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Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Agroecology and power distribution within supply chains: Andean blueberry case in Colombia

ANDRES MESA

University of Missouri, Rural Sociology, United

Abstract

Political ecology approaches the processes of power distribution among the actors, which is essential to determine the possibilities and limitations that smallholders have within the food systems. It reconnects the research in agrifood systems with its political and ecological implications, opening a spectrum of questions related to power distribution, access to technology, and information flows. This understanding of the agrifood systems provides foundations for reinforcing the social sphere of agroecology, which as a social movement, emphasises the importance of social capital to lead collective action and scale up the knowledge and innovations generated through family labour, small and highly diversified farms. Thus, agroecology offers crucial elements by focusing on finding ways to generate changes in the institutional and political framework to guarantee food systems where smallholders have access to markets, technologies, and knowledge. This study considers the case of Andean blueberry producers in Colombia and the challenges and barriers that smallholders face in order to form supply chains framed in agroecological principles. It was found that the power configuration and the legal framework of the conventional fruit supply chains in Colombia impact the formation of agroecological supply chains, preventing smallholders of making decisions and forming alternative supply chains. Nevertheless, the success of this endeavour is expected if those communities are tied to a specific territory with common cultural patterns, have personal closeness, and family ties. For that, a collective action approach supported by the dimensions of social capital can re-signify and enhance the idea of forming smallholder supply chains for this novel fruit in Colombia.

Keywords: Agroecology, alternative supply chains, Andean blueberry, Colombia, power distribution, smallholders