

# Food for all in Latin America: Otra Economía, Otra Sociedad.

Heras Monner Sans, Ana Inés.

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# Food for all in Latin America

*Otra Economía Otra Sociedad*

Ana Inés Heras

Access to food is critical in several Latin American countries. What have been the self-organized responses to accessing food for all in Latin America? How have some of the governmental administrations responded to these issues? Over the past twenty years, peasants and rural families organized as worldwide coalitions or movements such as [Vía Campesina](#).

Other coalitions, starting in one country or local area, have expanded in their same country or abroad. That has been the case, for example, for the Movimiento Campesino Santiago del Estero and Movimiento Agrario Misionero in Argentina, or for the Movimiento Sin Tierra in Brazil. In turn, these current movements acknowledge their affiliation to older self-organized groups (e.g., ligas agrarias, movimiento campesino, movimiento de pueblos originarios).



Cycle of high external supplies. Slide: courtesy by Dr. G. Tito, Argentina

Central to these coalitions is [sovereignty over land and food](#) defined as “to control the mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution rather than having the corporations and market institutions” do so. This means deciding where is food produced and for whom, with what purposes (satisfying local popular needs or exporting goods), and in which ways (e.g. organically grown or chemically supported).

The food sovereignty orientation has been contesting large scale, agro-oriented business. For example, in Argentina, there is a tension between owners of large soya fields and owners of small, family or community, cultivated portions of land. This tension has changed in the last 10 years, in such ways that important groups of people have been forced to move from their land and re-establish elsewhere (i.e., in large cities where they become detached from their ways of doing things, engrossing the list of so called resource-less people and starting to then be labeled as poor).

Food sovereignty is a multi-factor oriented struggle since it involves discussing the right over land and water, and it implies a debate over what cultural patterns are to be recognized as valid.



Agro Ecological Community Access to Food.  
Slide: Courtesy by Dr. G. Tito, Argentina

Large portions of land, exploited by agro-business, conform what it is known as the cycle of high external supplies: land becomes a profitable good, chemicals are needed to increase production, and what is cultivated is an exchangeable produce —not food for people. Additionally, these business are involved in the stock market, participating highly of a speculative way of conducting the economy.

In as much as community agricultural orientations involve a way of living and of relating to the environment, they become a cultural pattern that collides with agro-business interests. [Anthropologists](#) have agreed on identifying that eating and food habits are not only a question of biological need but are part and parcel of socio-cultural orientations. Thus, what we eat, how we eat it, when we eat it, with whom and why are all issues that conform our [eating habits](#). Of course, and importantly, eating is determined by having [access to food](#). Access to food by low income, rural and urban populations has been pushed at the center of public policy in several Latin American countries by peasants struggle.

## **Pro Huerta and Latin America: expanding over time and space**



Photo courtesy by P. Olivieri.

Pro Huerta is an initiative regarding access to food based on family and community ways of doing things. Originally designed in Argentina around 1988 by the state, this program started as national-state policy in 1990. Worth acknowledging is that it sustained its efforts throughout the nineties and into the XXI century, which means that it is a state-supported program that made it through administrations of different political orientations. This has been achieved by community organizing, small rural and urban community efforts, and by a long-term negotiation between different political participants (e.g., public servants, volunteers, organized participants, foreign cooperation agencies).

In Argentina, Pro Huerta is currently feeding 3 million people. There are 700 state hired professionals who in turn work with 30,000 volunteers, who reach the 650,000 vegetable gardens across the country.



Photo courtesy by P. Olivieri.

25% of these gardens also sustain small farms. According to the program's statistics, self-managed, small community and family organized gardens and farms are located in schools, hospitals, communal lands, family gardens, jails, mental-health institutions, special education centers, and elder's housing projects.

The program's philosophy is based on 3 key issues:

- Participants have to learn to grow a garden or take care of a farm, or else, if they already know how to do it, they are invited to share their knowledge.
- Gardens and farms follow an agro-ecological orientation.
- Sharing and inventing creative ways of doing things (e.g., of recycling, or planting and harvesting) is also part of the program's activities. Participants disseminate what they create by communication channels supported by the program (e.g., web site, Manuals, radio or TV short educational programs).



Photo courtesy by P. Olivieri.

Over the past 7 years Pro Huerta has been sharing their model with Latin America [by conducting workshops and seminars supported by JICA.](#)

The participating countries are Haiti, Dominicana, Venezuela, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, Uruguay, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Cuba. Out of this learning experience several countries have started their own programs. For example, in Nicaragua the Healthy Courtyard Solidarity Program is housed in the Community, Cooperative Family Economy Ministry, reaching 22,000 families. In Haiti the Argentine Horizontal Cooperation Fund, ProHuerta and the Canadian International Development Agency have cooperated to support the design and implementation of the ProHuerta Haiti, which reaches 140,000 people today.



Photo courtesy by P. Olivieri.

It has been found that these initiatives fulfill several different needs: access to a balanced diet, collaboration across people, self-organization strategies, and, very important, a feeling of well being for those who may be struggling with health issues, aging or different educational needs.

*Ana Inés Heras earned her MA and PhD in Education (1995) with a Fulbright Scholarship at UCSB. She also studied History and Physical Education at the undergraduate level in Argentina. She currently studies participants' collective learning processes at autonomous, self-managed*

*organizations in contemporary Argentina, focusing on how diversity is understood in such processes.*