

The School Meal Program as a Tool for Family Farming Development and Agroecological Transition: Governance Challenges in Three Brazilian Municipalities.

AUTHORS

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I. BACKGROUND

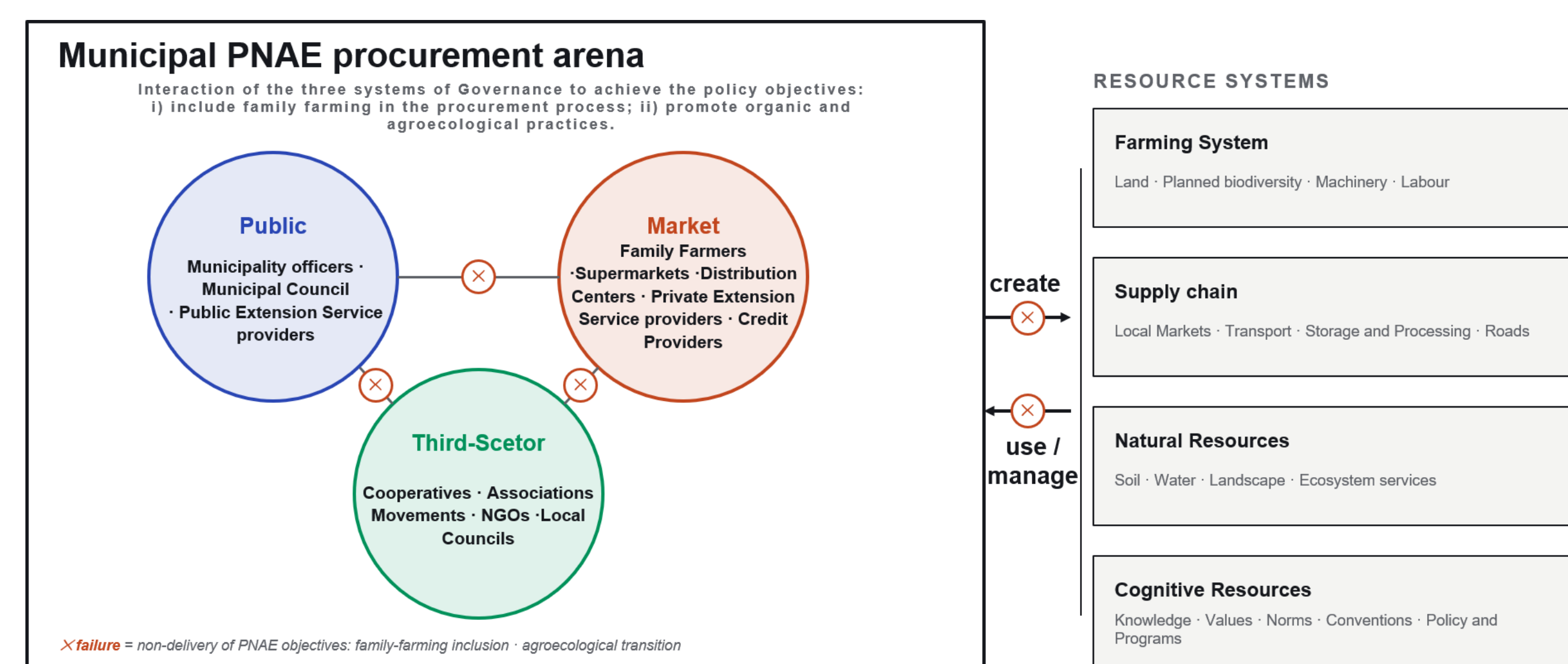
- Public food procurement (PFP) is increasingly recognized as a tool for transforming food systems.
- Brazilian School's Feeding Program (PNAE) is one of the oldest and largest PFP programs in the world.
- PNAE: 45% quota for family farming; organic and agroecological food production as a priority
- 51% of the municipalities would not meet the current procurement quota¹ and organic and agroecological procuring are marginal.
- Existing literature on program implementation focus on national institutional aspects or local supply and demand factors.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the governance challenges of PNAE to implement family farming quotas and agroecological and organic prioritization at the municipal level?
- What are possible solutions and governance arrangements for mitigating those challenges?

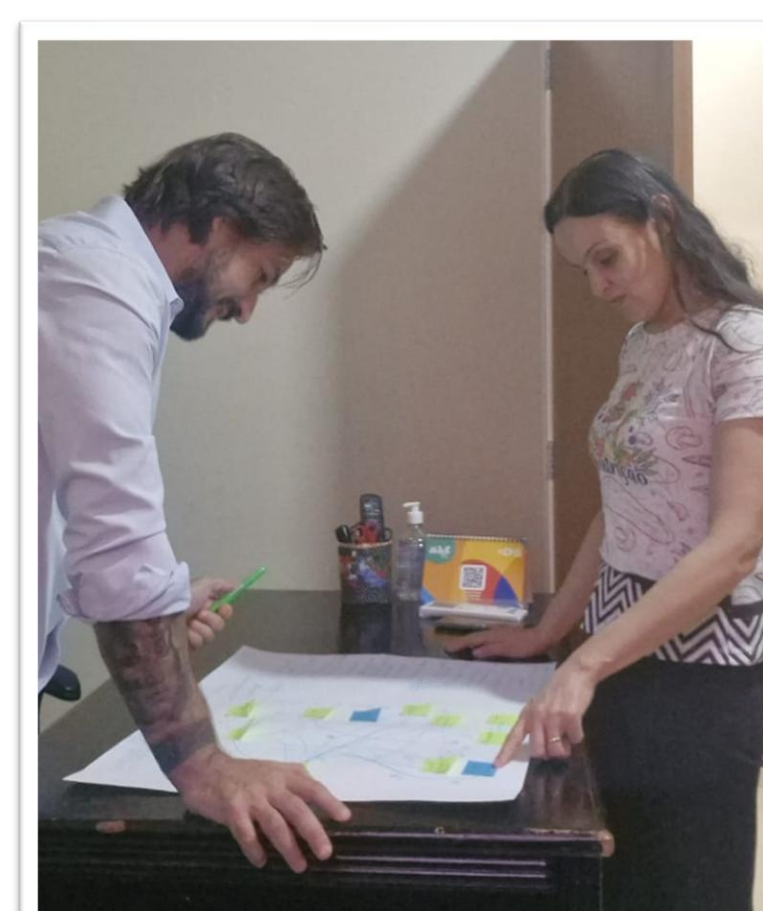
III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- New Institutional Economics and integration of Farming, Socio-Technical and Socio-Ecological Systems



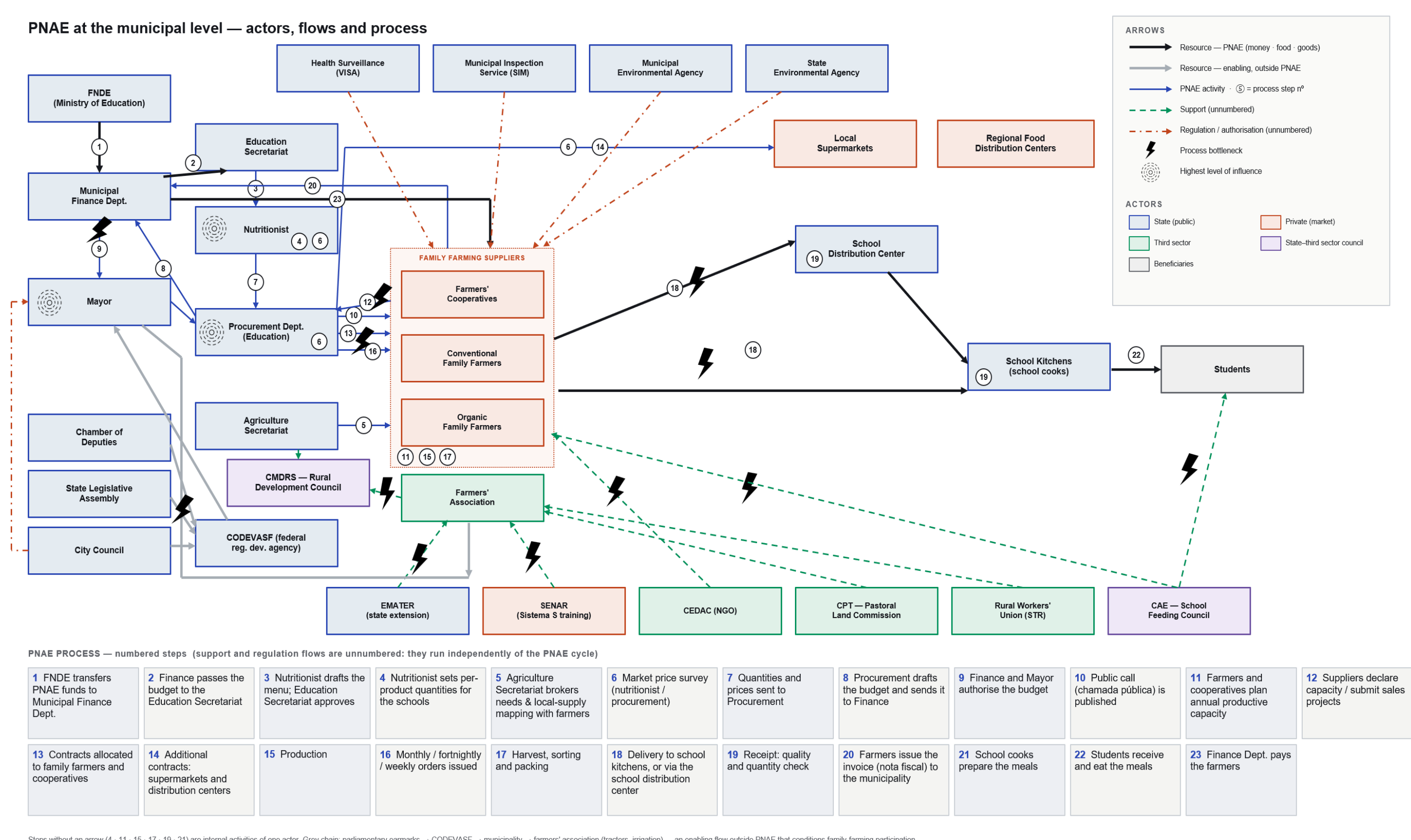
IV. METHODOLOGY

- Three municipalities in the states of Minas Gerais and Goiás: Urucuia MG, Formoso MG and Cidade de Goiás GO <30K inhabitants, Cerrado biome, different stages of program implementation
- 9 individual process net-maps with farmers and municipality officers mapping stakeholders, their linkage, influence on outcomes, bottlenecks and potential solutions.
- 57 semi-structured interviews with actors from the three sectors approaching their role in PNAE and how they interact with the four resource systems.



Reference: ¹Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação. (n.d.). Dados da agricultura familiar: Aquisições da agricultura familiar — PNAE 2022 [Family farming data: Family farming acquisitions — PNAE 2022; Data set]. Retrieved August 28, 2026

V. RESULTS



Main Insights:

- High concentration of power** — informal rules dominate execution and are held by a few actors
- Inherited location decides access** — family farms hold the poor soils and dry land; distance from town excludes suppliers
- Livestock lock-in** — land, labour and credit flow to a chain PNAE cannot legally buy (no local processing capacities)
- Irregular supply is a governance failure** — no purchase certainty, no continuous extension service, no machinery on time
- Fragmented demand** — PNAE, PAA, local fair and retail run in parallel, never aggregated into one local market
- Individualism as the norm** — farmers success are individual stories; programmes do not create cooperation
- PNAE seeds niches, not system change** — too weakly articulated to coordinate an agroecological transition; NGO initiatives should be more articulated with other actors from public and private governance systems

V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Barriers are interlocking three-sector failures** — they sit on the channels between systems, not inside one sector
- Aggregate the demand** — municipal + state PNAE, PAA and own-budget purchases as one predictable market
- Build access to market** — collection routes, collective processing, sanitary inspection via inter-municipal consortia, sociobiodiversity
- Build cooperation to deliver productive resources** — water, soil correction, machinery and continuous extension services through collective arrangements
- Activate the local councils** — school feeding and rural development councils with farmer seats and a coordination mandate
- Make the organic and agroecological priority verifiable** — with real advantages inside the programme



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