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“Competing pathways for equitable food systems transformation:
Trade-offs and synergies”

Fresh food markets, small-food producers and transformative path of food system in Thailand

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Abstract

The decline of importance of agriculture in the developing world highlights the competing food systems. On the one hand, the local food systems producing food in response to local food demand, and on the other hand, the global and industrial food system that widens the food supply chains in response to the global food demands. Drawing on two research projects, namely the Evolution of Fresh Food Markets in the northeast of Thailand, and the Local Food System (funded by Thailand Science Research and Innovation), this paper seeks to explore competing between two main food systems, and propose a pathway to a more sustainable food system. We found that local markets have been evolved and expanded following to the growing urbanisation. The expansion of local markets is widening the opportunities for smallholders' producers to take their food products, usually fresh, to the markets, meanwhile, is also broaden the outlets of industrial foods. We found that small food producers have been significantly drawing into the supply chains of industrial and global food systems, not only through the raw food products, but also through modern agricultural inputs. While the local food system continues to response to local food demands, in particular in a manner of self-contained in case of staple food (rice), the small producers are increasingly facing the chronic indebtedness, the variation of global market prices and the changing patterns and consumption tastes. We propose a transformative pathway for sustainable local food system by unlocking or breaking the chains to modern input supplies of agro-industries, replacing by converting local materials, such as food wastes, agricultural residues, etc. into organic fertilisers. It is also involved fabricating and nurturing networks among smallholders, such as between those who grow maize and husbandry farmers. In addition, local food produces must be diversified, and markets needed to be enhanced and widened. This path of transformation of food system could heighten the food costs, which can be managed or controlled with redirection of public investments, i.e. the urban food waste management, the development of innovation and appropriate technology for processing agricultural or crop residues into fertilisers, etc.

Keywords: Food chains, fresh food market, small food producers, Thailand