical inputs to guarantee their success, and plant [seed] patent rights (Patel 2007: 119-158).

The European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was first launched in 1962 as a common legal reference and policy framework to restore food supplies for European Members States. CAP's main objectives today include: a) to improve agricultural productivity (while ensuring a stable supply of affordable food); and b) to ensure that EU farmers can make a reasonable living<sup>10</sup>. The CAP is managed by the European Commission – based in Brussels, Belgium - and funded from the resources of the EU annual budget. Since 2005, two new funds were constituted as CAP's financial instruments: the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Today, the CAP aims to guarantee a decent standard of living for 12 million of farmers in Europe, as well as a stable, diversified and safe food supply for its 500 million citizens (CAP 2014:1).

The Autonomous Region of the Azores (ARA) has been recognized since 1992<sup>11</sup> as one of the Outermost Regions (OR) of Europe<sup>12</sup>. The ORs are regions that have a geographic distance from the European continent. They are usually islands, in a situation of being an enclave, or with challenging topographical and climate conditions, causing them to be removed from the main commercial trade lines, economically dependent on a few products, and therefore with restraints to take full advantage of the European Market.

To face these challenges, the European Commission designed in 2012 an innovative development strategy specific for the ORs to fulfill the Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>13</sup>. This Action Plan aims to address the limitations affecting their economic, social and territorial development. It encompasses all public policies and seeks to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth along five axes: accessibility, competitiveness, regional integration, the social dimension and climate change action.

The Programme d'Options Spécifiques à l'Éloignement et l'Insularité (POSEI) is a set of measures funded under the first pillar of the CAP to address the geographical and economic challenges of the ORs' agricultural sector. The European Commission approved the POSEI specific for ARA in 2007, which is coordinated by the Regional Secretary of Agriculture and the Environment (SRAA for its acronym in Portuguese). The POSEI strategy is intended to alleviate the costs of importing raw materials; and to provide support towards production, processing and marketing. On the other hand, the PRORURAL+ is the specific programme defined for the

<sup>10</sup> CAP 2012:3-5.

<sup>11</sup> Before Portugal adhered to the EU, the Azores region was structurally underdeveloped with very low levels of wealth production. This situation did not change much until the end of the 1990s, following a convergence strategy with mainland Portugal and Europe that boosted an economic growth thanks to the contribution of resources provided by Community funds. The Azores is classified as a predominantly rural and underdeveloped region. Its fundamental pillar of the economy is agriculture, an activity highly exposed to damage from natural catastrophes and bad weather.

<sup>12</sup> Art. 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), annexed to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, defines the specific characteristics of ORs. The ORs include: Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Réunion, Saint-Martin, the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands.

<sup>13</sup> The EU2020 Strategy was developed to create the conditions for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for all Member States in Europe. See: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/index_en.htm)

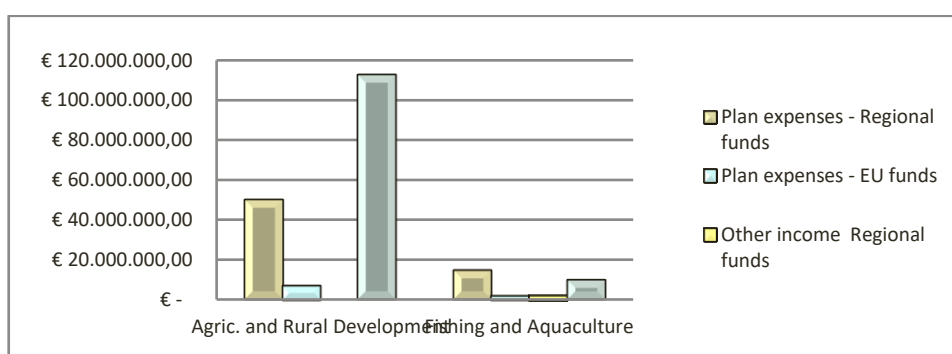


period 2014-2020 to promote rural development in the Azores. Cattle raising and environmental concerns always fall under the PRORURAL framework, as they have a direct impact in the rural economy of the Region.

3) The translation and implementation of the global food regime, the CAP scheme, and the EU convergence policy programmes take place in the archipelago via **the Azores Regional Government**. Three core regional institutions deal with ARA's food system affairs: the *Regional Secretariat for Agriculture and the Environment* (SRAA), responsible for implementing the agricultural and environmental policies for the Region; the *Regional Secretariat for the Sea, Science and Technology* (SRMCT), which is the department in control of the areas of fisheries and aquaculture; and, the *Vice-Presidency of the Government, Employment and Competitiveness*, accountable for the business sector and consumer protection affairs.

Given the relevance of agriculture for the Region, SRAA holds a higher stake in food affairs in the Azores compared to the Regional Secretary for the Sea, Science and Technology (SRMCT). Several aspects could be granted to this: first, the *Regional Directorate for Fisheries* (nested in SRMCT) deals mostly with the fishing industry; second, fishermen and ship-owners' issues are largely dealt through each of the islands' associations; third, there is a significant difference in budget allocation between the agricultural and fishing sector (see Table 1); and last, there is a lack of representation of fishermen in the Region:

"... today is gotten worse because [SRMCT] now includes education, science and technology and has little room for the fishing sector."



**Table 1: Comparison in ARA's budget allocation by departments for 2016, according to the Regional Legislative Decree No. 1/2016/A<sup>14</sup>**

The role of the Vice-Presidency of the Government, Employment and

<sup>14</sup> The Official Budget for 2016 in ARA, as approved by the Legislative Assembly (discriminated by departments). Three out of the four rural development projects expected for 2016 are agriculture-oriented. From: *Diário da República*, 1a. serie – No. 5 – 8 January 2016, pg. 63.

Competitiveness - in what competes the food producing system - consists of supporting and assisting businesses working on producing, selling and handling food (e.g. restaurants), as well as the entities working toward the protection of consumers. Stakeholders include the *Committee on Industry*<sup>15</sup> currently focusing on issues concerning the dairy industry, transportation and costs, and the *Association of Azorean Consumers (ACRA)*, acting as the food safety and hygiene police. ACRA also carries out workshops for business holders and consumers about food safety issues<sup>16</sup>.

Most of the initiatives developed in ARA's food system are fostered by stakeholders and institutions linked to the Regional Government. Root causes can include the strong reliance on public (regional or communitarian) funds, the Azores' historical predisposition, and/or the impairment to create complementary channels for non-state stakeholders to partake in the collective construction of ARA's food system, among others. Yet a countless number of non-state actors are involved in the food system of the Azores, only a few of them participate actively in decision-making processes. These stakeholders can be classified as non-for-profit organizations (e.g. the Local Action Groups (GALs) working closely with the Directorate of Regional Rural Development (DRDR) as entities promoting rural development in the Azores, and for-profit businesses - such are food and farming cooperatives (i.e. organic food cooperatives) and family businesses specialized on niche markets mainly revolving around livestock products).

### Shortcomings of the current arrangement in the Azores

ARA's food system presents multiple internal and external developmental limitations: (i) it is an imports-based food system encouraging the purchase of foodstuffs and food production inputs (e.g. fertilizers, seeds, specialized knowledge, etc.) from abroad to satisfy local needs and remain competitive; (ii) presents logistic issues in the control over the means of transportation - maritime and by air in the case of the Azores<sup>17</sup> - and the distribution chains; (iii) is vulnerable to market forces determined by the global food regime (such are food price, food availability, and food production strategies); (iv) small-scale farming due to factors such as topography, environmental conditions (including climate and weather conditions and insularity), agricultural labour force, and demographics; (v) it is an export-oriented system, which requires the Region to develop strategies toward suitable competences against intensive players in the global market, while jeopardizing at times the domestic needs; and, (vi) the Azores' environmental

<sup>15</sup> The Committee on Industry and Internationalization acts as an advisory body for the Chamber of Commerce of Angra do Heroísmo.

<sup>16</sup> Additionally to these entities, the Society for the Development of Businesses in the Azores (SDEA) is instrumental for the promotion of the food-related industry in ARA. However, it has little involvement in the political debate on food issues.

<sup>17</sup> According to Neilson (2012:480-482) "air transportation is an important part of the Azorean fish export strategy, as fresh fish are highly perishable and waterborne travel takes a far longer time than transport by air."



conditions, including its innate soil, climate and geographical conditions (such are its volcanic soils, heavy rain, windy winters, and condition of periphery).

Additional to the above, the effectiveness of ARA's food system's design raises a number of questions. The system has a short-sighted food strategy without clear, long-term objectives and grants uneven negotiation capacities to stakeholders throughout the system, which ultimately puts interests in conflict and creates constrains in decision-making processes. Missing what (or 'whose') needs should be made a priority jeopardizes long-term sustainability of ARA's food system. Challenges arise not only by the short-term nature of developmental initiatives, which tend to be fixed and project-based, but also due to a lack of proper infrastructure to monitor the system. The key concept underpinning these (in)consistencies and contradictions is '*knowledge*', whether a lack thereof or an urgency to further it. Ultimately, what these challenges reveal is the need to determine who should lead the knowledge-making processes, how funding can be attained to do this and to what extend this is actually relevant.

"The issue is that the ARA does not have a perspective, but instead it only looks at the economy. We do not know what are the deficits, visions, or goals of the region in order to transform what we have or to envision what we want to have."

By all means, the integration and participation of all sectors, along with knowledge-making processes embedded in ARA's reality, become imperative to enhance the development of ARA's food system. Add to this a critical revision of the dominant paradigm and a conscious structural organization. Innovative projects, such as those developed by rural and local initiatives like GALs, can strengthen the sector's presence in the market as they are based on local realities. Developing 'know-how' tools and skills regarding ARA's food system can help address the bottlenecks at the core of the Region's food policy framework. Increased knowledge boosts sustainability, self-reliance and sovereignty at the individual, sectoral and Regional level. It increments also the chances to target current issues, as well as to meet the actual needs of Azoreans.

### Issues affecting food consumption, people's health and nutrition, and their right to food in ARA in the context of a globalized food market

What we have come to call globalization is not simply a process that links together the world but also one that differentiates it. It creates new inequalities even as it brings into being new commonalities and

lines of communication. And it creates new, up-to-date ways not only of connecting places but of bypassing and ignoring them.

(Ferguson, 1999:243)

The dominating food system - due to its long-chain of actors and processes - poses a large number of social, political and health concerns affecting the quality and quantity of food we eat. They range from food starvation (referring to the inconsistent access to food, like during food crises), to food poverty (by cause of insufficient means to access foodstuffs) and to malnutrition (referring to improper diets). In response, public policies across the globe have sought to include in their agenda measures that promote the sector's welfare, by considering the principles advocated by the food security, sustainable food systems, food sovereignty and the right to food approaches.

### *Food Security*

The term food security began to be used as an operational concept in public policy by the mid-1970s in response to food supply issues and the instability of food prices that led to a global food crisis<sup>18</sup>. Current food security debates acknowledge broad public health issues. They include: food malnutrition and health concerns derived from inadequate diets; food-related diseases caused by improper food handling, lack of clean and safe water, and poverty; as well as food poverty, which highlights the absence of sufficient means to access adequate and healthy food.

The Eurobarometer survey report from 2012<sup>19</sup> indicates Europeans' main concern on food security lies in producing sufficient food to meet the world population's needs, while not so much on each EU member states' capacity to meet their own populations' food needs. Greek and Portuguese respondents to this report expressed concern about national food security. Overall, the report found that financially vulnerable citizens are most concerned about food security.

Importantly, in Portugal – as well as in the Azores - the term *food security* (segurança alimentar) is not differentiated from *food safety*<sup>20</sup> (segurança dos alimentos). This approach creates confusion both in theory and in the policy-making arena, and narrows food security to a set of mechanisms concerned

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<sup>18</sup> Chapter 2. Food security: concepts and measurement, FAO.  
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4671e/y4671e06.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Special Eurobarometer 389: "Europeans' attitudes towards food security, food quality and the countryside".

<sup>20</sup> Food safety refers to the extent to which food is safe to eat. The term is sometimes confused with food security, which refers to the extent to which food is available - i.e. whether it is physically available and can be bought at a price that people can afford. See Glossary CAP 2015.

with food-handling regulations and standardization of quality in food production. As a result, it overlooks at other key areas of interest, such as the promotion of healthy and sustainable food production, as well as of well-nourished and food-resilient communities.

Small-scale and artisanal fisheries play in general an essential role in food security and nutrition, poverty eradication, equitable development and sustainable resource utilization. Strengthening small-scale fisheries in the Azores can address current food security issues, as they have the capacity to provide nutritious food for local, national and international markets and generate income to support local and national economies.

### *Sustainable Food Systems*

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development came up with a definition of sustainable development, as it is understood in this work: “Sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Harris 2003:1). Attempts to developing sustainable food systems today are happening differently throughout the globe and go beyond concerns on ecological resources. These efforts seek to address sustainable consumption and production, public health (issues involving food security and water protection), social inclusion, demography and migration, among others.

In the Azores, this process has recently taken off and it advances slowly. Direct public and private initiatives addressing issues of public health concerns, such as food poverty and malnutrition, are basically absent in the colloquial and political discourses of ARA. Instead, today’s efforts centre in supporting investments towards the diversification of the economy – for example in tourism -, job creation and improvement of life quality.

GALs are taking the lead to initiate new ways of producing and consuming food. They promote a short-chain food system that fosters local varieties, culture and heritage in the form of organic food cooperatives, local seed exchanges and artisanal fishing. However, these initiatives are working mostly in isolation and their sustainability is not guaranteed due to their project-based nature. Moreover, organic food products are still luxury items accessible to well off citizens.

More specifically, sustainability concerns over the current food system and its focus on the industrial farming model include the renewability of the primary food sector in the Azores and their current fragile livelihoods. While the number of livestock per unit has increased, the number of small-scale producers has reduced, having an effect in the local food production in the

region as a whole:

“What is currently happening in the ARA is a suicide, taking away the farmers from the land to increase the dairy production in larger operations. This kills the family matrix!”

### *Food sovereignty*

Citizens have come to recognize their loss of identity and self-control in the global food system and a necessity to redefine their meaning within it. The concept of food sovereignty<sup>21</sup> was first exposed by non-for-profit *La Via Campesina* (LVC) at the World Food Summit in 1996. LVC’s international human rights statement encourages to put “the idea of equality right back into the heart of food politics” as a response to industrialization and commodification of food (Patel 2007:291).

“In Europe, organic or ecological farming movements face the power of the global monopolies of agricultural multinationals. The task is hard but not impossible. Governments continue to support multinational food chains based on the obsession of the productivism, paradigm which claims that increased production per man hour is necessary “to feed the increasing human population –estimated in 9 billion for 2050”.

(Vaarst and Gonzalez pg.6)

Europeans’ capacity of food self-determination has diminished, despite they might seem food secured. Vaarst and Gonzalez defend that “[the food producing sector in the EU is] nevertheless reliant on the food import and the moving around of food on the global market and through very few corporations benefitting from the price fluctuations” (*ibid.*:3).

Paradoxically, little to none political and/or grassroots efforts nowadays promote food sovereignty despite the reduced bargaining capacity by primary food producers in the Azores, intending to “raise awareness about the regulatory barriers that undercut the rights of [Azoreans] to choose where and from whom they buy their food” (Ayres and Bosia 2011: 47). Reasons for this can be linked to an ongoing financial dependency, ARA’s pre-existing environmental constraints, and the Region’s idiosyncrasy, which hinder putting local control of food systems in the food policy agenda.

Policies like CAP have altered historical land uses at the local level, despite

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<sup>21</sup> 'Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extend to which they want to be self-reliant'. Retrieved from Ayres and Bosia (2011:50).

seeking to protect farmers. For instance, cropping subsidies have privileged certain crops, while leading to the abandonment of others, generally traditional, and induced the shortage of local food supplies. Examples of subsidy supports in ARA today include the ‘milk package’, which is an additional financial support for the dairy sector distributed through the POSEI, and the export subsidy, which covers additional costs for production in the Azores to remain marketable abroad.

Against this backdrop, food sovereignty debates address today the pressing need to develop monitoring tools for evaluating the success of food-related policies, such as CAP, on the ground (*ibid.*:4-5). Part of the ‘local food movement’, they refer to a series of efforts forging people’s capacity to choose the quality and quantity of foods they produce, trade and consume. Governmentally-led and private efforts in ARA miss, however, the political resistance component of the concept that reclaims ownership of the food system against a uniformed and unequal food regime<sup>22</sup>. Instead, the current framework narrows its approach to food sovereignty by deploying local foods as a brand to promote the Region’s market competitiveness.

“Strategies [for the food and agriculture sector] in ARA include: 1) to prioritize high quality regional products; 2) to bring the name of the Azores higher (e.g. through the brand ‘Marca Açores’)<sup>23</sup>; 3) to invest on the dairy sector; and 4) to increase food self-provision (e.g. by depending less on imports).”

The food sovereignty movement also advocates for consumers to participate actively in the defining of their food system, including making informed decisions about the food available to them. In ARA, the political reach in the food policy arena is rather limited to a few stakeholders:

“The community does not participate [in the creation of programs]. For instance, the consumer does not intervene; the farmer participates little.”

According to Pouncy, the power of consumers to influence food production processes depends on the real competition existing in markets, which ultimately reflects “the institutional arrangement of choice for [agribusiness] firms” (Pouncy 2012:9. Brackets in original). Encouraging inclusive participatory spaces and education for younger consumers about their role in the making of the food system are two viable solutions to overcome the participation gap in the Azores.

Food sovereignty places food policy-making processes back onto the ground

<sup>22</sup> For an inspiring ‘door-on-your right/door-on-your-left discourse about food choices’ see Roberts (2008).

<sup>23</sup> The ‘Marca Açores’ certificate is a marketing strategy spearheaded by the SDEA for products produced in the Azores. The label serves as an iconic image that emotionally links products to their Azorean roots, while informing consumers about the implementation of principles that respect the archipelago’s traditions and nature. From: <http://www.investinazores.com/marcaazores/index.php>.

for the promotion of a stimulating and participatory system. Therefore, a framework suitable to guarantee stakeholders' accountability is prescribed to assure liability and transparency. Accountability means making someone responsible for something by means of a certificate or contract. In ARA, for example, consumers are unable to make food industry and/or governmental stakeholders responsible for food production processes, because food-labelling requirements are not enforced.

"[Labelling foodstuffs as GMOs because they derive from animals fed on animal feed that could have possibly contain GMOs] might create confusion on consumers and also affect the 'healthy and green' image that the Azores has; for example, the 'Milk from Happy Cows Programme'<sup>24</sup>."

This contradicts the EU's food security strategy, which 'defends the right of the consumer to make a fully informed choice.' (CAP 2014:14).

### *The right to food*

A large number of international legal instruments recognize the right to food as a human right and enforce its fulfillment by the ratifying States. The General Comment No. 12 of the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) argues, "the right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement"<sup>25</sup>.

By ratifying the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1978, Portugal is obliged to guarantee that food is always available, accessible and adequate to all its citizens, corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs. Food accessibility must: (i) be guaranteed either through the production of food, fishing, hunting or gathering; (ii) be physically and economically accessible without compromising any other basic needs, and (iii) be adequate – meaning that it must satisfy the dietary needs according to the individual's age, living conditions, health, occupation, and sex, etc. (Screen state action against hunger 2007:3).

There are three (3) recurrent misconceptions about the right to food in the public policy-making arena, which hinder the possibility of addressing right to food concerns on the ground<sup>26</sup>:

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<sup>24</sup> The 'Milk from Happy Cows Programme' (*Programa Leite de Vacas Felizes*) is an initiative in cooperation between Terra Nostra – a cooperative of dairy farmers located in the São Miguel Island – and the Azorean dairy producers. It lies on five (5) pillars: year-round grass feeding; animal welfare; quality and food safety; sustainable production; and, efficiency. <http://www.terra-nostra.pt/programa-de-leite-de-vacas-felizes>

<sup>25</sup> Screen state action against hunger (2007:13)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*:3-5.



1. The right to food is NOT the same as the right to be fed. The right to food refers to the right to feed oneself in dignity and does not equal to providing charity food to the hungry. This is exactly the case of the Azores. Initiatives in ARA seeking to ensure access to food are limited to social security palliatives, such as a minimum income and food donation via organized civil society food pantries (e.g. the *Banco Alimentar*<sup>27</sup>). First, this is not only unsustainable, but causes dependency; and second, it draws attention from the fact the Regional State is failing to provide a favouring environment in which people can use their full potential to produce or procure adequate food for themselves and their families.
  
2. The denial of the right to food is NOT a result of a lack of food in the world. It is commonly assumed that root causes of hunger and malnutrition in the world lie on a lack of food. However, the FAO affirms that enough food is produced to feed the entire world's population, but the current infrastructure fails to guarantee the appropriate *access* to available food (State action 2007:3-5). In the Azorean context today, for instance, fishing accounts for 40% of the total exports from the islands but involving only 5% of the officially recognized workforce (Rodrigues (2008), quoted in Neilson 2012:498).

" many fishermen have turned into food producers because [farming] is more profitable [than fishing]."

This reveals at least two direct outcomes: 1) fishing communities are being targeted because of fishing's lack of profitability, which leads to distress, income insecurity, social inequality, limited food diversity, and extinction of local cultures; and 2) consumers' purchasing power is, on the other hand, determined by the price and physical availability of food items in the market, and gives no room to considering issues on health and proper nutrition. According to Pouncey (2012), "exporting outputs and performances despite the fact that societal members need and lack access to them suggest a society's stage of development and its levels of political and economic equality".

3. The right to food is different from food security and food sovereignty. Although these three concepts overlap, it is important to stress that only the right to food is a human right recognized under international law. It provides entitlements to individuals to access to adequate food and to the resources that are necessary for the sustainable enjoyment of food security. By the same token, it places legal obligations on States to define adequate trade or public policies to overcome hunger and malnutrition.

<sup>27</sup> <http://terceira.bancoalimentar.pt/>

## *Food production in the 21st century: The role of activism and research in promoting healthy, socially inclusive and sustainable food systems in the Azores*

“The importance of contextual adaptation of any global vision raises issues of individual choice and democratic freedoms, which cannot simply be set aside. Here, significant challenges arise from questions such as: who represents the many? By what processes are decisions taken? And can institutions that promote voice and choice lead to a convergence of individual and collective priorities, or promote individual freedoms while defining collective responsibilities?”

(Agarwal\_2014:1265)

The current exclusive, homogenous and profit-centred global food regime raises challenges for the Azores’ political aggregation to promote food sovereignty, encourage food security, and guarantee the right to food. As Agarwal highlights above, food sovereignty shortfalls in ARA can be addressed with processes containing the right amount of coordination and communication to define collective strategies and foster inclusive participation. Some concrete examples to transform current shortcomings in the Azores’ food system into possibilities to promote food sovereignty, food security and the right to food might include:

- *Enhance local and seasonal small-scale food production:*  
Unlike the arguments favouring large-scale fishing in the Azores, Carvalho and others (2011) claim the small scale fishing sector is more capable of meeting the policy goals of “catching fish for direct human consumption, providing employment and deriving a higher economic value from each tonne of fish landed” (Quoted in Neilson 2012:496). Producing food locally tackles concerns over environmental sustainability, health, unemployment, transportation, seed resources, and productivity. For instance, small-scale and artisanal fisheries play an essential role in food security and nutrition, poverty eradication, equitable development and sustainable resource utilization<sup>28</sup>. In the Azores, they can address current food security issues, as they have the capacity to provide nutritious and sustainable food for domestic and global markets and generate income to support both local and regional economies.
- *Put sustainability at the forefront of ARA’s food policy agenda:*  
Janez Potocnik, European Commissioner for Environment points out that, “[w]e have to protect our ecosystems and their biodiversity now, not only to conserve nature, but also to support the livelihoods of those that depend on them” (2011). For ARA’s food system to be sustainable, it must prioritize processes that respect regional identity and heritage, but at the same time can guarantee sustainable food resources and a sustainable food production. (Quoted in *ibid.*:504)

<sup>28</sup> “Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries” (2015:9)

- *Limit the size and scope of agrifood business firms in ARA's food system*  
According to Pouncy, "this will increase competition and consumer power, permitting the entry of new market participants, including cooperatives and nonprofit organizations" (Pouncy 2012:112). Benefits include: first, the promotion of local food production inputs in the Azores thanks to the development of new, creative, and specialized businesses tailored for producing them; second, it would enhance the protection of local resources, such as heirloom seed varieties, soil, water, etc.; and third, all members of the food chain could become more acquainted with food processes effects, which would subsequently increase their participation in decision-making processes.
- *Develop consumer-farmer networks:*  
Bringing consumers and farmers together can increase common knowledge about food production. Mutual knowledge will encourage them to "act and interact collectively for local social and political change by building food systems over which they as local communities can take ownership and control." (Vaarst and Gonzalez, p.7).

Defining concrete steps toward attaining food sovereignty in the Azores is not an easy task. Efforts in this direction need to combine the will, knowledge and time for stakeholders to work collectively and complementarily around building a sustainable food system based on common interests for the well-being of the people, the community at large and the environment in this EU ultraperipheral region.

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