ACF Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation

VOICES OF PROGRESS
BRAZIL



IN CONVERSATION WITH

LEIDIANE EVANGELISTA DE SOUSA

Farmer in Brazil's Cerrado region

Please could you tell us a bit about yourself and your farm?

I am a land reform settler, linked to the Landless Workers' Movement (MST)[1], I live and work with my family on a 40-hectare plot of land, where we produce watermelon, vegetables and pigs. We also maintain an Agroforestry System (AFS) that guarantees food for our family. Our land is located in the Cerrado region, with soil that requires a lot of care, and the tropical climate meaning that it rains a lot in the summer and is dry in the winter.

Can you describe a typical day during your busiest season?

Every day we wake up at 5am to take care of our plot of land. During the busiest times, such as the watermelon harvest (mainly January-March) or the peak of vegetable production (April-June and September-November), the days are long and demanding. We divide our time between harvesting, preparing and delivering food, as well as caring for the pigs and the SAF . Sometimes the day only ends after dusk, but we keep going because we believe in what we do.



What trade-offs do you currently face in producing healthy food in a way that is sustainable? Can you give an example of how the competing pressures of increasing yield and income might conflict with farming in a way that protects your local environment, for example?

Our biggest challenge is to produce healthy food naturally, even while being surrounded by large agribusinesses which use a lot of pesticides. These can easily end up affecting our plants. Even so, we resist. Through the MST, we have access to training on sustainable soil management and we remain steadfast in the fight for agroecology and food sovereignty.

> **"Producing without pesticides requires more work, more time and more knowledge – but that is how we want to continue, respecting the land and taking care of the health of those who consume what we grow."**

But it's not always easy. There's a lack of support or credit, and little protection against pesticides. The market also doesn't value clean food as it should and this weighs on family income. We often feel like we have to choose between increasing productivity and continuing to care for nature. But with organization and effort, we can find the best possible paths.



How could government policy help you manage these trade-offs in a way that leads to better outcomes for you, your community and the environment?

Public policy can – and should – be on our side. And we currently access both the Fomento program (a direct transfer scheme that supports diversified food production amongst low-income rural communities) and the Fomento Mulher program (aimed primarily at women). We are also on the verge of receiving the Fomento Jovem funds (which supports youth farmers) - all programs from the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Agriculture (MDA), which assist us in financing our production.

But increased access to technical assistance, credit for agroecology, protection against contamination and purchasing programs for our products would all make it easier to continue with dignity in the countryside. The MST already does this work of training and support, but it needs more recognition and structure to reach even more families like mine.

How do you feel about your future as a farmer? What are the most important things that would need to change, for you to feel secure about the future of your farm?

Despite the difficulties, I remain hopeful. The future of family farming and agroecology depends on support, respect and bold political leadership. We want to live well, produce healthy food sustainably and ensure a living land for those who come after us.



[1] Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Portuguese, is a mass social movement, formed by rural workers and by all those who want to fight for land reform and against injustice and social inequality in rural areas.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH

FERNANDA MACHIAVELI MORÃO DE OLIVEIRA

Executive Secretary of the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Farming (MDA), Brazil

Please could you tell us a bit about yourself?

I serve as the Executive Secretary of the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Farming (MDA) in Brazil, where I contribute to the formulation, coordination, and implementation of public policies aimed at strengthening family farming and promoting food sovereignty and security. My career has been guided by a deep commitment to social justice, the rights of rural peoples, forest and water communities and the sustainable development of food systems.

Which policy areas do you oversee?

I oversee many policies related to land access, including rural credit (such as PRONAF), technical assistance and rural extension, land regularization, support for agroecology, the promotion of socio-biodiversity and productive inclusion. I also coordinate cross-ministerial initiatives focused on ecological transition, sustainable development and strengthening rural territories.

How do these policies interact with different parts of government?

MDA policies are inherently cross-sectoral. We work closely with Ministries such as Health, Environment and Climate Change, Finance, and Social Development - among others. Family farming strongly intersects with policies on school feeding, public procurement, agroecological transition and climate action. This demands continuous coordination, shared governance and alignment across different government agendas.

How are competing agendas considered together? What are the challenges?

Balancing food production, environmental conservation, income generation and social inclusion is one of our greatest challenges. Political priorities and sectoral interests do not always align.

> **“Our task is to build governance processes and institutional agreements that enable integrated solutions, with a focus on historically marginalized groups to help foster social justice and sustainability.”**

What structures, institutions, or processes has the government implemented to address this comprehensively?

I would highlight the reestablishment of the National Council for Sustainable Rural Development (CONDRAF) - which enables the MDA to closely engage with civil society groups, family farmers and producer networks - along side the revitalization of the National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production (PNAPO) that supports the sustainable development of rural communities through the adoption of agroecological and organic production systems. The Family Farming Harvest Plan also places an emphasis on participatory development and aims to strengthen family agriculture to sustainably produce healthy foods through a range of technical assistance services.

From a national perspective, what is the prize for getting the transition right? And what are the costs of getting it wrong?

Getting the transition right means building fair, sustainable and resilient food systems that ensure income generation, food security and biodiversity preservation. Getting it wrong would deepen inequalities, increase food insecurity, drive environmental degradation and result in biodiversity loss — unacceptable outcomes that threaten both present and future generations.





Additionally, we have strengthened interministerial forums and social participation mechanisms to ensure greater policy coherence and robust dialogue between the government and civil society.

What are the government’s aspirations for the food system by 2030 and 2050?

By 2030, we aim to consolidate an inclusive agri-food model led by family farming, that guarantees the human right to adequate food whilst strengthening sustainable production and local markets. By 2050, we want Brazil to be a model of food sovereignty, agroecological innovation and climate justice, with food systems grounded in the rich biological, cultural and social diversity of our nation.