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Security via Sovereignty

Lessons from the Global South

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The American shopper walking down a grocery store aisle naively participates in a food system full of ironies and unintended consequences. If asked to interpret the contrast between great volumes of food on the shelves and the request at the cash register for contributions to the food bank, a thoughtful person will quickly recognize the most blatant of ironies—a country that produces mass quantities of food and pays farmers to stop producing too much is also a country with 17.4 million food insecure households (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, and Singh 2015). But beyond this glaring contradiction, the complexities and frequent dysfunctions of the country's provisioning remain a mystery. One reason for shoppers' naïveté is the dominance of food security “thinking” about the feeding of populations and the lack of awareness of an alternative food sovereignty theoretical framework. In this chapter we highlight the distinctions, connections, and implications of these frameworks, advocating for a more thoughtful approach to understanding the feeding of the United States by incorporating the strengths of food sovereignty, a concept embraced by South Americans in their constitutions.

Consider another apparent contradiction. From a food security point of view, high rates of obesity and diabetes among poor Americans are nonintuitive, especially given that in other countries poverty can lead to stunted growth and gaunt faces. But a food sovereignty lens brings into focus the fact that powerful interests arrange for government-subsidized commodities that keep prices low on calorie-intensive, nutrition-poor diets, while healthy fruits and vegetables remain unsubsidized, more expensive, and therefore more accessible to middle and upper classes.

The sovereignty lens also reveals ironies inherent in the production and delivery components of the food system. For example, sometimes, the same trucks that transport organic produce from the rural “salad-bowl” areas to the cities are the same ones that bring back from port cities the less expensive canned produce gathered and processed elsewhere, at times from halfway around the world. So, rural farmworkers in the United States use their meager wages *not* to purchase the food they cultivated and harvested, but instead to buy food that other farmworkers produced more cheaply elsewhere. Even stranger, low-income workers and the unemployed, both in remote rural



and in densely urban places, often find themselves in the midst of food deserts; that is, they live in places that lack a wide variety of affordable, quality foods and instead are full of cheap, highly processed foods. Supermarkets may choose to avoid urban ghettos, or not stock their stores with the same quality produce owing to economic and transportation obstacles, while little country stores are often so remote that food distribution companies decide not to deliver fresh dairy, bread, or produce to such small markets.

Further ironies appear when a sovereignty lens is used to consider the food access concerns of low-wage, working Americans. For example, many of the low-income inhabitants of these urban food deserts work in “food service” while low-income workers in rural places are often engaged in cultivating, harvesting, and packing food. In both rural and urban areas of the northwestern United States, food service workers have been among the highest represented workers among food insecure households (Grussing and Edwards 2006). Meanwhile, at the end of the food chain, consumers who work in retail (such as Walmart) often earn wages so low that they must turn to federal assistance (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—SNAP), providing them modest funds to purchase food, often from the very employers who pay them low wages.

The computer-precise and remarkably organized food-delivery system that daily feeds multitudes with safe, if not always healthy, food also displays occasional unintended consequences that achieve notoriety in the media. For example, the same amazingly efficient industrial food complex that distributes massive quantities to most parts of the country and the world also produces large outbreaks of food-borne illnesses when food safety is compromised. One bad crop of cantaloupes or batch of ice cream contaminated with *Listeria* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015b) or one side of beef infected with “mad cow disease” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015a) can put at risk thousands of consumers because indeed millions of consumers partake of the rationalized system that so widely distributes cantaloupes, ice cream, and hamburger from and to all parts of the country. From a food security point of view, such problems may be regarded as unavoidable collateral damage that can be minimized with ever-greater technological improvements. With a food sovereignty lens, one may instead ask if perhaps there are alternate possibilities to access more localized food via community or family gardens, relying on closer providers or markets that need little to no public intervention.

Finally, federal public policy focused on food systems in the United States (a country whose constitution emphasizes the separation of powers) has ironically placed one agency (the US Department of Agriculture, USDA) in charge of advocating for both producers and consumers. Because food industry companies are organized and resource rich, they can influence decision makers more readily than can the poor, leading to a situation akin to putting foxes in charge of the hen house (to borrow a food metaphor). Agribusiness and the food industry spend tens of millions of dollars each year on campaign contributions (for candidates sympathetic to the industry) and on lobbyists. The result is pressure on the USDA for subsidies on corn and beef and resistance to efforts to raise nutrition standards on school lunches. Debates over whether ketchup is a vegetable, and less silly but nonetheless contentious wrangling over revising the USDA’s food pyramids, reveal how the USDA faces often irreconcilable goals and competing pressures from unequally matched constituents. So, one part of the USDA

favors commodity producers (e.g., dairy industry) while another part of the agency is questioning the healthfulness of all that cheese on lunchroom pizza. A food security lens does not address such questions about who is deciding the menu of the poor but rather focuses on making sure that food is distributed widely. The sovereignty lens brings into relief these discontinuities and could remind Americans (a) that what they eat is largely determined by much bigger forces and vested interests and (b) that they could actively support their own interests regarding feeding their families.

American eaters of any class, but especially of working and lower classes, need not invent the critique and the questions on their own. They can learn from the efforts, successes, and failures of international movements seeking to ask these uncomfortable questions in countries where economic and political circumstances have made it possible to give voice to them. We focus on two South American examples. First, Ecuador, where unlike in the United States, the constitution of the country addresses food rights for producers and consumers, and the food system is explicitly called out as a vital part of society to be evaluated and debated through a deeply democratic process that creates new institutions of deliberation. The concept of food sovereignty plays a central role in the polity of the country although not without problems. Second, in Brazil, a food sovereignty framework takes center stage in that country's integrated, multipronged approach to creating food security for the population, while taking seriously the structural reasons for hunger. Brazil's Zero Hunger policy, like Ecuador's policy, includes the creation of institutions that allow the participation of the wider public in the design and implementation of local programs that include the support of local and regional producers. We begin by first elaborating on the food security and food sovereignty frameworks, describing how conflicting and/or compatible they are, before turning attention to these two South American examples and some of the lessons US eaters can learn from them.

Food Security and Food Sovereignty

Food Security: A Dominant but Incomplete Narrative

The concept of food security is almost as intuitive as hunger. No one wants to be hungry, and everyone wants the security of knowing that their next meal is assured. And most would likely wish for food security for their community, region, or country as well—a condition where there is plenty for all and assured access to that plenty in the future. Yet, as intuitive as this understanding of food security may be, there has remained a surprising amount of debate about, and number of differences in, definitions of food security.

In 1974, before food security in America was being widely discussed, growing international concern over world hunger led professional development bureaucrats and academics to establish a food security framework at the World Food Congress in Rome. Over the subsequent decades, the concept evolved as consensus grew that there should be internationally shared responsibility for national-level hunger, recognizing that the Green Revolution (i.e., large-scale technical improvements in agriculture that dramatically increased world production of crops) was not rapidly or automatically leading to reductions in poverty or malnutrition. Indeed, in some cases, that revolution may have increased hunger vulnerability in some countries (McIntyre et al. 2009). By

1996, at the World Food Congress, there was international acknowledgement of the *social* causes of hunger and an emerging recognition that access to food is a “universal right.” Even with these changes, food security as the end goal remained and continues as the dominant framework for understanding the feeding of the world’s population.

Examining official definitions of food security reveals the primary elements of a food security framework for understanding the feeding of countries. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations World Health Organization declared that “food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agriculture Organization 2003, 28). This definition describes a condition where access is never in question, where quality is assured, and where culture is taken into account (“preferences”). Parsing the sentence reveals that “access” is what people have, and the remainder of the definition describes “what” they have access to. Note that it does not address production, processing, manufacturing, and sourcing of foods, leaving open the debate as to whether this condition of constant access is achievable through the current international food system. Some critics argue that this definition predisposes actions to be the development of technical solutions for production and delivery but without illuminating the sources of food insecurity, and hence the root causes of it.

In the United States, the concept of food security was introduced to decision makers in the mid-1990s by the USDA. The USDA continues to use a minimalist definition of food security that ignores many of the elements found in the FAO definition, describing it as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, and Singh 2015). Issues related to food preference, nutrition, safety, and means by which food is obtained are not explicitly included in the USDA definition nor in the official measure of food security used by the agency. The measure focuses primarily on respondents having enough money for purchasing food and ignores receipt of SNAP, food boxes, school breakfasts and lunches, or congregant meals. The definition emphasizes purchase rather than production or even eating, which, while shallow, is not unreasonable given the fact that most people do not produce any of their own food anyway.

But definitions of problems are not neutral. They are reflective of assumptions about the way the world works. When those assumptions are hidden, they exert power in unexamined ways. This is true of the international and domestic definitions of food security. The absence of attention to where food comes from, who decides what will be produced, who produces it, and at what cost hides issues that are ignored, yet deeply relevant to the low-income shopper, the diabetic, the child eating free and reduced-price lunch, the local grocer, and the small farmer. Evidence of just how shallow has been the food security framework, on its own, can be seen in the US response to growing rates of officially measured “food insecurity.”

If contributions to food banks are any indication, the American public has increasingly come to believe that domestic hunger exists. Since the early 1990s, the collective response from citizens has not been to question the systems that provide food to the population, but rather it has been to give food and money to regional and local food

banks (Poppendieck 1999). Initially, the USDA also responded by distributing agricultural excess through this same emergency food system. Further expansion of SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) also prioritizes money-for-food approaches without interrogating the processes that make some groceries more expensive than others, or that make some people more likely to be low income than others. These incomplete and narrow responses reflect what is possible with only a food security lens, which gives emphasis to making sure that low-income people have food in the cupboard but without evaluating the means by which the food is obtained, the quality of the food, and the larger vested interests that put low-income people into this situation.

Similarly, the food security framework's incomplete narrative about food and the systems that produce and deliver it sometimes positions antihunger workers and activists at cross-purposes, or at least having to navigate complicated food politics. For example, the nationwide organization Feeding America begins with a food security framework and impressively organizes the delivery of millions of pounds of donated food to people who are left hungry in the current system. While they are deeply engaged in research and advocacy that informs government decisions, they must refrain from directly criticizing large food producers and distributors who contribute to their hunger-relief efforts. (Imagine the public relations quandary of wishing to advocate for local, sustainably grown produce, instead of relying on canned, high-sodium vegetables from another country, when an industrial canner and distributor is willing to donate tons of canned produce.) Other advocacy organizations such as FRAC (Food Research and Action Center) more obviously lobby and advocate within the political system, but faced with resistance to food sovereignty critiques of the existing food production and delivery systems, they primarily focus on existing food security policies such as support for child nutrition services or protecting SNAP benefits.

The food security framework in the United States has achieved two important things while leaving unexamined others that we have previously mentioned. First, in the raising of public awareness of the extent of domestic hunger, the effort to measure food insecurity has made it possible to document annual federal and state rates of food insecurity, thus lending scientific credibility to claims that economic and policy changes may be impacting families' material well-being. In a country where obvious malnutrition is not evident to people and where shelves are full, having trustworthy statistics to document the number of struggling families has assisted advocates in making the case to decision makers and the public that a problem exists. Second, the concept of food security is not inherently partisan (compared to "food sovereignty," which immediately elicits questions of power). By focusing on provision of sufficient calories, this framework permits people on the political left and right to seek to address it, whether through defending government programs on the left or advocating for more private charity on the right. However, this framing has left unexamined the influence of vested interests, has individuated the problem rather than addressed structural reasons for it, and has ignored nonmarket solutions.

Food Sovereignty: An Emerging but Contested Approach

In part a response to the perceived shortcomings of food security for seriously addressing recurring food shortages as well as to the tenacity of rural poverty and the

international rise of corporate influence over food, peasant movement representatives participating in a 1996 international meeting of La Vía Campesina made an international call for “food sovereignty” (Vía Campesina 1996). The definition emerged as “the right of the populations to food which is culturally adequate and nutritious, accessible and produced in a sustainable and ecological way, and the right to decide their own food and production system” (Nyéléni Declaration 2007). They asserted that food insecurity must be resolved by the affected people themselves in a favorable policy environment supported by governments and international organizations.

The food sovereignty framework demands the direct participation of food insecure persons in local food policy and program design and implementation, letting them take an active part in influencing the quantity, quality, and price of food available to them. This approach contradicts the notion of the consumer as simple receptor of food and food aid, an approach that tends to favor opinions and plans of food corporations, investors, and government experts. Embracing food sovereignty means the creation of institutions that support and enhance the quality of participation as well as public (state) support for food insecure consumer organizations (e.g., training about their rights, about nutrition, etc.). Although there are organized groups of food insecure consumers in the United States, these tend to be focused on adjusting or improving current food aid programs with little or no say in the way such programs are organized, and without institutionalized and/or public mechanisms to support their organizations. With different mechanisms for participation, they could effectively ensure that programs that target food insecure people would become more integrated with other policies and programs such as labor and housing programs. Currently, in the United States, there is no such effective space to debate the role of huge food corporations in maintaining the status quo, to challenge the way they affect public policies, or to discuss how they market and promote low-quality, highly processed and sugary food.

Contradictory, Corrective, yet Complementary

Critics of the food sovereignty framework argue that it is naive in its emphasis on small farms and urban gardening for feeding the world and its rejection of many modern agricultural practices (Bernstein 2013; Southgate 2011). Others argue that it confronts more than cooperates “on the ground” (Aerni 2011) and that the food sovereignty movement has been unclear about the nature of sovereignty (Hospes 2014). Some of these critics appear to dismiss out of hand the sovereignty approach, with the same vigor with which food sovereignty advocates criticize the food security framework.

While the food security framework emphasizes the importance of technology, food sovereignty prioritizes the “rule of the people.” We argue that the food sovereignty approach improves a food security approach, showing that these are complementary approaches that in practice do not need to be set up as hostile to one another. Indeed, the food sovereignty lens for understanding food systems has been a response to the failures of the food security approach to solving nutritional problems in the world. Instead of being proposed by government experts or international organizations, the food sovereignty response has come from the very populations that have been affected by the experience of food insecurity. This development is both historic and highly unusual, with affected populations of the Global South identifying a concept that resonates with

them in terms of the definition of the problem and possible ways out. Perhaps because it does not come from scientific/academic or governmental domains as such it has been the cause of much debate.

We identify three ways that food sovereignty improves the food security framework. First, the food sovereignty approach reclaims the right to decide for the most affected people regarding the ways to solve their daily problems of food insecurity. It does not supplant the food security framework for another one to be implemented by governments or international organizations. This observation highlights the “sovereignty” part of the term. In other words, while the food security framework implies plenty of calories for everyone, food sovereignty implies that people exert control over what they eat and how it is produced and distributed. Process becomes as important as final outcome.

Second, unlike food security’s technical, scientific approach to measuring deficits and inequalities, food sovereignty focuses on (a) making visible existing solutions already embraced by millions of people around the world and (b) addressing root systemic causes that lead to food insecurity. Among these root causes are: (1) distancing and disconnection from the production of one’s own food (e.g., most people do not know where their food comes from or how it is produced), (2) turning all processes involved in food production and distribution into a money-making proposition (“commoditization”), and (3) depending on knowledge external to the community (i.e., quality certification comes from bodies unfamiliar with local practices of production). Presently many countries in the world produce enough food for their populations but have uneven distribution, thus the food sovereignty approach questions the assumption that “more production is needed for a growing world population.”

Third, the food sovereignty approach gives new vision and purpose for the existing structures that have emerged in a food security framework. Governments and international organizations that have implemented the current food security system still have an important albeit different role within the food sovereignty approach. From the food sovereignty point of view, these entities would support the different deliberative institutions and implement policies that reflect people’s positive experiences in accessing food in sustainable ways. The likely heterogeneity of these various solutions (such as producing food in urban and rural areas in family or community gardens; supporting producer-to-consumer markets; bartering and many other localized and creative ways of production, distribution, and consumption) around the world is certainly a challenge for policy making and implementation.

The transformation of today’s reality of food insecurity, according to the core proposal of food sovereignty, means transforming our personal and collective approach to accessing food every day. Such changes may include: expanding food production as a responsibility of more families either in rural or urban areas; actively choosing direct contact and thus mutual responsibilities with the producers of our food and their realities; and decommoditizing as much as possible the relations around food so that food quality and quantity would be a right to everybody and not something that relates to income level, race, class, gender, and the like. (Can one really argue that some people are more deserving of healthy food than are others?) To further illustrate these possibilities, we turn attention to two examples from the Global South that provide lessons

for how eaters of all classes in the United States may critique and influence the food systems they are a part of.

Learning from the Global South

The cases from Ecuador and Brazil illustrate how the broader population may more actively influence and participate in how food is produced, delivered, and consumed, sometimes integrating existing practices and ideas into a national strategy.

Social Participation for Food Sovereignty in Ecuador

In 2008 the Ecuadorian Constitution was changed in ways considered among the most inclusive and innovative in terms of the rights of people and nature. An important section of the constitution relates to a mandate for food sovereignty, establishing a specific law and its regulations so that a food sovereignty regime could be put in practice. Before this constitutional change, different social movements in Ecuador had been working toward food sovereignty for more than a decade. So, the inclusion of this new framework reflects the pressures and contributions of these movements prior to and during the constitutional assembly. For the first time in Ecuadorian history, wide participation was encouraged in the constitutional process in an attempt to end a decade of social, economic, and political turmoil in which citizens nearly constantly expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the Ecuadorian government.

Food sovereignty was thus legally instituted through the Organic Law for the Food Sovereignty Regime (Spanish acronym LORSA), which also enabled the formal participation of different groups for changing other related laws and policies. Such participation was pursued by the creation of an entity called Plurinational and Intercultural Conference for Food Sovereignty (Spanish acronym COPISA). The members of COPISA are nine representatives of different collectives and organizations of the civil society related to the LORSA (different producers, consumers, universities, indigenous, and Afro-Ecuadorian groups) and selected through a democratic process every four years in order to promote debate, deliberation, monitoring, and proposal generation. Participation is encouraged through processes of public deliberation organized by the state and by various advocacy groups and is articulated through the Food Sovereignty and Nutrition System (Spanish acronym SISAN), an entity that includes representatives of four related ministries, the national planning secretariat, the decentralized local governments, and the members of COPISA, whose president is also the coordinator of SISAN.

In their first year of functioning, these newly created organizations and institutions faced numerous challenges. The most significant problem was that civil society participation through these newly formed institutions was new for everyone, especially for state ministries and local governments now required to listen attentively to nongovernmental groups. Meanwhile, in spite of hundreds of debates promoted throughout the country regarding the content of various food policy innovations, different members of SISAN and the various movements and collectives in COPISA often would go “their own way,” developing independent and uncoordinated versions of the same law, sending them for approval to the National Congress. As a result, the members of the National Congress who were from the dominant political party tended to approve

proposals that most aligned with government objectives rather than giving full consideration to new and alternative policy innovations.

In spite of such difficulties, social movement organizations working on food sovereignty found that the LORSA was a legal endorsement of their practices and activities. Legitimated by this new law, one movement called the Colectivo Agroecológico del Ecuador initiated various campaigns in 2011 that for the first time focused on consumers. The three hundred individuals and organizations that composed the Colectivo Agroecológico came from throughout the country and represented diverse practices and areas of focus. Yet they unified around the idea of a food sovereignty campaign that would target the consumer-citizen, meaning that all people who had a concern about the sustainability of the food system (not just producers and distributors) were relevant to debates about food, food practices, and food policies. This development shows a wider and more integrative understanding of how food sovereignty applies. The idea of the campaign was to mobilize Ecuadorians to express themselves with sustainable food practices that would enable a transition toward food sovereignty. This transition would be financed by consumers themselves by way of actively choosing sustainable food practices. These practices included participating in local and agroecological production in the country and, in cities, direct marketing and purchasing, cooked and fresh food at school cafeterias, and so on. The objective of the campaign was to reach 250,000 families that would actively participate with their own practices while also informing others. With this kind of mobilization, the goal was that one-third of the population in Ecuador would begin pressing for changes toward food sovereignty.

The Ecuadorian example illustrates the ability of individuals and organizations to promote food sovereignty in ways that surpass the simple vision of participation within the state and its institutions. To American ears, this suggestion means new forms of deliberation and “lobbying”—not just asking one’s congressional representative to vote a certain way on the “Farm Bill”—but actually communicating with all forms of government leaders and with other mobilized citizens about food production, distribution, consumption, and so on.

Zero Hunger in Brazil

In 2003 the Brazilian government initiated its Zero Hunger state policy, which set food security for all the population as the main objective to be reached through interrelated policies in all sectors of society (policies that tackle structural causes of hunger such as employment and specific policies that covered emergent situations such as food subsidies, food cards, food banks etc.). Veiga explains: “Since the hunger problem in Brazil was not being caused by insufficient food supply but rather by difficulties in accessing food, the concept adopted by the Brazilian government was based on the assumption that eradicating hunger entailed fighting extreme poverty and social inequality, which in turn required combining actions against hunger with a food and nutrition security policy that took into account the human right to food and Brazil’s food sovereignty” (2011, 90).

The Zero Hunger policy combines policies needed for immediate access and provision of food for the poorest residents (resonating with a food security framework), together with strategic policies that would (from a food sovereignty perspective) redistribute income, promote production, generate jobs, foster agrarian reform, increase

the minimum wage, and expand the social security system (Da Silva et al. 2011). The design of this policy was based on recognition that there was a vicious cycle between hunger in the country, “excessive income concentration, low wages, high unemployment levels and low growth rates,” which are not merely connected but are “endogenous to the current growth pattern and, therefore, inseparable from the prevailing economic model” (Da Silva et al. 2011, 19). This diagnosis of the problem motivated the aims of the policy to change the model and not just the food insecurity situation. However, according to policy makers, this was not possible without the participation of “society at large,” an observation consistent with a food sovereignty framework.

Veiga summarizes the policy like this:

[In Brazil] food and nutrition security policy involves four dimensions. The first one refers to the quantity of food, which can be characterized by the quantity of calories, proteins, vitamins and minerals consumed by human beings. The second one refers to the quality of the food that is consumed, which can be translated by the nutritional balance of food and its sanitary quality. The third one refers to the regularity at which a person consumes food, which can be translated by eating at least three times a day every day. The fourth one refers to dignity, which can be translated into the freedom of people to choose their own food without dependence. (Veiga 2011, 91)

In practice, the Brazilian policy went beyond food security by focusing on social justice with citizen participation. Evaluations of these efforts show that this last element has been one of the main factors of early success with this policy. Takagi (2011, 62) describes the program as having three axes: “implementation of public policies; participatory building of the food and nutrition security policy; and self-help action against hunger.” This means that formal and nonformal spaces for those affected by food insecurity and those who had been working with them were created in the decision-making processes. As a result, projects and programs throughout the country reflect people’s experiences and struggles to ensure their own provision and access to food.

A remarkable result of Brazil’s Zero Hunger policy is that it reduced the poverty rate from 28.1 percent (44 million) in 2003 to 15.4 percent (29.6 million) by 2009, with the majority of these people living in urban areas (Da Silva et al. 2011). Considering that poverty reduction has a strong connection to reduction of food insecurity, this is a huge advance in the right direction. In addition to reduction of food insecurity, the policy appears to have led to other important developments consistent with food sovereignty. For example, all Brazilian children and adolescents who attend public schools now have better access to a nutritious meal every day in their day care center, preschool, or elementary school. After almost doubling the funds allocated to each participant, the National School Meal Program (PNAE) expanded opportunities to improve the quality of the food served in schools. Some initial efforts were made for meals served in schools to use items purchased locally from family farmers, for education on nutrition to be included in the curriculum of primary education, and for special attention to be paid to the diet needs of indigenous populations in order to respect their food habits and expand the program’s social impact. Moreover, urban programs were designed to improve nutritional standards among poorer groups through

partnerships with local authorities, NGOs, and private companies including subsidized restaurants, community kitchens, food banks, and urban agriculture schemes.

More than a decade after the Zero Hunger policy was put in place, the most interesting lessons emerge around the practices to ensure civil society participation in as many instances of decision making as possible. Supporting this policy was a vision that food insecurity could be tackled only when people had more decision-making power about not only food but other aspects of their lives as well. The Brazilian government's strategy was based mostly on structural and strategic measures to reduce poverty, inequality, and lack of social security and access to jobs, along with efforts to increase immediate access to food.

Given the recent recession in Brazil, it remains to be seen which of these positive outcomes will persist. However, there is little reason to believe that genuine and institutionalized citizen participation, public-private cooperation, and program attentiveness to root causes of food insecurity need be threatened, even as unemployment and loss of confidence in the government rise.

Opportunities for Applying These Lessons in the United States

Some of the most important lessons from food sovereignty in South America have to do with the inclusive, democratic, and holistic approaches to deliberating about how food is produced and consumed. The example of Ecuador and Brazil shows food insecure people being guaranteed the right to influence the conditions under which they access food and, as importantly, the ways in which they can get out of dependency on food aid. Apart from occasional poor people's protests or testimony given to Congress, with few exceptions SNAP participants in the United States rarely deliberate with state agencies, nonprofits, and producer distributors to decide how SNAP recipients could escape dependency on food aid. The Ecuadorian and Brazilian cases also alert us to what can happen when new forms of deliberation are made possible. In the United States, food councils are the most closely related form of organization that resembles the new deliberative bodies described in Ecuador and Brazil. Indeed, food councils vary in their resiliency and effectiveness, but their potential for impacting policy within the fifty states is reasonable to expect, if state legislatures were to more consistently rely on them for policy development (see Chen, Clayton, and Palmer 2015).

Movements that are already working on food sovereignty like the Colectivo Agroecológico in Ecuador are a rich source of solutions that are being put in practice. In the United States, many policies can start from grassroots activities instead of coming only from technocratic experts. In the United States, grassroots organizing, such as through FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together), a community-organizing approach initiated in rural Oregon by the Oregon Food Bank and now spreading through other states, has produced dozens of examples of substate regions solving local food problems, with some of their solutions likely to be reproducible in other parts of the United States. Such new efforts for mobilizing citizens through community food security efforts are promising.

Finally, the effort to make legal changes in Brazil and Ecuador point to the potential for better "local" legislation within states, some of which can and will be emulated

across the country. For example, recent cottage food laws (which empower small producers of processed, cooked foods in home kitchens) and farm direct laws (which strengthen connections between smaller farmers and local institutions such as hospitals and schools) provide new opportunities for substate regions to grow in the direction of food security through food sovereignty.

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