



# Agriculture and Food

*The E-Newsletter of the ISA Research Committee on Agriculture and Food (RC40)*

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## From the President

Allison Marie Loconto

President, RC40

[loconto@inra-ifris.org](mailto:loconto@inra-ifris.org)

The third ISA Forum of Sociology will be held next month in Vienna, Austria. This year's theme is **'The Futures we Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World'**. I want to take a moment to reflect upon what this may mean for food and agriculture. We are just emerging from three very important global agenda-setting exercises related to agriculture and food systems: the establishment of the Agenda 2030 that establishes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement that was the outcome of the COP21 negotiations and the upcoming Habitat III New Urban Agenda. Each of these agreements has refocused attention on the fundamental role of agriculture in the future of our economies, in the future of the planet and in the future of our cities.

We see a growing trend of the use of forecasting, prospective studies and scenarios to envision what we as societies want for our future, but as always, the concrete plans to get there have been lagging. Interestingly, each of the above global instruments has adopted an approach of positioning current action based on a fairer and more sustainable future for the planet. The innovation found in these initiatives is that there has been a refocusing away from North-South inequalities to internal and intra-regional inequalities. Thus, new geographies of food and agriculture can begin to be envisioned. What I find interesting in all three of these imagined futures is the increased role for multiple stakeholders.

All three documents lay out clear responsibilities for governments, as their predecessors have, but interestingly, there are increasing responsibilities for private companies (like mandatory CSR reporting in the SDGs) and civil society (for example, individuals and associations have been signing the Charter of Milan). Indeed, thanks to massive civil society organizing – not only through classic NGOs but also through community organizing of citizens, producer organizations and indigenous groups among others – the multitude of concerns about the threats posed by current practices to future human and natural rights seem to be heard. One interesting point about this new series of international accords is the focus on new actors and new ways of engaging them. City mayors have suddenly jumped onto the scene as key people who can play a role in improving the health and nutrition of their citizens by including food policy (and the organization of their food systems) in their urban planning.

This talk of futures reminds me of the work of Thomas Luckmann, who just passed away earlier this year, and who had strong influence in shaping struggles in sociology between realist and constructivist approaches. When we talk about the futures that we want, we must account for the existing structures and the future structures that are 'in the making' through current interactions. As sociologists we have a responsibility to participate in this process by pointing out what the existing structures are, but also in helping to imagine what better future structures may be.

This last point brings me to an area of work of RC40 that I want to report back on, as it links precisely to this point of existing and future structures of agri-food systems. This spring RC40 participated in commenting on the Zero Draft of recommendations made by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on 'connecting smallholders to markets'. We were requested to contribute by the civil society mechanism (CSM), which has gained in influence over the past few years, and we compiled comments on the text and submitted this directly to the CFS secretariat. We summarized our main concern with the text as follows:

*In general, the document mentions very little about the existing socio-economic structures and interplay of global and local powers and players that interfere with the participation of smallholders in markets, nor is there explicit recognition of the specific socio-economic conditions of production and social reproduction that constrain the full integration and participation of smallholders in a variety of markets.*

In addition, we made numerous detailed comments on other elements of the text. Our specific comments on the importance of taking international 'value chains' into consideration when discussing local and informal markets and the need for not only training smallholders to meet strict standards – but to actually enable them to change these standards so that they are appropriate to local situations were adopted in the final recommendations. The work that RC40 members did to construct a well cited argumentation for specific contested topics in the debate most surely helped the negotiators to arrive at a conclusion.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the RC40 colleagues who participated in this exercise and to note that this activity is rather historic. It is the first time that a professional association of sociologists has contributed to a CFS negotiation. This type of international collaboration is something that we want to continue to encourage within RC40 and will try to do this in the coming years.

In this issue we take the time to reflect upon some recent regional events. Josefa Salete Barbosa Cavalcanti provides us with information about work in the region and reflects upon recent changes in Brazil's political structures that will have future effects on the material practices of agriculture in the country. We also provide announcements about the two upcoming conferences that we have this summer.

As mentioned above we will meet in Vienna in July to discuss the futures that we want, while we meet in Toronto in August to discuss the Sustainable and Just Rural Transitions that are needed in order for us to arrive at our imagined futures. Specifically, we are hosting a RC40 mini-conference on **Critical Analysis of Agri-food Resistance and Alternatives: Contestation over Just, Healthy, and Safe Worlds of Food**. Please don't forget to attend!

We will be hosting our business meeting at the IRSA conference in Toronto and we will be hosting a networking event with members from RC40, RSS and IRSA at the beginning of the conference. Please pay attention to the RC40 listserv in order to receive practical information about these two events. We look forward to seeing everyone this summer!

## Regional Reflection Piece

### Changing Political Structures in Brazil and Its Implications

Josefa Salete Barbosa Cavalcanti  
Professor, Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil

1. Considering the serious political and economic situation in Brazil caused by the impeachment situation and, as a consequence, the actions that have hit the policies for family farming, indigenous and *quilombola* populations and, finally, the dismantling of the institutions linked to programs such as: *Citizenship Territories* and *Brazil without Misery* that contributed to the improvement of rural life and to reduce inequality rates in the country, we must draw the attention of colleagues to the increased threats caused to the peasants and family farmers. Furthermore there is the impulse and decisions of *the interim government* continuously in favor of large landowners and agribusiness. Although this is not new in the history of the power of landowners in Brazil, it is important that RC40 members register this situation.
2. We are planning to organize a ***Seminar on Labor Relations and Rural Workers in a globalized world***. The seminar will be held in Recife, Pernambuco at the Federal University in the month of June 2017.
3. I intend to organize a session at the Congress of the Brazilian Sociological Society to be held in Brasilia from 26 to 29 July 2017. The conference theme is: ***What sociologies we do? Interfaces with local, national and global contexts***. All RC40 members are welcome to join the session.
4. Additional two special events that I found RC40 members might be interested in:
  - In Brazil: The VII Meeting of the Network of Rural Studies Conflicting Perspectives on Rural World: Territoriality, knowledge and development actions 29 August to 1 September. NATAL.RN.BRASIL. <http://www.redesrurais.org.br/7encontrorede/>
  - Regional Event Pre - Congress ALASRU - The Latin American Rural Sociological Society" Rural Sociology at the Crossroads Agrarian Question, social actors and development in the region" from 18 to 21 October 2016 , SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO ARGENTINA: <http://www.alasru.org/index.php/novedades/27-pre-alasru-santiagodel-estero>
5. I think it is relevant to bring in some information about events. I participate in ***La Renaissance Rurale d'un siècle à l'Autre ? : International Symposium on The Rural Renaissance From One Century to the Next?*** This was a very important event, a Symposium which was held in Toulouse at the Toulouse University from 23 to 27 May 2016 and brought together researches from 25 countries of the world.

For those who are interested in the symposium, please visit the following website for more information. <http://blogs.univ-tlse2.fr/dynamiquesrurales/>

## ISA Forum 2016 in Vienna

ISA Forum is approaching quickly! RC40 will (co)sponsor five sessions in Vienna that include:

- Contested Sustainability Discourses: From Food Sovereignty to Sustainable Intensification
- Food Security, Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Agriculture
- Globalized Agrarian Economy and Women's Labour: Analysing Situations in Asia
- Social Innovation in Agriculture and Food: Old Wine in New Bottles?
- Farm Work Issues within Globalization

In addition to these interesting sessions, RC40 is planning to hold a get-together dinner from 8:00 pm on July 11<sup>th</sup>. With the help of Dr. Bernhard Freyer, we are currently working to reserve the restaurant/pub for our members. As soon as we secure the place, we will inform the members who expressed their interests in the survey monkey. Please stay tuned.

## IRSA: XIV World Congress of Rural Sociology, Toronto

RC40 is organizing Mini-Conference, "**Critical Analysis of Agrifood Resistance and Alternatives: Contestation over Just, Healthy, and Safe Worlds of Food**" at IRSA, Toronto. There are three tracks. Please come and join us for stimulating discussion!!

### **Track 1: The Critique of Resistance in Agrifood: Its Limits and New Frontiers**

Organizers: Alessandro Bonanno and Steven Wolf.

Papers on issues pertaining to the theme of 'resistance in global agri-food' are invited for this track of the RC-40 mini-conference. The growth of corporate agri-food has been countered by a variety of initiatives. Arguably the most visible and also successful of them consists of those various activities grouped under the label of 'alternative agriculture.' Programs such as civic agriculture, farmer markets, organic farming, biological farming, slow food and more and movements such as Via Campesina and Food Sovereignty propose and practice alternative forms of agri-food. These initiatives, however, have been criticized, among other things, for their inability to halt the expansion of corporate agri-food; adopting traits that are typical of the dominant ideology of neoliberalism; conflating resilience with resistance; limiting the participation of members of the lower classes; and proposing systems that cannot address global food needs. Moreover, the development of alternative agriculture has been paralleled by the intensification of labor exploitation worldwide. Agri-food production and distribution is increasingly based on the use of cheap and very exploitable labor whose conditions have worsened in recent years. The crisis of unions and historical political parties of the working class has further contributed to the political weakness of labor. The 20 papers in this track of the RC-40 mini-conference aim to foster discussion and the sharing of ideas and proposals about the current characteristics and future developments of resistance in agri-food.

A white paper framing the mini-conference goals is available at <http://www.irsaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/BonannoWolfMiniConferenceOnResistanceForToronto15Jan2016.pdf>. Abstracts are available at <http://blogs.cornell.edu/safrig/safrig-mini-conference-program-paper-abstracts/>. Short discussion papers are available at <http://blogs.cornell.edu/safrig/>. The website will be updated as additional papers arrive.

**Track 2: Contested Sustainability Discourses: From Food Sovereignty to Sustainable Intensification**

Organizers: Douglas H. Constance, Jason Konefal, and Maki Hatanaka

Papers that critically investigate contested discourses on sustainability in the agrifood sector are invited for this track of the RC-40 mini-conference. As the legitimization crises of the conventional agrifood system has accelerated over the past 50 years, numerous alternative movements and initiatives have emerged and provided a counter position to the hegemonic discourse of corporate-controlled, chemical-based monoculture agriculture. Organics, Fair Trade, local, civic agriculture, geographic indicators, and food sovereignty are a few of the counter movements grounded in discourses centered on sustainability instead of productivity and efficiency. In the last 10 years as the legitimization crisis of conventional agriculture has reached critical mass, the word 'sustainable' has come into play as competing factions mobilize to capture the meaning of the term. Conventional agriculture proponents have counter-attacked utilizing discourses such as ecological modernization and sustainable intensification. The result is increasingly contested understandings of sustainability and agriculture. Surveying current debates on agricultural sustainability, Paul Thompson (2010) divides sustainability discourses into three broad categories: economic approaches that focus on technological innovation to ensure supply exceeds demand; ecological approaches that focus on the long term resilience of the agrifood system; and sociological approaches that focus on creating a collective banner under which a coalition of counter-hegemonic movements can mobilize and create a just and sustainable agrifood system. Today, the race to define sustainability is on, as evident by the plethora of private governance initiatives working to establish standards and metrics for nearly all facets of agriculture. Once the contest is completed, Larry Busch (2011) reminds us that the resulting standards become 'recipes for reality.' Noted Rural Sociology Fred Buttel (1996) warned us that we should not be surprised at the ability of conventional agriculture to 'sustain the unsustainable.' We welcome papers that critically investigate the issue of contested sustainability discourses and governance in the agrifood sector.

**Track 3: Global Trends in Alternative Agri-food Movements: Seeking Convergence Paths**

Organizers: Marta G. Rivera Ferre, Douglas H. Constance, and Marie-Christine Renard

Agri-food movements worldwide are developing their own strategies and actions to promote alternatives to the industrial global food system. These movements, which can be categorised as radical or progressive, seek to converge and generate alliances at different levels in order to increase their options of success. To what extent these movements, through convergence and alliance strategies, can generate real alternatives to the corporate food regime is still a matter of discussion. What conditions are required for this to be happening? What kind of convergence is needed? And which strategies are more likely to have more success? Alternative tools born outside the capitalist influence, such as Di'logo de Saberes, and convergence with other development paradigms, such as feminist theories, can be suggested. Others may include a broad and progressive approach to the commons (both material and immaterial commons, including knowledge). In this session we are interested in case-studies and theoretical insights that can bring light into these questions and seek papers advancing these topics.

**Mark your calendar: RC40 business meeting is held on August 12 from 5:30 to 7:00 PM (JOR 1043) Jorgenson Hall 380 Victoria St.**

## BOOKS Recently Published by RC40 Members

Bonanno, Alessandro and Lawrence Busch (eds.). 2015. *Handbook of International Political Economy of Agriculture and Food*: Northampton, MA. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bonanno, A. and Cavalcanti, J. S. B. (eds.). 2014. *Labor Relations in Globalized Food: Research in Rural Sociology and Development*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Bingley - UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2014. v. 1.

Sekine, Kae and Alessandro Bonanno. 2016. *The Contradictions of Neoliberalism in Agri-Food: Corporations, Resistance and Natural Disasters in Japan*: Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press

Howard, Philip H. 2016. *Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?* New York, NY. Bloomsbury Academic.

Abstract: Nearly every day brings news of another merger or acquisition involving the companies that control our food supply. Just how concentrated has this system become? At almost every key stage of the food system, four firms alone control 40% or more of the market, a level above which these companies have the power to drive up prices for consumers and reduce their rate of innovation. Researchers have identified additional problems resulting from these trends, including negative impacts on the environment, human health, and communities.

This book reveals the dominant corporations, from the supermarket to the seed industry, and the extent of their control over markets. It also analyzes the strategies these firms are using to reshape society in order to further increase their power, particularly in terms of their bearing upon the more vulnerable sections of society, such as recent immigrants, ethnic minorities and those of lower socioeconomic status. Yet this study also shows that these trends are not inevitable. Opposed by numerous efforts, from microbreweries to seed saving networks, it explores how such opposition has encouraged the most powerful firms to make small but positive changes.

Link: <http://www.bloomsbury.com/us/concentration-and-power-in-the-food-system-9781472581143/>

Lapegna, Pablo. 2016. *Soybeans and Power: Genetically Modified Crops, Environmental Politics, and Social Movements in Argentina*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Abstract:

In 1996, the Argentine government authorized the use of genetically modified (GM), herbicide-resistance soybean seeds. By the mid-2000s, GM soybeans were cultivated on more than half of the arable land in Argentina and represented one-fourth of the country's exports. While this agricultural boom has benefited agribusiness companies and fed tax revenues, it also has a dark side: it has accelerated the deforestation of native forests, prompted the eviction of indigenous and peasant families, and spurred episodes of contamination.

In *Soybeans and Power*, Pablo Lapegna investigates the ways in which rural populations have coped with GM soybean expansion in Argentina. Based on over a decade of ethnographic research, Lapegna reveals that many communities initially resisted, yet ultimately adapted to the new agricultural technologies forced upon them by public officials. However, rather than painting the decline of the protests in an exclusively negative light, Lapegna argues that the farmers played an active role in their own demobilization, switching to tactics of negotiation and accommodation in order to maneuver the situation to their advantage. Lapegna offers a rare, on the ground glimpse into the life cycle of a social movement, from mobilization and protest to demobilization and resigned acceptance.

Through the case study of Argentina, a major player in the use and export of GM crops, *Soybeans and Power* gives voice to the communities most adversely affected by GM technology, as well as the strategies that they have enacted in order to survive.

- One of the first ethnographic case studies to examine the relationship between GM crops and local protest in Argentina
- Explains why many rural communities initially resisted but ultimately accommodated the arrival of new agricultural biotechnologies
- Features the stories of the families who have experienced the first-hand effects of GM expansion
- Sheds light on the social and environmental consequences that can emerge from rapid economic growth

OUP link: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/soybeans-and-power-9780190215149?cc=us&lang=en&>

Loconto, Allison, Anne Sophie Poisot, and Pilar Santacoloma, eds. 2016. *Innovative markets for sustainable agriculture: Exploring how innovations in market institutions encourage sustainable agriculture in developing countries*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Abstract: Between 2013 and 2015, FAO (specifically the Plant Production and Protection [AGP] and the Rural Infrastructures and Agro-industries [AGS] divisions) and the French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) undertook a survey of innovative approaches that enable markets to act as incentives in the transition towards sustainable agriculture in developing countries. Through a competitive selection process, 15 cases from around the world provide insights into how small-scale initiatives that use sustainable practices have been supported by market demand and have created innovations in the institutions that govern sustainable practices and market exchanges. These cases have responded to both local and distant consumers' concerns about the quality of the food that they eat. Through this study we learned that the initiatives rely upon social values (e.g. trustworthiness, health [nutrition and safety], food sovereignty, youth and rural development, farmer and community livelihoods) to adapt sustainable practices to local contexts better, while creating new market outlets for their products. Specifically, private sector and civil society actors are leading partnerships with the public sector to build market infrastructure, integrate sustainable agriculture into private and public education and extension programmes, and ensure the exchange of transparent information about market opportunities. The results are: (i) system innovations that allow new rules for marketing and assuring the sustainable qualities of products; (ii) new forms of organization that permit actors to play multiple roles in the system (e.g. farmer and auditor, farmer and researcher, consumer and auditor, consumer and intermediary); (iii) new forms of market exchange, such as box schemes, university kiosks, public procurement or systems of seed exchanges; and (iv) new technologies for sustainable agriculture (e.g. effective micro-organisms, bio-pesticides and soil analysis techniques). We have found that the public sector plays a key role in providing legitimate political and physical spaces for multiple actors to create jointly and share sustainable agricultural knowledge, practices and products.

CAVALCANTI, J. S. B.; WANDERLEY, M. N. B. (Org.) ; NIEDERLE, P. A. (Org.) . Participação Território e Cidadania: Um olhar sobre a política de desenvolvimento territorial no Brasil. 1ª. ed. Recife: Editora Universitária da UFPE, 2014. v. 1. 439p.

Language: Spanish

CAVALCANTI, J. S. B.; NIEDERLE, P. A. (Org.) ; Raynaut, Claude (Org.) ; FERREIRA, A. D. D. (Org.) . LÁ NO TERRITÓRIO: um olhar cidadão sobre o Programa Territórios da Cidadania. 1. ed. Recife: Editora Universitária da UFPE, 2014. v. 1. 206p.

Language: Spanish

CAVALCANTI, J. S. B.; NIEDERLE, P. A. ; Raynaut, Claude ; FERREIRA, A. D. D. ; WANDERLEY, M. N. B. ; Silva, Osvaldo Heller da ; COSTA, I. B. ; Zanoni, Magda ; BILLAUD, J. . LÁ NO TERRITÓRIO: um olhar cidadão sobre o Programa Territórios da Cidadania. 1. ed. Recife: Editora Universitária da UFPE, 2014. v. 1. 206p .

Language: Spanish

OMOTO, Reiko, Tetsu SATO and Daisuke NAITO (eds.). 2016. *International Certifications for Sustainable Resource Management*, University of Tokyo Press.

Language: Japanese

Abstract: The editors of this book attempt to deal with various transnational environmental certification schemes in one book including FSC (forest), MSC (marine), ASC (aquaculture) and RSPO (palm oil). Cases are from Japan and Southeast Asian countries described by hands-on users of certification at ground level. While great challenges are identified some cases show how local producers found such certification schemes useful in order to solve their own local issues.

## RC40 Executive Council (2014-2018)

| Office                          | Officer                          | Organizational Affiliation                   | Country | Email                                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------|----------------------------------------|
| <b>President</b>                | Allison Loconto                  | National Institute for Agricultural Research | France  | amloconto@versailles.inra.fr           |
| <b>Secretary/<br/>Treasurer</b> | Maki Hatanaka                    | Sam Houston State University                 | U.S.    | maki.hatanaka@shsu.edu                 |
| <b>Executive Council</b>        | Josefa Salete Barbosa Cavalcanti | Federal University of Pernambuco             | Brazil  | saletecav@gmail.com                    |
|                                 | Hilde Bjørkhaug                  | Centre for Rural Research                    | Norway  | hilde.bjorkhaug@bygdeforskning.ntnu.no |
|                                 | Steven Wolf                      | Cornell University                           | U.S.    | Saw44@cornell.edu                      |
|                                 | Bishnu Charan Barik              | Sambalpur University                         | India   | bishnu_barik@rediffmail.com            |
|                                 | Marie-Christine Renard           | Universidad Autónoma Chapingo                | México  | mcrenard@gmail.com                     |
|                                 | Carmen Bain                      | Iowa State University                        | U.S.    | cbain@iastate.edu                      |

## RC40 Regional Representatives

|                       |                      |                                                                                |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Latin America         | John Wilkinson       | <a href="mailto:jwilkins@uol.com.br">jwilkins@uol.com.br</a>                   |
| Australia/New Zealand | Geoffrey Lawrence    | <a href="mailto:g.lawrence@mailbox.uq.edu.au">g.lawrence@mailbox.uq.edu.au</a> |
| East Asia             | Yoshimitsu Taniguchi | <a href="mailto:tani@akita-pu.ac.jp">tani@akita-pu.ac.jp</a>                   |
| South Asia            | Bishnu C. Barik      | <a href="mailto:bishnu_barik@rediffmail.com">bishnu_barik@rediffmail.com</a>   |
| Northern Europe       | Reidar Almås         | <a href="mailto:reidar.almås@rural.no">reidar.almås@rural.no</a>               |
| Southern Europe       | Maria Fonte          | <a href="mailto:mfonte@unina.it">mfonte@unina.it</a>                           |

### From the Secretary

Maki Hatanaka ([maki.hatanaka@shsu.edu](mailto:maki.hatanaka@shsu.edu))

#### [1] About the Listserv of the RC-40:

Beginning fall 2014, RC40 has established its listserv using the Yahoo Groups. We hope to use this listserv to enhance communication and interaction among the RC40 members.

##### List Logistics:

- To join the RC40 listserv, send your message to: [rc40\\_food\\_and\\_ag\\_soc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rc40_food_and_ag_soc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).
- To post messages to the list membership, send your message to: [rc40\\_food\\_and\\_ag\\_soc@yahoogroups.com](mailto:rc40_food_and_ag_soc@yahoogroups.com).

#### [2] About the membership fee:

Membership to the International Sociological Association (ISA) and RC40 covers a four year period. To apply for membership and see the fee structure, please go to [http://www.isa-sociology.org/memb\\_i/index.htm](http://www.isa-sociology.org/memb_i/index.htm).

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For more information contact:

Editor: Maki Hatanaka,  
RC40 Secretary/Treasurer  
Sam Houston State University

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