International Institute of Social Studies

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

Food Sovereignty as a Traveling Concept: Initiating and Practicing Food Sovereignty in Australia

Nicolette Larder and Sarah Ruth Sippel

Paper # 69

Apirila – Abril – April
24, 25, 26
2017

elikadura21

NAZIOARTEKO HIZKETALDIA
COLOQUIO INTERNACIONAL
INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM

www.elikadura21.eus

Food Sovereignty as a Traveling Concept: Initiating and Practicing Food Sovereignty in Australia

Nicolette Larder and Sarah Ruth Sippel

Introduction

The term "food sovereignty" has gained traction in recent years within food and agriculture studies and among civil society and farmers' rights organizations as academics and citizens seek ways to deal with the social, environmental and ethical problems of the industrial agriculture complex. While the genesis of the term lies in the 1980s with peasant movements in Central America, civil society organizations in the global North concerned with issues such as obesity, rising food costs, increasing control over the food system, food injustice and food insecurity, among others, are increasingly turning to food sovereignty as an frame to guide their actions.

Within the Australian lexicon, the term food sovereignty is not well established. Outside a few of civil society groups, a handful of blogs, and a small number of academic publications that deploy the term in respect to Australian case studies food sovereignty remains relatively a relatively obscure term in public discourse. As scholars from Australia (Larder) and Germany (Sippel) working in transregional agrarian studies, we are puzzled by the lack of attention paid to food sovereignty, particularly when reflecting on the cases of Canada and the US, which exhibit similar political, economic, and agriculture, if not social, systems to Australia, and where food sovereignty, as an organizing concept and political tool, is relatively well established (see Desmarais and Wittman (2014) on Canadian food sovereignty and Fairbairn (2012); Clendenning; Dressler and Richards (2016) on food sovereignty in the US).

This may be changing with the emergence in 2010 of Australia's first food movement organization to organize around the term food sovereignty. In this paper we explore how food sovereignty 'traveled' to Australia. What inspired community action around food sovereignty? How was food sovereignty defined in the Australian context and how did, if at all, this conceptualization differ from food sovereignty in other places? In asking these questions we start from Bal's (2002: 24) observation that:

> …concepts are not fixed. They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ.

While Bal is referring to concepts within academia, the theory can be applied to the study of food sovereignty, which is after all, a concept as much as it is a social movement, a framework for change or a legislated goal. In this work we set out to explore how food sovereignty, as imagined in Australia, connects to food sovereignty movements, organizations and definitions of other places. In doing so we follow Desmarais and Wittman (2014: 1156) who noted that, 'clearly, food sovereignty in Saskatchewan, Canada will look different than in Indonesia or

Peru…Importantly, however we also need to understand *how these various struggles are connected and how they shape one another'*. We ask: what are the potential challenges and limitations of food sovereignty as a framework for organizing change in Australia? What challenges does food sovereignty face in taking hold? How might communities come to realize a food sovereign society and how would such a society differ from and interact with food sovereign societies in other places? Here we draw from the work of Desmarais and Wittman (2014: 1155) who suggest that to '…better understand what food sovereignty is – its potential, challenges and limitations as a framework for food system change – we need to look carefully at the social actors involved…concepts that have transformatory potential do not appear in a vacuum as disembodied intellectual exercises'. Following this logic, our investigation of food sovereignty in Australia starts with the social actors involved in defining and popularizing the term in the Australia context.

At this point it is useful to ask why we need food sovereignty in Australia, a country that, along with Canada and the US, is known in peasant activist networks as a member of the 'axis of evil', due to its strong adherence to free trade and to the industrial agriculture model. While Australia and its farmers are no doubt implicated in perpetuating unfair and harmful farming practices, increasingly Australian government policy on food and agriculture benefits a few, often corporate actors, at the expense of many Australians including but not limited to farmers, indigenous people, food insecure people and the poor. This is evidenced for example through: the growing number of farmers committing suicide, a tragedy that has been linked to neoliberal farm policy; on-going threats to prime agricultural land from mining; rising farming debt levels; and a grocery retail sector dominated by a powerful duopoly. In this context, when combined with Australia's role in the global food system, change is urgently needed in the way we 'do food and agriculture' in Australia.

In tracing the path food sovereignty took as it traveled to Australia, we suggest the 2007 food crises spurred governments in Australia to take policy action on food and food security. This created an opening in the political opportunity structure for a number of individuals engaging with the idea of food sovereignty at the local level to undertake collection action to define and develop food sovereignty for the Australian context. The term food sovereignty traveled to Australia through international interlinkages between several Australian actors who connected with La Via Campesina delegates in the Asia Pacific region. The naming of an emerging network as the *Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance* (AFSA) and the launch of the alliance's website were key moments in food sovereignty's entrance to Australia. However it was with the development and publication of *The People's Food Plan* in 2013 that food sovereignty was first defined in the Australian context. The vision of food sovereignty developed in *The Plan* aligns closely with that outlined in the Nyeleni Declaration (2007). We suggest the development and articulation of the food sovereignty concept has had both political and practical outcomes in Australia but challenges remain in terms of striking an appropriate balance between the interests of producers and consumers. We suggest the terms food sovereignty and peasant may not be the most appropriate for mobilizing action to bring about much needed alternative visions for food and agriculture. This paper begins with a brief overview of the theoretical framework guiding the paper, namely Bal's conceptualization of traveling concepts. Next we give an overview of the historical emergence of food

sovereignty then describe how food sovereignty travelled to Australia. We conclude with an examination of what food sovereignty did politically and practically in Australia.

Traveling Concepts

For Bal (2002: 11), concepts are not established and unambiguous terms but dynamic. The value in exploring a concept is that ‘in groping to define, provisional and partly, what a particular concept may *mean,* we gain insight into what it can *do* (Bal 2002: 11, original emphasis). It is this ‘doing’ of the concept of food sovereignty that we are interested in. Much discussion has taken place in the literature and among food sovereignty scholars in recent years about how to make food sovereignty happen. We are yet to come across an argument against the principles of food sovereignty: even the most rapacious corporations generally subscribe through their corporate social responsibility statements to the basic elements of food sovereignty such as fairness, gender equality, respect for diversity, resilience, environmental care and the human right to food. Yet the path to food sovereignty is not clear. In examining the way the concept of food sovereignty traveled to Australia and was defined and used in the Australian context, that is what the concept *meant,* we gain insights into what food sovereignty can *do.*

The Emergence of Food Sovereignty

Before exploring how food sovereignty travelled to Australia it is necessarily to briefly explore the origins of the term. Edelman (2014) has traced the etymology of the term food sovereignty as far as possible and locates the term’s origins in a publication by the Mexican government, who, in 1983 announced a new national food program, the first objective of which was ‘to achieve food sovereignty’ (Edelman 2014: 964). From here Edelman speculates the term travelled to Costa Rica where peasant movements started using the term ‘food autonomy’ around 1998 (‘autonoía alimentaria’) to push back against the dumping of maize from the United States, which undermined domestic maize producers (Edelman 2014: 962). Whether the term travelled through mass media or through the mouths of peasants and/or civil society actors moving between the two countries in uncertain and unknowable (Edelman 2014: 964). We do know that it was the leaders of several of the Costa Rican civil society groups who took the term food sovereignty to the transnational peasant movement, La Via Campesina, in the early 1990s, where these leaders played a key role in founding La Via Campesina (Edelman 2014: 961). Subsequently La Via Campesina adopted food sovereignty as their *raison d’etre* and the use of the term food sovereignty skyrocketed as farmers’ rights groups, civil society organizations and government in nations around the world adopted the term (see Figure 1).

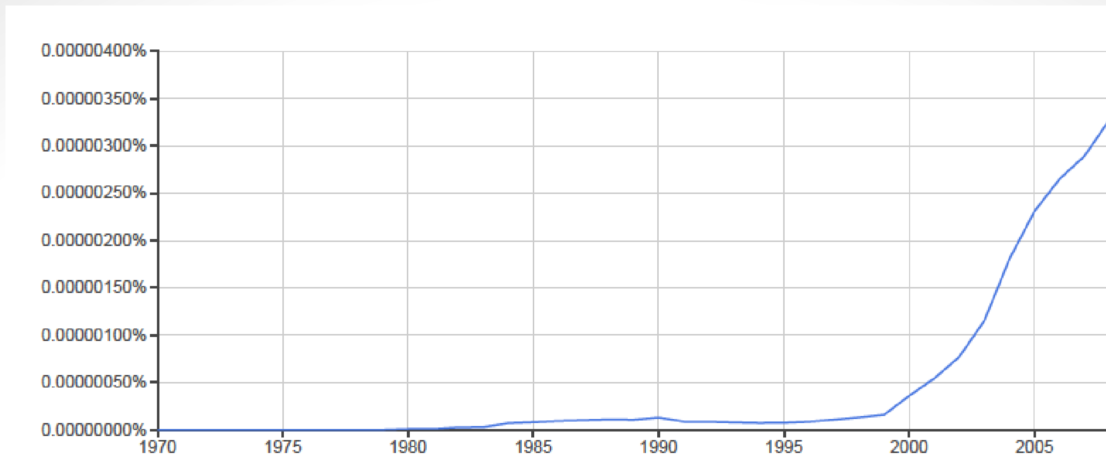

Figure 1: Relative frequency of 'food sovereignty' in Google Books English database, 1970-2010. Source: Google Ngram, 10 October 2016. Adapted from Edelman (2014).

Since it was first used in Central America in the 1980s, the term food sovereignty has spread across the globe and has been taken up, defined and redefined by social movement, activist-academics and governments alike. In the words of Edelman (2014: 959), 'food sovereignty has emerged as a powerful mobilizing frame…a set of legal and quasi-legal norms and practices…and a free-floating signifier filled with varying kinds of content'. In short, food sovereignty has proved a malleable concept whose definition has shifted and changed over the years and across geographies. This is partly the result of its nature as a situated concept, one that 'occurs in particular places and how it is expressed is determined largely by local dynamics…' (Desmarais and Wittman 2014: 1157). Arguably part of the constant redefining of food sovereignty must be due to the intellectualization of the term and the ongoing attempts to deal with some of the contradictions and difficulties inherent in operationalizing food sovereignty. For example, one of the difficulties communities face in getting to food sovereignty is the inherently diverse and winding path that will be taken practically to achieve what is conceptually a simple proposition – out with the old industrial, globalized food system and in with the new agro-ecological localized one. Partly in an attempt to provide clarity around food sovereignty some 500 delegates from 80 countries representing family famers, artisanal fisher folk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, and groups representing movements for women, youth, consumers, environmentalism and urban interests, met in southern Mali in 2007 to define what food sovereignty is for and against (Nyeleni Declaration 2007).

The Emergence of Food Sovereignty in Australia

The emergence of the food sovereignty discourse in Australia in various texts was the result of two separate but interlinked events. The first was the opening of a political opportunity structure and second was the convergence of a group of people who had 'arrived' at the food sovereignty independently and used the political opportunity structure to articulate a food sovereignty vision for Australia.

Opening of the political opportunity structure

Food sovereignty's arrival in Australia was closely linked to policy changes at the local, state and federal levels that occurred around 2007. At the state and local levels a rising consciousness around food, resiliency and localization was an important catalyst for the emergence of the food sovereignty discourse. In Australia this was precipitated by the belief that the resilience of urban centers could be enhanced through urban production. Urban communities in Australia have been experimenting for some time with localizing and urbanizing their food production in community gardens and backyards. However prior to 2007 few local or state governments in Australia engaged in food-based policies or programs. Around 2007 rising political consciousness, no doubt linked in some way to the global food crisis of 2007, as well as concerns around peak oil, climate change, and urban resiliency, saw numerous state and local governments put in place programs, policies and strategies to increase urban and local food production. For example, the NSW State Government's Office of Environment and Heritage allocated millions of dollars in funding to local governments to develop food-based programs to build local food networks, reduce food-based waste, and develop school-based community gardens. In Queensland and Victoria, local governments independently implemented strategies for urban food production particularly through the development of community gardens.

At the national level the Gillard Labour Government commenced planning and consultation for the National Food Plan (NFP) in 2011 following their election to Federal Government. The NFP was a different take on how Australia should respond to the food-fuel-climate crises of the time. While state and local governments were attempting to arm communities with the knowledge, skills and in some cases land they needed to 'grow their own', the Federal Government sought to take Australian food to the world. Australia has long seen itself as highly resilient when it comes to food production: the country is a mass exporter of foodstuffs and has a highly technological system of agriculture which politicians regularly remind us is the most 'advanced' in the world. It naturally followed then that the Australian government saw rising global food prices and rising global hunger as a problem the Australian model of high-output agriculture could solve.

So how did these policy agendas relate to the emergence of the food sovereignty discourse in Australia? We suggest they created a critical opening for the emergence of a national dialogue around food and food security, which had been missing previously. As outlined by Tarrow (1994) (also see Kriesi, 2004 for a more recent overview), collective action and social movements arise within particular political contexts and it is political structures or 'opening' that facilitate the rise of collective action. With growing awareness among policy makers and politicians of the need for action around food, so too individuals engaged in diverse food-based actions at the community level saw the emergence of a political opportunity structure, which they could use to push the food agenda in a direction that fitted with their aspirations and visions. Our research suggests there were a number of gatherings that were central to the formation of Australia's first movement for food sovereignty. In 2010 when these gatherings took place food was well and truly on the radar across all three levels of government as outlined above. For

those who would later become the founding members of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, 2010 was the year that things stated to come together.

Doing together: Grassroots movements towards system change

We can trace food sovereignty's path as it travelled to Australia by examining several key moments when key actors came together in order to try to 'do something'. This doing was designed to be with others and it was designed to be bigger, more impactful and meaningful than attempts that had been made before. Here we recount some of the key moments where these various actors met, exchanged ideas and attempted to come together to do something. In outlining these key moments we include elements of the personal biographies and life trajectories of key figures behind these moments. In doing so we follow Edelman (2009) who noted the importance of life trajectories to the development of transnational agrarian movements. The first moment of coming together was at a university in Brisbane, where citizens gathered to listen to a talk by Jeanette Longfield from Sustain UK. Inspired by what Sustain UK has been able to achieve, a group of individuals in consultation with Longfield set up Sustain QLD, a not-for-profit auspiced by an established Brisbane-based non-government organization, the Queensland Conservation Council. These individuals had experiences with and of food producers and production, either as a producer themselves or through their professional day jobs. Sustain QLD members met on a handful of occasions in spaces around Brisbane where the group discussed the best way forward but ultimately the group wound up after only a year due to lack of energy and time of the participants.

One of those involved in the start up of Sustain QLD was Robert Peakin, a well-known figure among food activists and academics in Australia and founder of the community-supported agriculture social enterprise, Food Connect. At the same time Sustain QLD was trying to get off the ground, Robert was setting up the Food Connect Foundation. The Foundation aimed to create transformative social change by acting as a 'hub' for ideas, networks and enterprises, including Food Connect itself. According to Peakin overt, his involvement in Sustain QLD and drive to set up the Foundation was based on his aim of having an advocacy organization beyond the enterprise side of Food Connect as a way to give a voice to the large and growing number organizations working on the ground to build a new food system:

> My aim was to have a formalized network where at various points in time…we could come together and nationally mobilize in whatever way felt fit. Mainly it was a place where any group anywhere in Australia could identify with and something they could come to or a place where they could find out who else was doing things in this space. Friends I guess. That was our original aim because we [at Food Connect] felt alone in the world doing this stuff and we wanted to do it with friends (pers. comm. R. Peakin, 2016).

This 'doing together' emerged as an important theme in how food sovereignty arrived in Australia. Michael Croft, a small-scale farmer and one of the members of a Slow Food chapter in Australia, had become disillusioned with what he called

the ‘bourgeois’ nature of the slow food movement with its focus on ‘middle class foodies’. In particular Croft suggests he was skeptical that broadscale food system change could come through changing food consumption practices (pers. comm. M. Croft 2017). While Croft maintains eating is a political act, as a farmer himself Croft became increasingly angry at the unjustness in Australia’s food and agriculture system, which eventually drove him to search out new ways of thinking about and organizing the food system:

> How can you have a system that you claim is one of the most efficient in the world when it takes 10 calories of oil to produce and deliver one calorie of food? From an economic view it might be efficient. From a labour perspective it is very efficient. But a cropper cropping 10,000 acres of wheat in Australia is no more efficient on a per acre basis than an Ethiopian farmer with a bullock farming two acres. So we’ve got some measures that fundamentally distort how we view agriculture…and everything that I was looking at I was experiencing first hand…[and]…I became angrier at the system. I realized how unjust and how stupid the system had become…So I became frustrated, angry and said ‘right, what are the solutions out there. Started researching; thank god for the Internet (pers. comm. M. Croft 2017).

For Croft then the solution to the problems of the contemporary food system were to be found in food sovereignty’s grassroots, values-driven approach to change, which resonated with his own perspectives on what a new food system should look like. As he says:

> I was hoping AFSA would become a truly national organization that united the nascent alternative food movement…bring together the various warring faction of the organic movement…where people would put aside their egos and their immediate self-interest to create a national body that would promote and think tank the whole bit and would actually get food on the agenda and the radar of political parties as a counter to the National Farmers Federation…I didn’t want it to be a top down thing…but to speak to their core values…[because]…when you analyze these people in the farming movement, they all have some essential core values that are the same. So it was a values driven approach (pers. comm. M. Croft 2017).

With these goals of building a formalized network linking grassroots organizations with similar values, we start to see the influence of the food sovereignty movement; this model is the same operating structure employed by La Via Campesina. Yet up to this point, food sovereignty had not emerged as the guiding discourse under which the network would coalesce. It was Nick Rose, one of the co-founders and eventual director of the Food Connect Foundation, who proved central to the uptake of the food sovereignty term. As he describes in Rose (2015), Nick returned to Australia in 2006, having spent the previous six years living in Guatemala worked in community development. While in Guatemala, Nick says his ‘political consciousness was…awakened, but yet to find an outlet’ (Rose 2015: 21). Settling on the Coffs Coast in NSW, a region know for its high rural amenity and post-productivist economy, and searching out social connections, Nick joined the local climate change action group and quickly became involved in a range of local food activist groups including community gardens, local film festivals and the

transition towns movement. As with many food-based activists, the path to change began through talking about others in the community about organizing a local food network, which led to a local food film festival and feast in early 2008, and a successful funding grant to the New South Wales Environmental Trust for the Coffs Coast Local Food Futures Alliance (Rose 2015: 23). By 2008 Nick was undertaking a PhD focused on human rights but as a result of his engagement in the local food scene he changed his focus to food sovereignty:

> I was getting more and more interested in food and had become aware of La Via Campesina and the food sovereignty movement and was curious to know why where was this big global movement of 200 million people in most continents and 80 countries, but had no presence in Australia, no organizational presence in Australia (pers. comm. N. Rose 2016).

This shift in focus to food sovereignty was inspired by Nick's own reading and early PhD fieldwork, which included a trip to Dili and Jakarta in 2009 to meet with La Via Campesina members. Through Nick's participation in a government-funded local food alliance, Nick met Food Connect's Robert Peakin in mid-2009. Shortly after, Peakin invited Rose to be part of Food Connect to further their goals for a new food system. As a result, the following year the Food Connect Foundation was started with Rose working as Director. According to Peakin (pers. comm. R. Peakin 2016) the Foundation supported Rose to 'be the main driver from Food Connect Foundation's point of view and take some of the things we had been gestating for years and lob it [the ideas] into the policy space. Rose for example was instrumental in bringing La Via Campesina delegates to Brisbane in 2010 on a speaking tour. With Rose driving the movement forward, Rose, Peakin and one of the directors of Permaculture Australia, Russ Grayson, met in Sydney in late 2010 to discuss how a formalized network based on food sovereignty could connect the various food-based movements organizations within Australia.

Framing Food Sovereignty in Australia

From these early beginnings where we see the emerging influence of transregional connects with the movement of Nick Rose between Australia and several Asian nations, we start to trace the journey food sovereignty took as it travelled to Australia. In this section we describe how food sovereignty was framed in Australia, that is, defined and embedded in discourse. To do so we examine the texts in which the term food sovereignty appeared and also examine the process and rationale behind the embedding of the term.

The first step in framing food sovereignty was the naming of the nascent network as the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance. The choice of name reflected the group's desire to be linked in some way to the broader food sovereignty movement, specifically La Via Campesina, and establish that the group was not another local food movement but a group with a global focus based on food sovereignty. As Nick Rose says:

> The whole transition towns movement as 'our way of life is going to be really threatened if peak oil happens and if climate change happens and we need to network together', I'm not opposed to people working together…obviously I support all that stuff. It was more the hyperlocalisaiton

> of it and the lack of any sense of solidarity or concern or the ethics for what was going on in other places…That was one of the reasons I was very firm in my conviction that food sovereignty is an international movement founded in solidarity and the broad spectrum of concern for all people everywhere was something that we should be taking about and not simply locavorism or local food-ism… (pers. comm. N. Rose, 2016).

The second action that discursively constructed food sovereignty within public discourse was the launch of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance website. According to one AFSA committee member, the launch of the website was *the moment* the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance came in to being: 'It was the website that launched it that made it a real and tangible thing, that it [the movement] became a *thing'* (Interview, AFSA member 2016). This pairing between human and non-human actants, particularly information technology, has been identified by others as critical for reconfiguring relationships with the food system (see for example Hill 2015; Cameron, Gibson and Hill 2014; Latour 2004). Following the launch of the website, the newly formed AFSA began their first mobilization effort, which involved writing a 'crowd-sourced' policy document setting out a food sovereignty-inspired national food plan. The production of this document, entitled *The People's Food Plan,* was undertaken as a direct response to the launch of the Federal Government's policy planning process to develop the *National Food Plan.*

The development of a National Food Plan was an election promise of the Gillard Labour Government during the 2010 election and the National Food Plan green paper was released in mid-2012. The green paper was open for consultation and a range of stakeholders including major food and beverage corporations and associated lobby groups, State Governments, the National Farmers Federation, and the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance among others made comments (see Commonwealth of Australian 2013). According to one AFSA member, the Alliance was motivated to write *The People's Food Plan* because they felt locked out of the planning process for the National Food Plan:

> We started to write public submissions [to the National Food Plan] but we realized their system was quite closed…one of us [AFSA members] said, 'let's stop engaging with them and start doing something else, challenge it another way, because they are locking us out anyway, they are not listening to us, they are filtering the types of people who can give information to them'…And that's when we started to talk about the wording of the People's Food Plan…And we started calling the National Food Plan the 'Corporate Food Plan' [Interview, AFSA member, 2016].

The guiding principle of *The People's Food Plan* was food sovereignty, which as the Plan states: 'seeks to reinsert everyday people back into the center of the food system, empowered to make choices over the types of food they access rather than have this dictated by an anonymous, global food system with corporate elites at its center' (AFSA 2013: 11). While *The People's Food Plan* summarized the core principles of food sovereignty as outlined in the Declaration of Nyeleni (2007), the Plan developed and outlined a separate set of values and principles identified through a series of community consultation forums, which underpinned the Plan.

These included health and well-being as primary; equity and social justice; democracy and participation; resilience; diversity; cooperation; custodianship; and transparency and openness (AFSA 2013: 12). These principles are an adaptation and translation of the Nyeleni declaration for the Australian context and have strong resonance with the Nyeleni document given many of the ideas appear in both documents. However, the authors of the Plan felt impelled to adapt and re-imagine the core principles of food sovereignty in order to make them meaningful for the majority of the Australian population, who are consumers rather than producers. As Nick Rose (pers. comm. 2016) said:

> …if you are interested in a whole of society or whole system transformation, you're not going to achieve that if you're simply pursuing a strategy and a set of priorities that are articulated to respond only to the needs of one sector. That's particularly true in the context of Australia where farmers are a tiny fraction of the population as a whole, less than one per cent. My thinking was always to try and make food sovereignty as relevant as possible to as many people as possible and to find a way to frame it and articulate it that made sense to broad layers of the population.

This re-focusing of what food sovereignty means in the Australian context is critical for understanding what food sovereignty might *do,* a theme we take up in the next section.

Doing and Acting With Food Sovereignty

As a concept, food sovereignty has power and relevance, both politically and practically, for re-making and re-thinking food relations in Australia; in other words we suggest the term *did* things. In terms of the political dimension of food sovereignty, with the development of *The People's Food Plan,* AFSA went arguably further than any other movement or organization in articulating and vocalizing a national collective alterative vision to the corporate, globalized model of agriculture. This political dimension of food sovereignty is argued by many to be key to the food sovereignty movement (see Visser et al. 2015: 522). Although Australia is a long way from achieving the aims and goals embedded in *The People's Food Plan,* this alternative vision did not go unnoticed in Australia. For example, the People's Food Plan was endorsed by the Australian Greens political party while the New South Wales Farmers Association argued for the importance of the food sovereignty model for its farmers.

It is difficult to say how or what practical affect the articulation of food sovereignty in the national discourse might have at the level of production and consumption. How can we trace the path food sovereignty takes as its proponents attempt to move from the possible to the routine? To take a vision for an alternative system and to make these things routine – to have them, as Carolan (2016) says, ripple out and *stick?* Carolan (2016: 147) suggests the things that have to stick are those 'more-than-we-can-tell practices that will have to be known and felt for alternative foodscapes to stick and flourish'. But equally, Carolan (2016: 150) suggest that in seeking to bring about alternative visions for the food system we need to create conditions 'that invite collaboration, co-experimentation, and a coming-together that radically alters how we think and do Things like democracy, markets, and community', which arguably involves

'more…support for small scale producers…more so called cottage food legislation…most just labour laws, tax systems, and economic practices that enable people to freely co-experiment…'. We can point to two practical outcomes of AFSA's efforts in seeking to make the food sovereignty discourse 'stick'. The first has been AFSA's ability to gain access to policy-makers in order to lobby for changes to planning and food safety regulations that disadvantage small-scale farmers. These include for example food safety regulations that treat small and large-scale farming operations alike in respect to regulations around the processing and sale of meat and dairy products. While a number of ex- and current AFSA members we spoke with argue AFSA's current stance towards deregulation tends too far towards a right-leaning libertarianism, others within the movement suggest restrictive planning laws make small scale farming operations prohibitively expensive and inflexible. Time will tell how successful the lobbying for regulation change will be. The second ripple effect of AFSA's efforts in defining a vision of food sovereignty for Australia has been the opening up of new transregional interlinkages. These include Australia's first formalized links with La Via Campesina, with a sub-branch of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, Fair Food Farmers United, becoming officially affiliated with the peasant rights organization in 2016. In addition, AFSA's work opened the way for Australasia to gain a focal point representative for the Civil Society Mechanism for the United Nations' Committee on Food Security. These nascent linkages put Australian farmers and civil society groups in formal and direct conversation for the first time with more established groups working towards food sovereignty. While it is unclear yet what these linkages might mean for Australia's journey towards food sovereignty, they create the potential for dialogue and mentoring between Australian farmers and farmers elsewhere. Moreover, these new links signal a potential rethinking of the relationship between Australian farmers and farmers in other parts of the world. As a major agricultural exporter, Australia, along with the US and Canada, has traditionally been seen as one of the evil triumvirate arguing hard for increased free and global trade. Under such a policy agenda, Australian farmers have been forced to hold tight to an identity based around notions of resilience and independence and encouraged to see themselves as world leaders in agricultural innovation and production. Yet like family farmers the world over, small-scale family operations in Australia struggle to remain viable in the current food system with mounting debt, growing corporate control and the threats of climate change and loss of land due to mining and financial investment. Family farmers in Australia potentially have much to gain from collective responses of the kind undertaken by La Via Campesina and civil society organizations that support them.

The effort to develop a food sovereignty discourse in Australia has not been without challenge. The balance of power between producers and consumers has been a major sticking point. The Nyeleni Declaration (2007) speaks of both producers and consumers having the power to define their own system. Yet food sovereignty is explicitly a farmer-driven movement; the Nyeleni Declaration begins with the statement: 'We, more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries…most of us are food producers…'. The role of farmers in the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance has been debated since the organization's inception. In one respect the organization aimed to be inclusive and articulate a broad rights-based political discourse and narrative that appealed to the majority of Australians in their guise as consumers, given the relatively small proportion of

Australians that are involved in production. At the same time there were some within AFSA who were uncomfortable with the lack of voice given to producers given food sovereignty's historical beginnings. This tension has seen most of AFSA's early members leave the organization, which has been, according to some, 'taken over' by farmers. The role of self-confessed 'white, middle class, highly educated, inner city, urban elites' within food sovereignty organizations is not new, particularly in the Global North. Moreover, as Edelman (2009) has previously pointed out, intellectuals have historically played important roles in transnational agrarian movements. However given the clear and acknowledged lack of farmers' voices in *The People's Food Plan* does this document 'count' as a claim for food sovereignty? We would argue that farmer or no, collective action of the kind undertaken by AFSA is an important part of the formative work needed to bring about an alternative model of food production.

A second challenge to food sovereignty in Australia has been the lack of resonance of the term as perceived by those involved in the early development of AFSA. Not long after the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance commenced the process of writing the people's food plan, the term 'food sovereignty' was made subservient to the more innocuous 'fair food'. Food sovereignty is a loaded term and this gives it power; it was the term that connected Australian organizations with the global La Via Campesina movement. It was the term that got the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance off the ground through the first international linkages between actors like Nick Rose, Robert Peakin and La Via Campesina representatives from the Asia Pacific region. But the weight of the term was also seen to be problematic in the Australian context. Interviewees give two main reasons for this. First was the perceived lack of understanding among the general public of what the food sovereignty actually means. As one interviewee said:

> Raj Patel's phrase 'the right to have rights' is a good description of food sovereignty; that makes sense. But 'food sovereignty', you have almost lost your audience when you have to describe what it is you are on about – it's not catchy…when you mention sovereignty to people they start thinking about kinds and queens and crowns and nation state sovereignty so we stopped calling it that in a public way (Interview, AFSA member 2016).

The lack of resonance of the term sovereignty is not unique to Australia; Boyer (2010) identified a similar public perception of food sovereignty in Honduras. A second resonance problem is the implicit linking of food sovereignty with the term 'peasant'. This linking of food sovereignty with peasant occurs through advocacy that uses what Bernstein (2014: 1032) terms 'emblematic instances' where 'the individual "peasant" farm (and "community") exemplifies the way forward to save the plant, to feed its population in socially more equitable and ecologically more sustainable ways'. Here the peasant, a small-scale family farmer, is appealed to as the alternative to corporate, industrial and global capitalist agriculture. Construction of the peasant other is problematic in the Australian context not least because Australia does not have a history of an enduring peasant-style of agriculture. Australia's first peoples developed a model of agriculture that was highly mobile compared to agricultural practices that emerged in much of the Global South and Europe. As Gammage (2011: 303) explains:

> Somewhere on mainland Australia people used every farming process. Climate, land, labour, plants and knowledge were there…Templates and tending made farms without fences, but nothing made people farmers…They rejected or avoided the farmers' road, and lived comfortably where white Australians cannot. What they did stood on its own…People civilized all the land, without fences, making farm and wilderness one…This is farming, but not being a farmer.

Early Europeans were farmers in the European sense of the word but these were settler farmers and squatters who occupied the 'vacant' lands without landlords, gentry or otherwise. Without a history of a peasant farmer model of agriculture, 'the peasant way' and food sovereignty sit somewhat uncomfortably within the Australian vernacular.

Conclusion

This paper set out to trace the path food sovereignty took as it traveled to Australia and how the term was conceptualized in the Australian context. Prior to 2010 food sovereignty was rarely used in public discourse. The 2007 food crises spurred political action in Australia that saw food and food security emerge on the national policy agenda in a way not seen in previous decades. A number of individuals engaging with the idea of food sovereignty at the individual level saw the emerging political discussions across all three levels of government as an opening within policy structures to get an alternative vision of Australia's food future into public discourse. The term food sovereignty traveled to Australia through international interlinkages between Australians, particularly Nick Rose and Robert Peakin, who connected with La Via Campesina delegates in the Asia Pacific region. The naming of an emerging network as the *Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance* and the launch of the alliance's website were key moments in food sovereignty's entrance to Australia. However it was with the development and publication of *The People's Food Plan* in 2013 that food sovereignty was first defined in the Australian context. The vision of food sovereignty developed in *The Plan* aligns closely with that outlined in the Nyeleni Declaration. We were also interested in the potential challenges and limitations of food sovereignty as a framework for organizing change in Australia. We suggest the development and articulation of the food sovereignty concept had both political and practical outcomes in Australia but challenges remain in terms of striking an appropriate balance between the interests of producers and consumers. Finally, the terms food sovereignty and peasant may not be the most appropriate for mobilizing action to bring about much needed alternative visions for food and agriculture.

Nazioarteko Hizketaldia

ELIKADURAREN ETORKIZUNA ETA NEKAZARITZAREN ERRONKAK XXI. MENDERAKO:

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

2017ko apirilaren 24 / 26. Europa Biltzar Jauregia. Vitoria-Gasteiz. Araba. Euskal Herria. Europa.

International Colloquium

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.

April 24th - 26th. Europa Congress Palace. Vitoria Gasteiz. Álava. Basque Country/Europe

Coloquio Internacional

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.

24 / 26 de Abril, 2017. Palacio de Congresos Europa. Vitoria-Gasteiz. Álava. País Vasco. Europa.

GUNTZAILEAK/COLABORAN/COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

LAGUNTZA EKONOMIKOA/APOYAN/WITH SUPPORT FROM