

# Debating the food systems

Speakers:

- Eber Quiñonez Hernandez (Ecosol/CES, FEUC)
- Carmo Bica (President of the 3 Serras Cooperative)
- Rita Serra (Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra)

Moderator: Sérgio Pedro

Reporters: Aurora Santos, Cecília Fonseca, Lanka Horstink, Lúcia Fernandes, Sérgio Pedro

More information on the panel:

<https://climaximo.wordpress.com/2018/12/09/debatar-os-sistemas-alimentares>

The transformations imposed by capitalism on the agro-food systems ignore, and end by eliminating, innumerable agro-food micro-systems at the territorial level. People's and communities' practices, obstacles and resilience and imagination in order to resist.

This debate has for its objective the making visible of various perspectives on contemporary food systems, namely their limitations, conditioning factors, geographical particularities and alternatives of a legislative and practical character.

## Rita Serra

Rita Serra shows the concept of “zombie forests”, uniform and dependent, informed by intensive and unsustainable agri-forestry practices; forests which are trapped in a vicious cycle, from which in the present state of things they cannot escape. The zombie is a slave, the living dead, not able to achieve liberation in death, condemned to walk on this earth without reaching paradise, seeking to liberate itself. These forests are on lands which, due to the high level of forestry monoculture, make any natural forestry strategy of succession unviable.

The speaker puts in question the negative understanding of eucalyptus, mentioning that locally populations plant eucalyptus to get wood for heating, a practice which is later increased exponentially through the intensive planting of eucalyptus for the paper industry, with considerable harmful impacts. Nevertheless, the speaker notes that even in zombie forests woodland fruits appear, which are little considered in contemporary food systems.

Faced with this panorama, could wastelands be the solution?

Wastelands are, mostly, seized by private interests, namely the interests of the cellulose and mineral companies, a factor which makes a change of paradigm in the forestry sector difficult. These companies only look at the resources and benefit from the erosion of local communities, for lack of organisation in front of these powers.

**The future lies in the promotion of sustainable forests with native species.** Choosing seeds, acorns, etc., is a form of activism, but **without reform of territorial planning there**

will be no change.

## Éber Quinoez

Éber Quinoez's contribution came next, who, in his assignment, analysed the relation between producers and consumers, putting into perspective in greater detail the panorama of agro-food short supply chains (SSCs).

According to the speaker, **urban-rural dialogue is possible in the SSCs**, since consumers should put in question their role in the SSCs. He also notes the possibility of co-opting concepts, as is the case of SSCs or organic farming.

In order for actors in the food systems to obviate this situation they have to dedicate energy and resources to the strengthening of a movement of control over agricultural inputs, keeping in view opposition to risky financial investments with impacts that are ever less measured and more dangerous. Moreover, this movement should bear in mind **the tendency for the reduction of biodiversity of food patterns, leading to a reduction of biodiversity in flora and fauna.**

Another factor which should be considered by all actors in the food systems is food waste, namely food waste in the distribution chains, something which is not considered.

On the co-opting of ideas, the speaker noted that **the co-opting of the idea of organic farming comes in the sense of a market-capitalist logic which ignores the logic of fair trade which underlies the founding principles of organic farming.**

In order to reconnect organic farming to fair trade it is necessary to rethink food starting with territory.

## **Carmo Bica**

Tackling the public policies of food systems, the speaker noted the **necessity of a changing point in public policies**. A changing point which is becoming a more urgent case when we consider that a value equivalent to 10% of Portugal's GDP is allocated to health expenditure for the treatment of diseases resulting from poor dietary practices.

A changing point is also necessary faced with the **overexploitation of natural resources**.

This change of paradigm should be based on the Human Right to Adequate Food, defending the environment and biodiversity.

Despite the occurrence of higher levels of agricultural production, we are not succeeding in combatting inequalities of access to food and social inequalities and food insecurity. There is hunger, there are people who eat too much and people who eat poorly.

Which way do we want to go? Continue on the road of inequality? Or alter this capitalist model under which we live, which is based on the exhaustive exploitation of natural resources, harmful environmental impacts, and human resources.

To give an example, the intention to exploit lithium in Covas do Barroso, a food system where there is small-scale farming and where the prospecting of 542 hectares is predicted, with no

regard for impacts. This situation requires support and mobilisation.

Moreover, **the absence of control and accountability in the food systems leads to our not knowing what we are eating.**

If we are eating GMOs, or chemicals get on our plates, or not. This situation is also explained by the abandoning of land previously occupied by small- and medium-scale family farming, which guaranteed food sovereignty, fair trade, short supply chains, and 80% of world food production.

This abandoning of land generates decline, since half of the explorations are abandoned, a situation with its origins in an unjust common agricultural policy. A policy [the CAP] which, being under review at the moment, should be debated by citizens.

They should pose questions as important as: what type of food do I want to eat? What do I want to grow?

The political parties should enter into this debate. Agriculture is a different type of activity: it occupies territory, it produces food.

The speaker also noted the creation of a **basic law of the Human Right to Adequate Food** which would be debated in the Portuguese Parliament.