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The trajectory of Communities that Support Agriculture in Brazil: contributions to the construction of Alternative Agri-Food Networks.

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Abstract
This article analyzes the trajectory of Communities that Support Agriculture (CSAs) in Brazil, with an emphasis on the case study of CSA Coopermonte, located in Bahia. The research seeks to understand how the relations between production and consumption are structured within these initiatives, highlighting the role of farmers and co-farmers (as consumers who are part of a CSA are called) in the construction of alternative agrifood experiences. To this end, theoretical contributions on Alternative Agrifood Networks (AFNs) and the metaphor of fertile soil are used as an analytical lens. The methodology adopted combines in-depth interviews and participant observation. The results indicate that, although small-scale, CSAs multiply dynamically through training processes and support networks. They contribute to the reconfiguration of relations between the countryside and the city, the sharing of risks, and the valorization of the work of agroecological family farming, as well as the strengthening of food sovereignty. Furthermore, education and the exchange of knowledge among participants encourage more critical and conscious consumption practices, revealing the potential of CSAs as spaces of resistance to the financialization of agrifood systems.

Keywords: Communities that Support Agriculture. Alternative Agri-Food Networks. Agri-Food Systems. Food Sovereignty.

Trajetória das Comunidades que Sustentam Agricultura no Brasil: contribuições para as Redes Agroalimentares Alternativas.

Resumo
Este artigo analisa a trajetória das Comunidades que Sustentam a Agricultura (CSAs) no Brasil, com ênfase no estudo de caso da CSA Coopermonte, localizada na Bahia. A investigação busca compreender como se estruturam as relações entre produção e consumo no interior dessas iniciativas, destacando o papel dos agricultores e coagricultores (como sao chamados os consumidores que fazem parte de uma CSA) na construção de experiências agroalimentares alternativas. Para isso, recorre-se a aportes teóricos sobre Redes Agroalimentares Alternativas (AFNs) e à metafora do solo fertil como lente analítica. A metodologia adotada combina entrevistas em profundidade e observação participante. Os

resultados apontam que, embora de pequena escala, as CSAs se multiplicam dinamicamente por meio de processos de formação e redes de apoio. Elas contribuem para a reconfiguração das relações entre campo e cidade, o compartilhamento de riscos, e valorização do trabalho da agricultura familiar agroecológica assim como o fortalecimento da soberania alimentar. Além disso, a educação e a troca de saberes entre os participantes estimulam práticas de consumo mais críticas e conscientes, revelando o potencial das CSAs como espaços de resistência à financeirização dos sistemas agroalimentares.

Palavras–chave: Comunidades que Sustentam a Agricultura. Redes Agroalimentares Alternativas. Sistema Agroalimentar. Soberania Alimentar.

La trayectoria de las comunidades de apoyo a la agricultura en Brasil: contribuciones a la construcción de Redes Agroalimentarias Alternativas.

Resumen
Este artículo analiza la trayectoria de las Comunidades de Apoyo a la Agricultura (CSA) en Brasil, con énfasis en el caso de estudio de la CSA Coopermonte, ubicada en Bahía. La investigación busca comprender cómo se estructuran las relaciones entre producción y consumo dentro de estas iniciativas, destacando el papel de los agricultores y coagricultores (como se denomina a los consumidores que forman parte de una CSA) en la construcción de experiencias agroalimentarias alternativas. Para ello, se utilizan como lente analítico las contribuciones teóricas sobre las Redes Agroalimentarias Alternativas (RAA) y la metáfora del suelo fértil. La metodología adoptada combina entrevistas en profundidad y observación participante. Los resultados indican que, aunque a pequeña escala, las CSA se multiplican dinámicamente a través de procesos de capacitación y redes de apoyo. Contribuyen a la reconfiguración de las relaciones entre el campo y la ciudad, a la compartición de riesgos y a la valorización del trabajo de la agricultura familiar agroecológica, así como al fortalecimiento de la soberanía alimentaria. Además, la educación y el intercambio de conocimientos entre los participantes fomentan prácticas de consumo más críticas y conscientes, revelando el potencial de las CSA como espacios de resistencia a la financiarización de los sistemas agroalimentarios.

Palabras clave: CSA. Redes Agroalimentarias Alternativas. Sistemas Agroalimentarios. Soberania Alimentaria.

1 Introduction

In the traditional model of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a farmer and a group of committed consumers establish a local food supply network. In this arrangement, consumers sign up to regularly receive products from a farm by paying an agreed amount in advance, which helps reduce market risks (Diekmann et al., 2019). CSAs are also characterized by the production of organic or agroecological food, carried out by family farmers through weekly harvests of vegetables, legumes, or fruits—always local and seasonal—and the distribution of fresh food baskets to consumers previously connected to the producers (MAZEMBACKERT E MEIRA, 2020).

CSAs are an example of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) that have been organized in different parts of the world since the 1960s. These initiatives were inspired by the teikei movement, which originated in Japan. According to Nemoto

(2021), during the 1960s and 1970s, in response to growing public concern over chemical pollution, women farmers who questioned the conventional model based on the use of agrochemicals and chemical fertilizers began the organic farming movement. The teikei system supported this initiative by enabling direct purchases of food, establishing a support network between farmers and consumers. Even today, teikei is recognized as a form of mutual assistance that enables the direct distribution of organic food, whether by farmers or consumers.

In light of the impacts generated by the conventional agricultural model—which includes indiscriminate use of agrochemicals, land concentration, and the expansion of export-oriented monocultures—CSAs represent an alternative based on more sustainable agri-food systems. These initiatives integrate local, organic, and agroecological production with solidarity-based consumption practices and cooperation between producers and consumers. In the Brazilian context, the widespread approval of agrochemicals has proven harmful to human health and, consequently, has contributed to increasing rates of illness (Gurguel et al., 2019). As Borsatto and Souza-Esquerdo (2019) highlight, although Brazil is recognized as a pioneer in the institutionalization of agroecology, it is also among the world's largest consumers of agrochemicals and one of the leading exporters of agricultural products. This scenario is compounded by the worsening of land concentration and intensive land use, which deepens the country's socio-environmental challenges.

Data from MapBiomas (2023) indicate that Brazil's cultivated agricultural area grew from 19.1 million hectares in 1985 to 61 million hectares in 2022. Almost all this area (96%) is used for grain and sugarcane crops, whose production has tripled over 38 years. According to Arruda et al. (2022), large areas of arable land are occupied by high-yield monocultures, and the most common intensive practices are highly dependent on water, synthetic mineral fertilizers, chemical pesticides, and increasingly also on genetically engineered products. In recent years, this monoculture model has intensified, increasing agrochemical use in the country, which reflects an environmental, economic, ethical, political, and social crisis affecting Brazil (GURGUEL et al., 2019).

In this context, it is necessary to distinguish and articulate the concepts of food security and food sovereignty, which express interdependent dimensions of contemporary agri-food systems. Food sovereignty is defined as the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods, as well as their right to define their own agricultural and food systems (La Vía Campesina, 2017). Food security, in turn, refers to physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, nutritious, and safe food that meets dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2003). The intensification of the export-oriented monoculture model and the growing financialization of agricultural commodities jeopardize both dimensions by subordinating food production to speculative dynamics at the expense of the sustainability of agri-food systems.

After the 2008 food crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of speculative financial investments on food price volatility became more evident. Epstein (2005) defines financialization as the growing importance of financial markets, motivations, institutions, and elites in managing the economy and political institutions, both nationally and internationally. The entry of new institutional

investors and the diversification of capital investment forms have transformed the profile of financial actors, going beyond the traditional role of banks[1].

This process has deepened due to structural factors that have made the agri-food sector increasingly attractive to financial capital. Lawrence et al. (2015) identify several key drivers: the decline in per capita availability of agricultural land due to environmental degradation, urbanization, and land concentration; the prioritization of biofuel production over food production, legitimized by state policies; the growth of middle classes in countries such as China, India, and Indonesia, accompanied by dietary changes that increase meat consumption and thus demand for grain-based animal feed; and finally, new financial opportunities associated with climate change, such as carbon credit markets.

These dynamics have led the agri-food system to become increasingly subordinated to the speculative logic of financial capital, with significant implications for food security, environmental sustainability, and territorial sovereignty. According to Clapp and Isakson (2018), financialization increases the distance (not only geographic) between producers and consumers, diminishing the agency of both. People lack knowledge about where and how food is produced and about the growing number of actors involved in global food supply chains. This increasing distance weakens the influence that producers and consumers can exert on food system outcomes.

Given these concerns, there is a call for more sustainable food systems. According to Moragues-Faus (2020) and Blay-Palmer et al. (2020), such systems should be equitable, healthy, and decentralized, with characteristics that make food systems more democratic at all levels. Although the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility and unsustainability of the global food system, it also demonstrated the resilience of local food initiatives and short supply chains (Mert-Cakal & Miele, 2021). CSAs are a prominent example. The number of consumers subscribing to food basket schemes and CSAs has grown exponentially (SCHMIDT et al. 2020, URGENCI 2020).

This article aims to analyze the trajectory of CSAs in Brazil, especially that of CSA Coopermonte in Bahia. Beyond the trajectory, the study seeks to identify how production and consumption are organized within the CSA and the contributions made by both farmers and co-farmers[2] in this process. The article is divided into four sections, in addition to this introduction. The theoretical framework presents key contributions for understanding Alternative Food Networks and Community Supported Agriculture. Then the methodology is detailed, followed by a discussion of the results, and finally, the concluding remarks.

[1] In this context, transnational agribusiness companies such as ADM, Bunge, Cargill, and Louis Dreyfus — known as the ABCD group — began to operate as financial intermediaries as well, offering derivatives and financial services linked to agricultural commodities (CLAPP, 2012).

[2] In the CSA model, consumers are identified as co-farmers because they play a more active role—they come to know where their food comes from, how it is grown, and who produces it, thereby establishing a connection between producers and community members (SOUSA et al., 2023).

2 Alternative Agri-Food Networks (AFNs) and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs).

When we talk about the organization of production and consumption, we are referring to agri-food systems, which have been studied primarily through two main approaches—some more local and others more global. The global approach is often framed by the concept of food regimes (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; Bernstein & Medina, 2012; McMichael, 2016; Niederle, 2017), while more localized agri-food systems are analyzed through actor-oriented perspectives (Long, 2001) and its derivative, the concept of farming styles (Ploeg, 1993; Howden & Vanclay, 2000; Niederle, Escher, & Conterato, 2014). Both the food regime and farming styles approaches have received criticism from various scholars. The food regime approach has struggled to explain how localized experiences operate and expand despite global pressures (Niederle & Wesz, 2018). On the other hand, the actor-oriented approach is sometimes critiqued for excessive "localism" (GODMAN, 2004).

Recently, there has been a trend toward greater dialogue between these two perspectives, as both offer important insights for analyzing contemporary phenomena. According to Niederle and Wesz (2018), since the 2000s, food regimes have been useful for understanding large-scale social processes in agriculture and food, such as transnationalization, financialization, and the appropriation of land and natural resources. Conversely, farming styles—through a more localized lens—have drawn attention to the diversity of agricultural experiences, practices, and methods. Despite the deepening processes of globalization, financialization, and food commodity markets, Wesz Jr. (2016, p. 37) argues that the local space remains a strategic locus for such economic activities. The power of transnational corporations, which may seem abstract and intimidating at a global scale, actually depends on the formation, maintenance, and exploitation of local relationships of proximity, trust, and reciprocity—often through family and friendship ties.

The organization of these agri-food systems in alternative ways has been framed as Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), a broad term describing short-distance networks between producers and consumers, cultivation methods that contrast with large-scale agribusiness, a commitment to sustainability, and some level of food sourcing localization (Jarosz, 2008; Melo, 2020; Bertolaia et al., 2021; Tonini et al., 2024). Examples of AFNs include food baskets, farmers' markets, solidarity purchasing groups, food cooperatives, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives. In Latin America, other AFN forms have emerged, such as short supply circuits via biofairs, ecological and organic markets—for example, the fairs in Cuenca and Loja (Ecuador), and in Jalisco and Xalapa (Mexico). Other examples include agroecological basket initiatives such as Shared Responsibility Agriculture in Mexico, the Utopia Basket in Ecuador (organized by consumers), and Indigenous producer baskets from the Network of Solidarity Economy and Food Sovereignty of the Kayambi People (RESSAK) (CASTILLA-CARRASCAL, 2021).

Several authors have contributed to the understanding of the role of Alternative Food Networks and short supply chains in local economies (Sonino & Marsden, 2006; Van der Ploeg, 2008). The literature has identified common elements among different types of AFNs, such as self-governance, sustainability, cooperation, self-production, and inclusion (Renting et al., 2003). Other scholars have emphasized

the importance of social interaction among different actors within these networks to ensure sustainability. Processes of reconnection between consumers and producers occur through geographical proximity to shorten food supply chains (De Bernardi et al., 2020; Gori et al., 2023), and more recently, also through online platforms and social media to bridge geographical gaps (Edelman et al., 2020). In this sense, some authors view the emergence of AFNs as expressions of alternative food geographies, which do not conceive of the "local" as a closed space, but rather as a point of interconnection where multiple relationships meet and interact (BLUMBERG et al., 2020).

Henderson and Van En (2007) present CSA as a strategy for small farmers to cope with the risks of an increasingly competitive market. In CSA, there is a sharing of both risks and benefits between consumers and producers. CSA represents a viable alternative to the corporate diet and agricultural concentration, encompassing environmental, economic, health, and social justice initiatives in an effort to provide farmers with better livelihoods and opportunities. According to van Oers et al. (2023), the CSA model requires shared responsibility, where farmers are not left to bear all the risks alone, and where poor financial health of the farm is not viewed as an individual business failure, but rather as a challenge requiring a community response.

In this line, Middendorf and Rommel (2024) define CSA as a system of risk-sharing and transparent co-financing through membership fees for the entire CSA operation, in exchange for a share of food for its members. This defining characteristic is based on funding rates, cost coverage/full financing, risk-sharing, transparency, and direct relationships that can take various forms within CSAs.

According to URGENCI (2020), CSAs are positioned as alternatives to the problems associated with global intensive agricultural production and distribution. They operate under a model in which consumers agree to share the risks and benefits with farmers. This makes CSAs unique because the current system typically places all the market risks on farmers, forcing millions to abandon their land. CSAs are also recognized by Mert-Cakal and Miele (2021) as an alternative food movement offering a bottom-up response to the challenges of dominant food systems.

In Brazil, Matzembacher and Meira (2020) conducted a case study on a CSA in Minas Gerais (CSA Alfa) and found that the initiative demonstrated the coexistence of multiple regulatory principles through a combination of market exchange and reciprocity. Moreover, the CSA organizes itself as a countermovement to the commodification of agriculture by increasing individual autonomy, which in turn enhances social cohesion. For the authors, the CSA is not necessarily antagonistic to the dominant system, but maintains a critical distance from conventional markets to activate the principles of fair trade. In discussing this countermovement, the authors draw on Polanyi's (2012a, 2012b) concept, which suggests that no society has purely market-based relations without, to some extent, reacting to their negative effects.

CSA Demetria was the first CSA in Brazil in the internationally recognized format, featuring annual and semiannual memberships and support for agricultural organisms. However, other experiences with alternative food networks have existed for decades in Brazil, in the form of food baskets, community markets, commercialization networks, among others. In the case of CSAs in Bahia, their beginnings were inspired by the Demetria CSA model and also by the region's organized social and solidarity economy. Coopermonte is a cooperative of farmers

located in Monte Gordo, in the municipality of Camaçari, Bahia. Before becoming the agricultural entity of CSA Coopermonte, they sold their produce at local municipal fairs and at the fair established in 2016 at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). Their participation in that fair came through a partnership with Rede Moinho, a cooperative promoting fair trade and solidarity economy products.

3 Methodology

To address the research objective, ethnographic methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation were employed. Regarding the theoretical framework, this study is grounded in approaches from economic sociology, agri-food systems, alternative food networks, short food supply chains, and the debates on food security and sovereignty. This framework was built through a literature review using academic databases such as Scopus, SciELO, and Google Scholar.

Qualitative interviews are particularly useful for understanding the meaning actors assign to their actions (Della Porta, 2014). In-depth interviews aim to describe, understand, evaluate, analyze, and reflect, and the questions posed are designed to elicit factual, descriptive, thoughtful, or emotional information (Osborne et al., 2021). When preparing the interview guides, relevant themes were listed to guide the conversation, and these were later refined. The guiding topics included the history and trajectory of the CSA, its structure and functioning, the profile of participants, challenges faced, and the CSA's relationship with other actors, whether directly or indirectly, such as social movements (agroecology, solidarity economy, agroforestry), government, among others.

Nine in-depth interviews were conducted: CSA Coopermonte (3 co-farmers and 2 farmers); CSA Nirvana (1 co-farmer); CSA Demetria (1 co-farmer); CSA Brasil (2 members, who are also co-farmers at CSA Manaus and CSA Bauru). A case study was carried out at CSA Coopermonte in Salvador, Bahia. To understand the dynamics among key CSA actors in Brazil, I also interviewed some pioneers and leaders of the CSA movement, including one of the co-farmers who initiated the CSA in the Demetria neighborhood in São Paulo. Additionally, some educators and participants from CSA Brasil were interviewed, including a co-farmer from CSA Alvorada (Manaus), who is also a member of URGENCI (the International Network for Community Supported Agriculture). From CSA Coopermonte, I interviewed two farmers and three co-farmers. I also performed document analysis of materials produced by the CSAs and studies related to the topic in Brazil.

The primary methodology used to obtain the results was the conduction of in-depth interviews, complemented by participant observation, both within the CSA Coopermonte WhatsApp group and during a CSA training course (from August to December 2021, held online). According to Flick (2009), in participant observation, the observer must find ways to be accepted in the research context and act according to the dynamics of the setting under study. Both CSA members and course participants were previously informed about the research, which was briefly presented with its objectives and scope. The training course, organized by CSA Brasil, was a free course conducted via Zoom, with fifteen participants and six sessions. The main topics covered included the shift "from a culture of price to a culture of appreciation", identifying guiding principles of a CSA, learning about social sculpture

and why CSA is considered an example of it, as well as practical matters like how to start a CSA and the roles and responsibilities within the collective.[3]

To organize and code the interviews, I used the qualitative analysis software NVivo. The codes used were: CSA history and origins, expansion and replication, principles and philosophy, actor profiles, operational dynamics and challenges, education and training, political and social aspects, and local innovations and adaptations. Moreover, the structure proposed by Sekulova et al. (2017) supported the analysis of the results. They use the metaphor of "fertile soil" to provide a useful framework to describe or explain the complex process of grassroots and community-based project emergence and evolution. Fertile soil is understood as a specific quality of the social texture, characterized by richness, diversity, uncertainty—but also by multiple tensions and contradictions. This fertility is marked by a shared history of social organization, protest, and activism; diversity; values of cooperation and trust; concerns for justice and sustainability; the presence of countercultures; agency and self-empowerment of actors; social networks; a non-restrictive external regime; and the availability of physical space(s). These factors do not all need to be present; they may also impose—or rather, conflict—with one another (Sekulova et al., 2017, p. 3). The metaphor of fertile soil used by the authors helps explain the emergence, evolution, and diffusion of sustainable community initiatives such as CSAs.

4 Results and Discussion

To analyze the data obtained through in-depth interviews and other previously mentioned methodologies, we initially used the theoretical framework proposed by Sekulova et al. (2017). In a second phase, based on the case study of CSA Coopermonte, the data were systematized and analyzed with the aid of NVivo software, organized into categories previously defined in the methodology.

The theoretical framework by Sekulova et al. (2017) conceives community initiatives as expressions of a "fertile soil"—that is, material, symbolic, and relational conditions that enable the emergence and multiplication of alternative economic practices. CSA Demetria, the first of its kind in Brazil, is an example of such social and political fertility. The first element of this fertile soil concerns a shared history of mobilization and activism. CSA Demetria emerged in 2011 in a territory with a legacy of agroecological practices and biodynamic agriculture. Fazenda Demetria has been the first area of biodynamic production in Brazil since 1974, which gave its name to the neighborhood and fostered the development of anthroposophic[4] actions and initiatives such as Waldorf schools and, later, CSA Demetria (FRANCO et al., 2017).

The physical and institutional environment is also a relevant factor. Experiences such as that of the Demetria neighborhood benefit from a favorable setting with arable land, community infrastructure, and strong territorial ties.

[3] Although it was not directly part of this research's methodology, my participation in the 8th International CSA Symposium—Decolonize Your Plate, Amazonize the World—held online from October 25 to 29, 2021, deserves to be highlighted. This was an international symposium on Community Supported Agriculture and Local Solidarity Partnerships in Agroecology (LSPA).

[4] According to Neto et al. (2014), anthroposophy is the name Rudolf Steiner gave to his "Spiritual Science" after breaking away from other European philosophical movements in which he had participated throughout his life, such as Theosophy.

The agency of social actors is another important aspect highlighted in the results. Leadership figures played a crucial role, such as Hermann Pohlmann, a German visual artist, who, together with Claudia Vivacqua, launched the CSA Demetria project with thirty families. According to Lencioni et al. (2018), by 2013, there were already over 300 members, involving the municipalities of Botucatu, Ourinhos, and São Paulo.

The sustainability of CSAs also relies on social values such as trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. These values are manifested in practical terms through advance financing of production, shared responsibility between farmers and consumers (and their challenges), and collaborative management of activities. According to Pohlmann (2012), the CSA is seen as a social sculpture: the farmer no longer sells their products through intermediaries but relies on the participation of consumer members to organize and fund their production, contributing to sustainable regional development and promoting fair trade. The metaphor of the "social sculpture," inspired by Joseph Beuys, synthesizes the collective process of shaping a way of life in which food ceases to be a commodity and becomes an expression of an ethics of care (ADRIANI & KONERTZ, 1979, p.19).

Another element of the analysis is the diversity of profiles and experiences characterizing the CSA movement in Brazil. The interviews revealed a wide range of social actors: family farmers, agrarian reform settlers, engaged consumers, nutritionists, and others with different motivations and levels of involvement. This heterogeneity enables the articulation of diverse demands and the development of solutions adapted to various territorial contexts. There are currently over 150 CSA[5] initiatives, some well-established and others in earlier stages. According to the results of the in-depth interviews, the growth of CSAs is partly due to the training processes developed by the CSA Brazil Community Association.

There is a variety of experiences, from CSAs organized by upper-middle-class consumers concerned with food quality, to CSAs formed by MST (Landless Workers' Movement) settlers, CSAs in São Paulo's outskirts aiming to provide affordable products, CSAs created by farmers themselves (such as CSA Coopermonte in Bahia), and CSAs in small properties in the Federal District with the goal of strengthening biodynamic agriculture and Waldorf pedagogy-based education. Despite the diversity of initiatives, one common feature across CSAs is the strong involvement of nutritionists. This is due to food and nutrition security policies and related programs over the past ten years in Brazil.

Politically, CSAs express a commitment to social justice and environmental sustainability, acting as forms of resistance to the dominant agri-food model. Engagement with themes such as agroecology, anti-pesticide campaigns, the Slow Food movement, solidarity economy, and family farming is part of the CSA co-farmers' profile. However, there are also other consumer profiles not initially politically engaged, who become involved and end up financially supporting their CSA and receiving the products.

There is also a discourse and commitment to food as a political act, alongside a discussion about what constitutes real food. CSAs often form small working groups

[5] See the map: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/embed?mid=1LySgImg8tVgKoDBz5NtlnVXgsLo&ll=17.058983733415523%2C-47.46161989999993&z=4

to help mobilize activities between farmers and co-farmers. The consumer stops being just a consumer and becomes an active participant in the process—not necessarily by working the land, but by sharing production risks and becoming co-responsible for the entire process. The commitment of co-farmers to finance production for a year provides stability and peace of mind for farmers to plan and grow.

Moreover, CSAs are connected through social networks and exchange circuits that operate via meetings, workshops, technical visits, among others. A key actor in this connection is CSA Brazil. This association began its work in 2011, offering CSA training programs to improve food situations and multiply experiences across the country. The training sessions teach everything from basic principles, philosophy, and history of the CSA movement to practical issues like financial organization, production, and more. Participants often express the need to create more CSAs to shorten the distance between countryside and city. Many take the initiative to return to rural life as farmers; others are already part of a CSA and face the challenge of maintaining stable quotas for co-farmers. Some participants express concern over pesticide use and the need to access organic or agroecological food at more affordable prices.

Reported challenges include unstable quotas, voluntary-based management, logistical difficulties, and balancing growth with fidelity to founding principles. These tensions and dilemmas also serve as valuable learning experiences. Finally, the core principles of CSAs in Brazil include: mutual aid; cultural diversification; acceptance of seasonal foods; appreciation; deepening friendships; independent distribution (self-distribution); shared organization (management); mutual learning among people; maintaining appropriate harvest sizes and promoting local consumption; and stability. These principles are central to organizing work within CSAs, taught in CSA courses and regularly discussed in meetings. Each CSA has its own way of organizing its activities, depending on its dynamics, farmers, and co-farmers. Yet, the underlying idea is that these principles guide their actions.

Up to this point, we have presented the results and a general discussion about the trajectory of CSAs in Brazil. In the following section, we offer a more specific discussion on the case of CSA Coopermonte. Coopermonte is a cooperative of farmers located in Monte Gordo, a district of the municipality of Camaçari, Bahia. Before becoming the farming body of CSA Coopermonte, they sold their produce at local markets and at a farmers' market that has been held since 2016 at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). Their participation in this market was made possible through a partnership with the Rede Moinho network, a cooperative for marketing fair trade and solidarity economy products. Despite the importance of these spaces, financial instability remained a constant challenge, as reported by one of the interviewed farmers:

> Sometimes you take too many products and end up not selling well, or you take too few and don't have enough to sell. This instability created a difficult situation because the fixed cost of going to the market couldn't be covered by our sales (driver's fee, fuel, tolls, and car maintenance – the distance from Monte Gordo to UFBA is approximately 70 km). In the beginning, we used 15% of the cooperative's sales to cover these costs,

> then it went up to 20%, and even that wasn't enough. (CSA Coopermonte farmer).

The opportunity to transition to the CSA model arose in March 2018, during the World Social Forum in Salvador, when CSA Brazil promoted training and awareness-raising activities. In that context, people who attended the training course expressed interest in starting a new CSA in Salvador. Thus, CSA Pituba was created (later renamed CSA Coopermonte), with the first delivery taking place in July 2018. At that time, there were only two co-farmers involved, although the farmers estimated that at least 24 co-farmers were needed to make the production viable.

During 2018 and 2019, the group went through fluctuations, with frequent entries and exits. The group consolidated a few months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the second half of 2020 onwards, workshops with an agronomist were held to guide the farmers in agroecological practices. Nine in-person workshops were conducted between July and December 2020, revealing that the current production model was unsustainable, which led to the introduction of new cultivation techniques, soil management, and diversification.

Since 2021, there has been a strengthening of relationships between farmers and co-farmers, along with improved production organization. Currently, CSA Coopermonte has five delivery points: on Fridays, co-farmers living nearby receive their shares at the CSA Acauã point; on Saturdays, deliveries take place in Lauro de Freitas and three points in Salvador: at the Caminho Natural store, at the Viva o Grão store in Pituba, and at a delicatessen in the Rio Vermelho neighborhood. The CSA is composed of 32 co-farmers and twelve farmers. The weekly share includes eight items, such as roots, fruits, vegetables, and processed products. According to one interviewed farmer:

> Today, the basket consists of eight weekly items: roots, fruits, vegetables, and processed goods. But if more co-farmers joined, it would be possible to offer 10 or even 12 items. And who knows, we might organize shares for larger families and smaller families. We don't have a fixed model; we learned in CSA courses about social sculpture, where you are the artist and the work of art itself. So, our CSA will have its own identity—both from the farmers' and the co-farmers' sides. Depending on the circumstances, it's not a rigid model where everyone has to follow strict rules. (CSA Coopermonte farmer).

The profile of the co-farmers is diverse; many had no previous ties to agroecology, agroforestry, or farming, but are currently in a learning process. Participation in the CSA has provided access to knowledge on topics such as Non-Conventional Edible Plants (PANCs). Ora-pro-nobis, for example, is delivered regularly, and co-farmers have learned to use it in salads or stews, recognizing its high protein value.

There are also co-farmers with prior experience in other CSAs and social movements, who contribute with their knowledge and experiences. There is a more conscious group that understands the CSA is not just a service for organic food delivery, but a long-term relationship with people from the countryside. They start learning about seasonality, climate change issues, and how crops are affected; they learn recipes with fruits and vegetables that are no longer widely used, fostering

awareness of the co-farmer's role and the importance of participating in these spaces.

Despite the progress, there are important challenges. The main one is transportation, given the cost and the distance between Monte Gordo and Salvador. In response to this challenge, co-farmers have sometimes organized to collect their shares themselves. Another challenge is the need to develop a financial planning model based on the real costs of production and farmers' livelihoods. As summarized by one co-farmer:

> Because the CSA is collaborative, it has the potential to shift people out of the consumer mindset and into a more critical stance. To seek to understand what they are consuming—not only who produces the food, but to recover recipes with foods that are no longer used, stories connected to place and culture. But this depends on people truly stepping out of passivity. That's a major challenge. (CSA Coopermonte co-farmer).

CSA Coopermonte also redistributes social shares, financed by co-farmers, to a retirement home, promoting access to healthy food within a framework of social justice. Since 2021, interactions among members have increased, with participation in CSA meetings, product and recipe exchanges, training initiatives that reinforce the commitment to food sovereignty, collective work efforts, agroforestry workshops, planning meetings, and more.

Based on the field data analysis, the table below presents a summary of the main findings regarding the analytical dimensions of CSA Coopermonte, organized into the following pre-defined categories: history and beginnings, expansion and multiplication, principles and philosophy, actor profiles, operational dynamics and challenges, education and training, political and social aspects, and local innovations and adaptations:

Table 1. Analytical dimensions of CSA Coopermonte

Category	Main findings
History and beginnings CSA Coopermonte	The initiative began in 2018 after CSA Brazil activities at the World Social Forum in Salvador. Coopermonte used to sell at fairs before adopting the CSA model.
Expansion	Gradual growth: started with two co-farmers and now has 32. Deliveries occur at five points (Monte Gordo, Lauro de Freitas, and Salvador).
Principles and philosophy	Based on collaboration, transparency, and co-responsibility.
Actor profiles	Farmers from Coopermonte and diverse co-farmers: some with agroecological backgrounds, others in training. The group is heterogeneous, but with growing awareness of the co-farmer's active role.
Operational dynamics and challenges	Main challenge is transportation (cost and distance of approx. 70 km to Salvador). There are also difficulties structuring financial planning based on real production costs. Share organization follows a flexible model.

Education and training	Workshops with agronomists, agroecological training. Co-farmers learn about PANCs, seasonality, traditional recipes, and food production.
Political and social aspects	Redistribution of shares to a retirement home funded by co-farmers; strengthens rural-urban ties and fosters political and food awareness.
Local innovations and adaptations	Flexible share model; co-farmer mobilization to assist with logistics; active participation in meetings and exchanges. Ongoing adaptation to local realities.

Source: Own elaboration.

Based on the results presented, it is possible to affirm that the experience of CSA Coopermonte represents a concrete practice of reconfiguring the relationship between production and consumption. Its consolidation trajectory reveals structural challenges faced by family farmers—such as logistics and economic sustainability—on one hand, and, on the other, the transformative potential of the CSA model, especially in building bonds between countryside and city. Beyond the commercialization of food, it is an educational and political process that involves both farmers and co-farmers in a common project aimed at strengthening food sovereignty, agroecology, and local economies more broadly.

4 Conclusions

The metaphor of "fertile soil" proposed by Sekulova et al. (2017) proved useful to understand the emergence, consolidation, and diversity of CSAs. Experiences such as CSA Demetria, rooted in sociocultural contexts with a strong tradition in biodynamic agriculture, alternative education, and community organization, show how specific historical and symbolic conditions favor the development of such initiatives. However, the case of CSA Coopermonte shows that CSAs can also emerge in other contexts, through cooperation, the building of trust networks, and the agency of local actors.

CSA Coopermonte does not share the same history or context as Demetria, but values such as cooperation and trust emerge, along with social networking by farmers and co-farmers, and the agency and empowerment of participants. These are different characteristics for different CSA experiences. Reciprocal relationships and the participation of co-farmers in tasks formerly carried out only by farmers give meaning to a common project, not without challenges related to responsibility, coexistence, and criticism of consumption.

Even on a small scale, CSAs have multiplied thanks to efforts in training, networking, and knowledge sharing, as shown by the strategic role of CSA Brazil. These initiatives are concrete responses to the financialization of agriculture and food. They reduce risks for both farmers and co-farmers. Co-farmers now have more information about where their food comes from, avoid pesticide-laden products, can participate in processes previously inaccessible, and become more aware of land access and the importance of education to rethink consumption habits. Farmers also benefit, as they gain greater stability and can dedicate themselves more directly to working the land and selling without intermediaries.

CSAs across Brazil have made tangible efforts to promote a more critical, conscious, and engaged form of consumption, aiming to go beyond simply replicating a model. It is about developing context-specific ways of organizing production and consumption that respond to the unique challenges faced by each initiative.

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