



## **THE AGRIBUSINESS AND MONOCULTURES: DIAGNOSES AND PROPOSALS FROM FASE TO BE DEBATED WITH ITS PARTNERS**

FASE

December 2006

This text intends to systemize FASE's experiences and actions in facing the agribusiness and the monocultures, and aims to contribute for the debate and the building of diagnoses, visions and collective proposals along with our partners.

Several instances of FASE are engaged in actions regarding this problem. We are particularly in the "front", present in areas where rural and forest populations are being pressed and expelled by the sugarcane, by the soy or by the eucalyptus. We have been contributing through direct advise to farmers' family associations who practice solidary economy and promote agroecology. We support those who are hit by these monocultures and we produce studies for their defense and for the demanding of their rights. We have been receiving strong pressure to "open ourselves to dialog" and to embody "corporate social responsibility". Therefore it becomes necessary, in respect for the social sectors with which we work and to our partners and supporters, to clarify what is our present position, over which we want to debate and socialize.

### **I. What are the issues at stake?**

#### **The way of occupying the territory.**

Differently from previous periods of production for export (sugarcane, coffee, rubber, cocoa, cotton) or not for export (cattle raising) that occupied specific spaces of the territory, keeping themselves confined to these spaces (sugarcane) or abandoning them to migrate to other areas (coffee, cattle raising, wood), nowadays the cycles of production tend to spread all over the territory, opening new areas on the "expansion front" or conquering back abandoned or degraded areas. Nevertheless, even tough these areas may be considered abandoned or degraded under the entrepreneur point of view, many of them constitute a particular socio-cultural and ecological dynamics, and because of that, it should not be appropriate to transform them in areas of monoculture. This is even more truthful in the case of the Amazon, where, due to the diversity of the forest itself, the substitution of these areas by homogeneous plantations or monocultures can never be considered as "reforesting". Along with the big grain cultures and cattle raising, the production for export is being diversified: chicken and pork raising fed with soy grains, shellfish culture, flowers,

fruit. Side by side with food cultures, we should stress the growth of the industrialized productions: wood for pulp and paper, charcoal, building industry, biomass for energetic purposes, cotton.

This kind of production has a “totalitarian” character. It does not co-exist with peasant agriculture, with agro-extracting activities, and even less with the ecological option. If it did not use certain spaces in the past due to their distance from markets, due to infertile or inappropriate soils for traditional exploitation, nowadays with soil correction, seeds that adapt themselves to several climate and soil conditions, new productions (shellfish raising) expand easily in detriment of peasant and agro-extracting activities. Also, their production methods, extremely aggressive in the massive use of agrottoxics and water demanding, make it difficult and even impossible peasant production and the survival of families and isolated rural groups, without water or with contaminated water, with their fruit farms, their slashes and their small-animals raising and poisoned bees. There, where family farmers want to plant non-transgenic soy, the employment of transgenic seeds by their side makes it impossible that non-transgenic varieties are planted, because they end up contaminated by the use of the same machines, same storage areas and the same transport.

After benefiting themselves from favorable product prices, subsidies and credits, paying low prices for the land due to location in remote areas or considered infertile, either due to the soil characteristics or for being totally wasted, they expel the peasants and agro-extractors by force or by pressuring them to sell their lands because of the competition that puts their prices down and for the lack of public services in the countryside.

Most of the export cultures are heirs of the “latifúndio”. Therefore, the exploration in big scale was naturalized, as if production could only be done in vast properties. The machinery, the production support system (credit, storage, communication ways etc) and the urban fabric of the inlands are being produced based on these principles.

This agricultural model produces negative environmental impact that mortgage the future: impoverishment and contamination of soils; loss of natural and cultivated biodiversity; decrease and contamination of waters; micro-climate changes; desertification risks; loss of landscapes; biological and genetic erosion. These impacts are not merely environmental. They have the power to affect the urban and the rural life quality, health, and the food and nutritional sovereignty and security. This model induced the wastage of old cultural practices related with the managing of production systems and led to its abandonment. Traditional knowledge originated from the indigenous communities, agro-extractors and *quilombolas* (slave descendents) communities were devaluated, disqualified and put apart from the knowledge systems of the globalized world.

### **The several displacements produced**

The “Green Revolution” deeply transformed agriculture on the technological field, based on three factors: machinery, chemical fertilizers and more and more artificial seeds and matrixes. Here it should be stressed that the scientific knowledge was and is being put almost completely at the service of this model. “Freed from the need to supply themselves

with a varied extension of consumption goods and essential production goods (traction force, fertilizers, animal food, seeds, matrixes, tools etc) the agricultural exploitation became specialized: the diversified production was abandoned and they dedicated themselves almost exclusively to certain productions destined for sales”<sup>1</sup>. This created an abyss between the farmers that were able to adapt themselves (education, knowledge, capital and land) and the others who were excluded. Becoming more specialized and totally turned towards the market, attaining huge productivity gains, this agriculture is a consequence of the internationalization of the market and at the same time a producer of this internationalization.

It marks the shift of the centrality of the agricultural production from the producer to the industry and the agro-industry on both ends of the production track. The machines that were put available to the farmers during the first industrial revolution were not so sophisticated that they could not be repaired by the farmer or the village’s blacksmith. Nowadays, machines, seeds and matrixes, warehouses, melioration industries, commercial companies, technical assistance, banks, credit and insurance, production planning, commodities’ markets, transport infra-structure, everything is conceived and conducted from the city. The consumption of industrialized products prevails. There is almost no contact between the producer and the consumer. Hypermarkets dictate their rules to their suppliers. Our daily supply of food has nothing to do anymore with the local production and climate. This is not a sign of diversity, but rather a sign of impoverishment of our daily food supply, conducted by the market.

This model, along with the urban concentration and the mass media, deeply modified the consumption habits. There is a standardization of tastes all over the world. For example, four grains – corn, rice, soy and wheat – practically concentrate the totality of grain consumption. As new segments of the population begin to widen their consumption, they modify their daily food supply. They evolve from the use of local grains and products to begin using more and more wheat. Next, from the consumption of grains, they begin consuming meat. From a consumption of essential basic products, they shift to a luxury consumption, explored by specialized producers with fresh and differentiated products like shrimp, lobster, exotic fruits and fine meats. This dynamics supports itself and favors in return the world trade.

This displacement does not happen only and mainly between the production zone and the nearer cities. The planning and the managing of this agriculture that is turned towards the global market, either happening here or overseas, are, in a way, non-territorialized, because with the industrial and financial concentration in the hands of multinationals and of commodities’ markets, the research centers, the planning of decisions and the production of new technologies are located in distant countries. International instances like WTO, BIRD, OCDE, support the creation of market deregulation mechanisms, aiming to create tools to facilitate the global free flow of profits of the big corporations. However, the social-environmental impacts of this policy are felt by the local populations, what means that they are deeply territorialized.

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<sup>1</sup> Mazoyer, Marcel e Roudart, Laurence. **Histoire des agricultures du monde**. Du néolithique à la crise contemporaine. Paris, Seuil, 1997.p.378

With the introduction of new agro-industrial and commercial activities, another ones, which used to be closer to local farmers, simply disappear. The rural-urban relationship thus changes. The configuration of the territory modifies itself: small rural nucleus disappear, large spaces become human deserts, small and mid-size towns begin to form their slums, the diminishing and the abandonment of small local branches of transport also happen, what increases the growth of the large networks and the widening of the socio-territorial fragmentation.

The apparent success of this model, conqueror and tamer of the territory, associated with its up-to-date technologies, operator of powerful machines, vehicle of the “country look” and its rodeos, builder of a new middle class and savior of the surplus of the trade balance, brings with it a powerful ideological strength, usually supported by the politicians and the media, because it is supposed to bring “development, progress and jobs”. The hegemonic development model in Brazil established such a high level of dependency of our economy in relation to the external market – with the production of soy, cotton, chicken and cow meat, sugarcane, trees for the production of pulp and paper and charcoal, of biomass for energetic ends, among other goods – that the adoption of restrictive measures or even of control of the expansion of these activities could provoke a strong and negative impact in the economy of important and different areas of the country, the national treasure and even the import of goods that are necessary to the present model of production and consumption. In this way, the monoculture tends to be totally identified with economical growth and development, transforming its questioning in a very difficult challenge to all of us.

On the other hand, we can observe the strengthening of a critical thinking over this model that gathers peasants, consumers that are concerned with the consumption of “clean” products and resistance movements to global capitalism who question this model of production, in the defense of a peasant agriculture, of the environment, of health, of human rights and of the change in the power relations between the countries.

## **II. The political reason for the debate**

The prevailing development model in Brazil and internationally is based on a pattern of consumption and production that needs more and more the extraction of natural resources, more and more consumed products, pouring out in the environment the wastes of production and consumption. A country is built upon the interaction of the population with the territory in which it is inserted. And this insertion happens in the economical, political, cultural and social activities. The social building of the Brazilian territory, in the way it has been deepened in the last decades, mortgages the future because it creates the risk of non-supportable environmental situations and because it reinforces social and inter-regional inequality, not to mention the inequality between countries.

We find that are at stake here: a) the possibility of maintaining the democracy and the strengthening of its institutions in a territory dominated by increasingly concentrated economic interests, either in the country or in the city, in a territory controlled by one single production model that denies and destroys biodiversity and social diversity; b) the

possibility that the territory allows, in the future, the supplying of the population with a farming and cattle raising and agro-extracting production that has a minimum of quality, to assure the supply of water in the necessary amount and with quality; c) the possibility of respecting the economical, social, cultural and environmental human rights. If there is no more space for the peasants and agro-extractors to develop their own life and reproduction projects with its multiple services and activities, the only thing that will be left for them is the reduction to the condition of being socially assisted for humanitarian reasons.

FASE, as an organization historically turned towards supporting the social segments that are disfavored or excluded from the access to citizenship and worthy life conditions, could not omit itself. Through its social and educational interventions, focusing on the protagonism of excluded social sectors, the organization learned that the struggle of these social groups with which it works on a daily basis in its fight for land, for a peasant agriculture, for agro-ecology, for solidary economy, for water, for sanitation, for housing, ends up questioning democracy, the development model, justice and the accomplishment of human rights. Working with this population makes the organization face these core issues.

### **III. The Method**

Even if the terms of the debate are clear, in reality we face questions and contradictions that cross the society and ourselves. How to go from the technological packet of the Green Revolution to agro-ecology without dealing with the lack of supplies? With the countryside emptied by the abandonment of the majority its population, who does not want to come back from the cities, with the agro-industrial and the industrial production concentrated, how is it possible to rebalance the territory? How to reverse a model of consumption that has become indispensable to modern life? How to develop solidarity between the country and the city based on a new perspective?

As stated above, these questions have to be faced through debate and actions over development and territory and through human rights. Our intervention over these monocultures happens on the several levels of FASE's work: the local level; the regional/state level; the national level, the Latin American and the international level. It involves demonstrational projects, articulation through networks and forums, intervention in public policies, advising and capacity-building activities and in campaigns.

This involvement in several levels and types of activities should be simultaneous, coordinated and coherent. Although each FASE program acts in relation with one or two monocultures, it faces the same overall logic: huge extension of properties; a technological model that has a negative impact over public health and environment; the expelling of the population and the reduced offer of jobs; economic emptying of small villages and the creation of suburban gatherings that do not offer services or jobs; the perpetuation of local oligarchies and the absence of a democratic state and society; the confirmation and the deepening of a development model that serves only the neo-liberal world trade; the deepening of the subordination of the country to the interests of the dominant countries. Considering all this, we come to the conclusion that the confrontation should be global.

The challenging of monocultures is made from the point of view of the social and environmental impacts that it causes (environmental justice); from the existence of a class of peasants and agro-extractors that want to keep on living and producing, that are simply resisting or that are already experiencing and proposing alternative projects to the dominant agricultural model; from the perspective of a project of another development model for the country. It is the combination of these approaches that characterizes the intervention of FASE on its different levels.

When we say *no to soy* or *no to eucalyptus*, it is our responsibility to show objectively in the dispute field what are the possible alternatives and how can the transition be done. But it is not enough for us to say that we are, for instance, against soy in the Amazon. We must try to answer about the viability of the soy production by the small farmer and under what conditions. It is not enough to say that the consumption of paper or steel should be decreased. We should have a firm position on the production of trees in Brazil. It is also our role to develop a dialog with popular organizations and unions to contribute to the building of their own positions and to make our own positioning possible on the development issue. And in the international dimension, this is the acting line over which we should try to look for partnerships and common struggles, be it in the South or in the North.

#### **IV. Our proposals.**

1. Together with the social sectors, popular organizations, unions and social movements with which we work, we defend a sustainable agrarian reform, the limitation of the size of properties and the building of alternatives to the dominant agricultural development and to predatory extractive activities. Particularly, we defend that agriculture, cattle raising and extractive activities should be mainly based on diversified peasant agriculture, either beginning or reinforcing the transition towards agro-ecology. In this sense, we oppose and fight the present dominant model;
2. We question the excessive priority given to the external market and the terms in which this is conducted. If in the short term, the export of raw materials and agricultural commodities that greatly contribute to the attainment of high figures in the surplus of the trade balance might appear as a lever for the “development”, in fact we are exporting our own natural resources and blocking any possibility of democratizing land and agricultural production. If it is true that one cannot take abrupt measures that may cause the destabilization of the country, it is also true that in no way we can keep Brazilian economy with its focus turned almost exclusively to the external market without facing great social and environmental losses. This is the reason why we should begin a transition towards a model turned to the supply of internal and regional markets, based mainly on family and peasant agriculture;

3. It is also urgent to reassess the priorities of the Brazilian external policy on international trade negotiations. Instead of looking for agreements that widen even more the expansion of the agribusiness exports – and with this accepting the conditions of the corporations from the North that more and more influence our public health, educational, industrial, services and investment policies – preference should be given to the defense of family and peasant agriculture and to mechanisms that give back to Brazil and to the southern countries the right to elaborate their own public policies favoring distribution, sustainability, food sovereignty and security. In this sense, the Brazilian government should give priority to the programs that assure food stocking, acquisition of food supplies originated from the family and peasant agriculture, protection to the basic products of the population's daily food supply, protection of the native seeds and biological diversity;
4. We support the productive diversification and the variety of the daily food supply according to the local characteristics of the ecosystems and traditions. That is why we support traditional raisings and cultures that compose the daily food supply in the regions and in the country and assure food and nutritional sovereignty and security. The introduction of new cultures in the peasant production cannot substitute and superimpose its traditional raisings and cultures. Whenever they are introduced, it should be done based on the diversifying of the production and the agro-ecology, not as monocultures;
5. Brazilian energetic sovereignty and security based in the biomass should be based in agro-ecology and followed by investments in research on alternative energy sources, strengthening and financing of family production, fighting against land property concentration, strengthening of existing plants, technological modernization of the distribution network and education to avoid unnecessary wastage;
6. We profess agro-ecology as a technical-scientific paradigm and a new development strategy for the country that contradicts the presupposed basics of the Green Revolution based in the intensive use of motor-mechanization, of inorganic fertilizers, of agro-toxics, of the intensive use of natural resources and of the so-called Bio-revolution that has been stressing the simplification and the extreme artificial conditions of the natural environment and encouraging the patenting of living beings. Agro-ecology comprises social, economical, environmental, agricultural and cultural aspects of society based on a perspective of sustainable development of agriculture, cattle raising and extractive activities. Therefore, the contraposition goes beyond the technological model. The agro-ecological field of which FASE takes part, represented by the National Agro-Ecological Articulation (ANA), defends: the territorial rights of the peoples and traditional populations and the Agrarian Reform; the diversifying of the productive systems with the least

possible dependence on external inputs; the conservation and use of natural resources and biodiversity; the building of the agro-ecological knowledge with the appreciation of the traditional knowledge of how to manipulate forest resources, seeds, animals, soil and water, along with the embodiment of appropriate technologies and social management of the agro-ecological development; new relationships with the markets, based on ethics and solidarity and in alliances between producers and consumers. That is why we consider crucial to reassess research priorities, technical assistance and the development of technologies that favor the strengthening of agro-ecology;

7. The reassessment of the production that we profess should be associated with changes in consumption, in its decrease, reassessing and quality; consumption turned towards the mass of the population, and not to an elite; the supplying of the external market as a second priority that presently might be indispensable to family reproduction, and in the future, on a complementary and solidary basis for populations threatened by natural catastrophes, for instance, but not on a competitive basis;
8. The role exerted by the big agribusiness corporations, usually multinationals, goes far beyond the country. The issue of production (which products, produced under which system) as seen under the optics of food and nutritional sovereignty and of the environment also goes far beyond the country. Solidary economy articulates country and city. It is the development model that is being questioned here. That is why the debate has to include the organizations that have the city in its focus;
9. In the areas and regions where FASE works and the entities, popular organizations and social groups affected oppose themselves to monoculture, the alternatives considered and discussed with the local population can hardly include the monoculture products, because this would somehow weaken the fight of the groups that are affected by this or these monocultures. This would allow the corporations to take advantage of the fact in their arguments in favor of the culture, and the affected groups would lose sight of their struggle. For instance, FASE will note encourage the forest development based on eucalyptus in family agriculture in Espírito Santo or soy in family agriculture in Pará;
10. If one group turns towards these cultures in other regions, FASE will try to understand and support them so that their effort distinguishes itself from the big corporation's business, developing diversified productive systems with the keeping of yearly and perennial diversified cultures associated with raising, adopting agro-ecological principles and stimulating cooperative associations;
11. FASE evaluates that the dominant certification processes are market tools turned mainly to the big corporations. Even when they embody



assistance to sectors of family agriculture, this opening ends up legitimating strategies that serve these corporations. From the strict environmental and labor point of view, they might make sense, especially if they are constantly monitored and socially controlled. If this does not happen, they might produce a kind of “make-up” effect that in the end would make things more serious in respect to the problems created by this model;

12. FASE works towards the acknowledgement of alternative ways of certification, like the ones promoted by the Ecovida Network. Nevertheless, we have to admit that on a transition process, to assure to families and groups their income, we might appeal to the dominant certification processes systems;
13. FASE recognizes and acknowledges the legitimacy of aid agencies and Northern organizations when they try to dialogue with their national companies who import products from Brazilian agribusiness, and therefore, to question the way in which these companies do their work in our territory. But at the same time, we question if these same organizations are willing to discuss their countries’ model of consumption and the proposals of organizations like Via Campesina of reassessing and protecting the family and peasant agriculture in their countries. We ask these organizations not to involve themselves here in actions oriented by domestic questions “there” when they deal with their partners that work with the peasants “here”;
14. FASE does not deny that its proposals still need time and strong public policies, and that the political, economical and technical conditions are not yet ready for its immediate implementation, probably not even in the mid term. Therefore it is necessary to make a transition, what brings up the issue of the necessary coexistence between two forms of production and antagonistic classes. That is why we respect the organizations that have the task of dealing with the corporative sectors and the dominant classes, under the condition that they know how to differ themselves from the corporative interests of these sectors and try to understand the deep injustice and the abyssal inequality that reigns in our country;
15. We observe, with some concern, the growing discussion among NGOs close to the social movements and even organizations from the social movement themselves turning towards discussing corporate social responsibility, social and environmental sustainability of corporations production;
16. Without judging these organizations and acknowledging their right to choose other ways, we consider that FASE should not engage in promoting corporate social responsibility for several reasons:

- Precious and scarce resources destined to the support of the poorer and excluded social groups would be deviated to deal with the interests of privileged groups. Even if some of them have a real interest in changing their action for the better, the rule that conducts their good behavior would still be their profit. Not bad, we could say. But we do not receive resources, either private or public, to ensure the high profit of shareholders or of the owners and high officers of corporations that want to present themselves as the environmental vanguard;
- This would improperly legitimate sectors that have contributed historically to labor exploration and even to the perpetuation of slave labor;
- This would take off the burden of responsibility from the public institutions of assuring the obedience to the law, because the respect of environmental, social and labor laws should not be awarded, and in fact the vast majority of the corporations that do not observe these laws should be punished;
- We would be renouncing to any transformation of the deep injustice reality of land property in Brazil by pointing certain corporations as models, since these corporations have never actually manifested their support to the end of big land properties, but, on the contrary, contribute to their expansion and to the survival of a model that increases the deepening of inequality;
- By valuing corporations that have never been empathetic to the hundreds of rural, native and environmental workers that have been murdered would mean to forget our dead and to identify ourselves with short memory entities and peoples. It would mean to renounce to something that transcends a mere “make-up” moralization of the consumption and production model if we turn our attention to discuss the possibility of our urban consumers buy products from the environmental and social sustainable corporations. It would also mean the renouncing of an alliance between we from the “South”, with the “North”, between the city and the country, so that we can keep on looking for a change in society without which we would be left only with cynicism, charity or pragmatism;
- It would mean to accept that pragmatism should redirect our activities and with this we would say good bye to peasants, natives and the multiple identities of the agro-extractors. All of them keep saying: we want to keep on living as peasants, Indians, extractors, fishermen...

### **Conclusion: should we give in to the wave or should we resist?**

Giving in:

*You, who we used to call companions, brothers, Señor José, Doña Maria, Chief Damião, Francisca and Antonio, you don't know, but you are already dead. It was nice to walk part of the path in your company. We're sorry for the little we did. Now it's the*

*big game. It's the country's growth. Don't worry, it's for your own good. We say goodbye. See ya. Who knows if one "Fome Zero" would bring us back? Tell Ribamar and Doña Zefinha that one of us would be honored to be the Godfather of your kid when we return, if you are still there.*

Resisting:

*It is not without anguish that we balance ourselves over the rope of utopia, possessed by the vertigo, less by the abyss excavated under our feet and more by the distance that separates us from the safe platform from where we left and to where they want us now to return because there should be no point in trying to find something on the other side. Vertigo, because we know that mermaids do not sing in the void and neither we know what awaits us. But what would it be from the art of life without the movement that keeps us up, without a direction that orientates the movement, without something at the end of the rope that remains as a dream of justice, of empathy, of dignity, of equality? We did not invent this dream, what makes us keep on standing is not the dream itself, not dreamt anymore, but lived by so many women, so many youngsters, so many men with which we have lived and fought together that we can neither step back nor fall anymore.*

With all this, the options seem clear: agricultural diversifying against monoculture; family and peasant agriculture against agribusiness; agro-ecology against Green Revolution and Genetic Revolution; agrarian reform and limitation of the size of land property against big land properties; the keeping of the ecosystems against the standardization of spaces; the re-balancing of the rural and urban world, of the big cities and the small and middle ones against the emptying of the countryside and the industrial-urban concentration; the recognition of the traditionally occupied lands and the right to return to them for the traditional peoples and populations that are against the expropriation of the territorial rights and the privatization of the environment; the social utilization of biodiversity against the patenting of genetic resources; food sovereignty and the strengthening of the local and regional markets against the world neo-liberal markets; nutritional and food security against the impoverishment of the daily food supply. If these options are not enough for the building of a sustainable and democratic development project, and if choosing them does not guarantee its accomplishment, our experience shows us that they remain being feasible economically, socially, environmentally and politically.