



# Online fair trade market from organized civil society in Colombia: case study of food sovereignty and tropical ecosystems conservation

Erika Arias<sup>[1]</sup>, Lucero Blanco<sup>[1]</sup>, Felipe Rodríguez<sup>[1]</sup>, Laura Cabezas<sup>[2]</sup>,  
 [1]Asociación de prosumidores agroecológicos Agrosolidaria  
 [2]Universidad El Bosque. Vicerrectoría de Investigaciones. Instituto de Salud y Ambiente. Bogotá, Colombia.

Contact:  
 [1]monterrey@agrosolidaria.org  
 [1]territorios@agrosolidaria.org  
 [2]lcabezasp@unbosque.edu.co



## Introduction

According to (Ricciardi, et al., 2018) 34% of the diversified and nutritious food that reaches homes in the world comes from small agricultural units (<2ha) thanks to the work of peasant families (1). Additionally, in 2018 the UN enacted the declaration on the rights of peasants (2), Colombia ratified this declaration in congress with Act 028 of 2023 (3).

Therefore, to generate informed awareness of the importance of **environmental sustainability** and **food security and sovereignty**, the **observatory of Agrosolidaria agri-food system**, made up of more than **930 peasant families in Colombia** was created. This seeks to understand how this initiative from organized civil society resists the violations introduced by the covid-19 pandemic and confinement by continuing the ancestral peasant markets and short marketing chains which promote equity for small stakeholders, agri-food products and at the same time support the conservation of ecosystems cared for through the philosophy: production respectful with nature (4), thus contributing to a fair and sustainable local food system.

## Methods

The team generated a database of the Agrosolidaria Teusaquillo market from 2023 which is articulated with 300 peasant and artisan families. Farmers join efforts to bring 221 food and artisan products to the country's capital through an online form that is currently available serving 200 families in Bogota.

The observatory of the online for fair trade in its first phase seeks in a descriptive manner to inform the associates of Agrosolidaria about the commercial dynamics of the market. This exploration involves the analysis by types of production and the ecosystems in which the agri-food system affects through corroboration with field visits to peasant agricultural units and data analysis through the use of ArcGIS and Rstudio.

## Agrosolidaria fair trade data

The Agrosolidaria Teusaquillo market emerged in 2020 during the confinement caused by COVID 19. In this context, peasant markets, being the safest and most reliable marketing chain for peasant families (5), were forced to cease activities. Globally, these public spaces are used by families living in dispersed rural areas with few roads access to offer the surplus of their small agri-food productions and thus obtain economic resources for their homes (6).

For this reason, in a self-managed way 300 out of 930 **Colombian associated peasant families** under the legal frame of the NGO Agrosolidaria (30 years expertise) start up the Online Market of fair prices. It consists of a weekly offer using Google forms tool that sale to date **166 markets** in the city of Bogota affecting 7 of its localities.

From the 221 products offered in the agri-food ecosystem we categorized 11 production types, based on the concepts of knowledge that agri-producers use to produce and to add value to their crops, as shown in **Figure 1**.

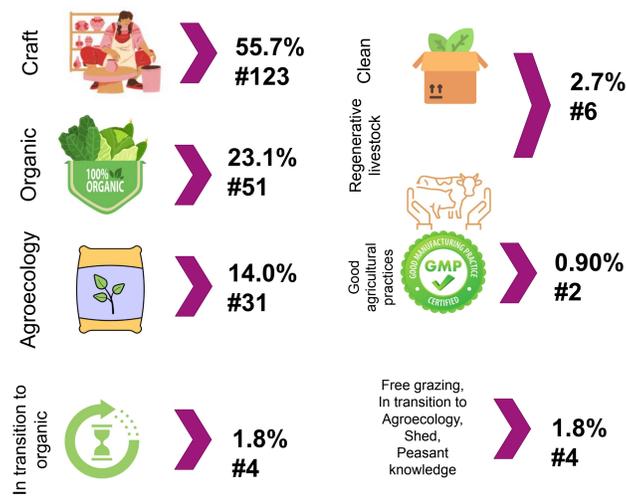
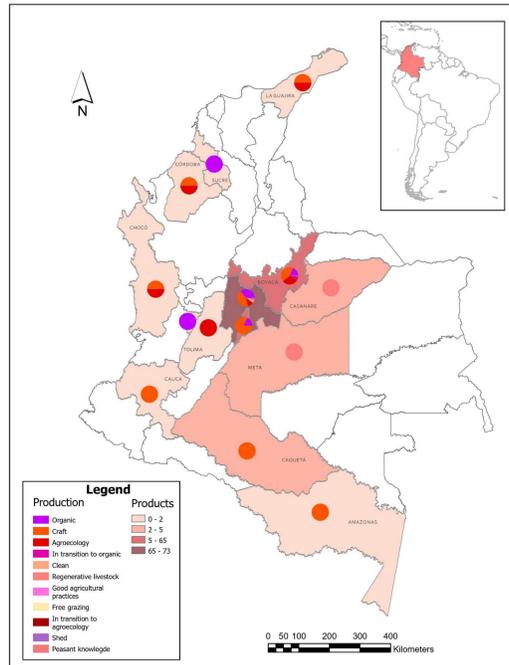


Figure 1. Type of production used in the Agrifood System of the fair trade market, expressed in percentage and number of products. Own elaboration, 2023.

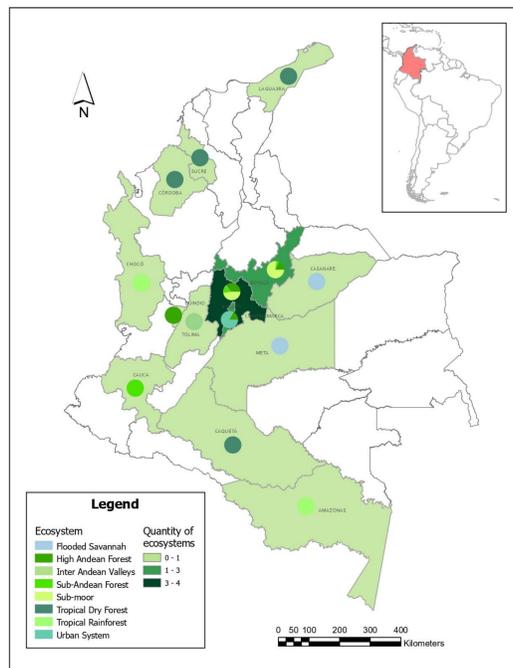
## Communities and production location

Field groundwork made possible to generate the degree of agri-food system incidence at the national level, being the municipalities the smallest administrative unit of analysis, we evidenced 48 municipalities in the Fair Price Market integrated into 14 departments. According to the results, shown by the heat map (**map 1**) the production level in the Andean zone, represented by the departments of Boyaca, Cundinamarca and the urban system, integrate a greater number of production techniques, likewise greater diversification of food, mostly explained by the proximity and road connection to Bogota. In turn, from the 221 products, 146 (66%) offer some type of added value to final sale.



Map 1. Online fair trade market presence by production type and product number at department level in Colombia. Own elaboration, 2023.

We identified small agricultural units distribution in the territorial ecosystem gradient. There are **8 tropical ecosystems** associated with the production systems at the national level (**map 2**). According to the production categories, with the greatest market weight (**figure 1**) is possible to say that **craft and agroecological** production is associated with **6 ecosystems** and mostly with urban and sub-moor ecosystems; Organic production is found in 4 areas of ecological interest and especially in sub-moor and high Andean Forest. In general, the global trend at the ecosystem and production level is expressed in **figure 2**.



Map 2. Online fair trade market presence by ecosystem type and quantity of ecosystem per department. Own elaboration, 2023.

## Sub-moor



37.5% (83)

Urban system



23.9% (53)

## High Andean forest



22.6% (50)

Sub-Andean forest

6.3% (14)

## Tropical rainforest

4% (9)

Tropical dry forest

2.2% (5)

## Flooded savannah

1.3% (3)

Figure 2. Online fair trade market presence in tropical ecosystems in Colombia. Data is shown in percentage and number of products. Own elaboration, 2023.

## Discusión

In line with the results obtained by (Gütschow & Feola, 2022)(7) Agrosolidaria Market corresponds to an **alternative agricultural community food network** aware of ecosystem services. It relies on short marketing chains; therefore, it has a specific and smaller market niche, aligned above all in an aware community that supports rural development, its income and sustainability in the face of the dominant agri-food system.

Consequently, the organizational work and the type of production oriented towards organic, agroecological and artisanal agriculture allow maintaining this social interaction between the countryside and the city, in addition to rural farmer market-tourism (7). However, an **indisputable challenge is the price associated with these productions**, which, being higher compared to market chains, makes the commercial group to which it can access even smaller.

Additionally, the findings of (Bos & Owen, 2016) (8) suggest that this type of innovation developed by Agrosolidaria partners is in accordance with a **serious management of social networks** and the Internet space, which potentiates: i) Agrosolidaria's profile and customer base and ii) an efficient and low-cost operation. In addition, it meets the previously stated challenge, since the purpose of virtual spaces satisfy the promotional, advertising and diffusion line, expanding the market to diverse spaces and a larger customer base, with the challenge of neglecting the social interaction of the farmer markets.



Photo Agrosolidaria. Organic wheat production in antique stone, Socotá, Boyacá.

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## Conclusions and challenges

Tropical forests are threatened to a great extent by the expansion of the agricultural frontier (9), in contrast, the smallest agricultural units produce the most diversified global food (1). As shown in Agrosolidaria case study, small agri-producers are committed to establishing productions that are respectful with ecosystems (especially using organic and agroecological methods) and continue adding value using craft models to reach specialized markets, both aligned with **current international agreements as the 2030 Agenda (SDGs 2, 12 and 15)**. Self-managed processes is noteworthy, these ensure sustainability and innovation. These are demonstrated with: i) online market incidence in 44% states production presence at the national territory, ii) the online market continues its operation to date and, iii) the market became an option to get higher family's revenues by reaching directly the final consumer.

**The observatory is a strategic alliance between academia and organized civil society.** Hereafter, it aspires to manage resources that allow a more robust analysis in order to determine differentiating variables to promote educational change forces in a more conscious, ethical and respectful food consumption systems, mega-biodiversity and, 'country-city' link in an innovative way. **A great challenge identified** is that **only 10% of the products offered comply with the commercial regulations of the national market**, consequently, in bureaucratic terms, even the agri-producer families do not find a solidarity path that allows them to articulate with agri-food industry.



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