

REVISITING THE 'URBAN BIAS' AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO FOOD SECURITY

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Abstract

Accentuating both damaging environmental change and food insecurity, we focus on the dynamics between national development policies and food systems. Using Lipton's 'urban bias' hypothesis, we position citizen-consumers as a pre-eminent socio-political force facilitated by the urban-rural power relations underpinning the food system. Urban consumers particularly benefit from industrial food systems through cheap food and from cheap manufacturing and service sector labour, released as rural populations become marginal to agricultural productivity gains. Consequently, many cities overflow with redundant workers, while rural areas contain impoverished, insecure agrarian populations often tied to global supermarket supply chains. For these populations, food security can be elusive. While Lipton's argument applied to three and more decades ago, his hypothesis that policies favour urban populations when policies pursuing economic growth are based on a presumed 'natural' coupling between rural outmigration and urban manufacturing jobs could apply more contemporaneously. We apply key urban bias concepts to the unfolding of events in Thailand, detecting conditional support for the hypothesis. We conclude by canvassing food system actions to counter the urban bias with a more ecological view of urban-rural interdependencies linked to sustainable food production and consumption.

Introduction

The world is at a turning point as for the first time in human history the urban population is today larger than the rural population. However, poverty has still overwhelmingly a rural face and the rural economy and society still perform a vital part in the development process and in people's well-being. (Kay, 2009, p. 103)

For more than 25 years, Tony McMichael examined population health, including nutritional health, impacts of lifestyle changes and widespread, escalating and deepening environmental change. He was particularly concerned with the health consequences of affluent lifestyles and the environmentally unsustainable nature of the international spread of industrial and meat-based diets (Hetzl and McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2005a; McMichael et al., 2007).

Underlying the diffusion of industrial foods is the global retailing revolution (Burch et al., 2013), whereby supermarket diets for the majority world (middle and working classes) converge on a narrowing base of staple grains, increasing consumption of animal protein, edible oils, salt and sugar and declining dietary fibre as consumption of brand-name processed foods rises. These combined changes contribute to an increasing prevalence of (non-communicable) dietary diseases (Hawkes, 2008).

In this chapter, we argue that rural producers have been rendered redundant as a result of the industrialisation of agriculture in world regions classified as 'developed'. Further, the model of industrial agriculture has since been exported to post-colonial regions in the form of Green Revolution technologies (Patel, 2013), universalising urbanism as the desired or naturalised end point of an international 'development project' (McMichael, 1996). In the post-World War II development era, this outcome gave rise to the concept of 'urban bias' (Lipton, 1977), which focused on the political privileging of cities over the countryside. For our purposes, this concept anticipated a more profound discounting of the centrality of agriculture to human sustainability.

We argue further that urbanisation has incubated a global process of supermarketisation, concentrated populations no longer producing their own food, and reconstituted them as 'consumers' (Dixon and Isaacs, 2013). Here, the retailing revolution has not simply displaced local food systems, but now governs consumption patterns associated with urbanism: anonymised and monetised exchange and the commercial construction of value, including authoritative dietary 'knowledge' (Dixon, 2009). Such knowledge is the construct of an industrial food system that is not only global but also one that steadily undermines the lay science of the remaining rural producers; and the

possibility of retaining diverse farm systems that restore and preserve ecological cycles is lost (McMichael, 2013). In these terms, then, 'urban bias' represents a long-term threat to human health and planetary sustainability.

Valorising the Urban

In 2007, UN-Habitat declared the urban millennium to have arrived. At that point, cities housed a majority of the world's population, which added to their already formidable political status gained over centuries through providing the seat of government, vast stocks of finance capital and entrepreneurial zeal, cheap wage labour to underpin industrialisation, and diverse cultural forms and relative tolerance. With the symbolic, political and economic re-ascension of the city over the last half a century, a simultaneous decline in attention to rural spaces and peoples has been under way, in line with the ever-diminishing contribution of rural productivity to Gross National Product (GNP). In both developed and developing countries, there are now many fewer rural people than in the past, and those who remain are typically poorer, less educated, less healthy and less potent at the ballot box and in policy development. As Kay observes in the opening quote, the contribution of rural populations to national development is being denied.

Reinforcing the political and symbolic elevation of cities has been economic geography's declaration that the urban–rural binary is redundant, with the appropriate unit for any spatial planning or policy focus being 'city regions' (Jones and Corbridge, 2010), especially where food is concerned (Marsden, 2012).

In addition, 'feeding the city' from within peri-urban boundaries has become a fashionable topic for urban ecologists, agri-food, climate change and development researchers.¹ However, championing the food security potential of urban agriculture obscures the fact that for almost half of the world's population, which continues to reside in rural spaces, their food production activities are essential for their own food security. It also denies the various estimates of urban population dependence on smallholder food provisioning for most of their food requirements: the Erosion, Technology, Concentration NGO (ETC, 2009) estimates that 'peasants' produce 70 per cent of the world's food, while Public Citizen and the food sovereignty movement claim an even higher percentage is peasant produced: 'Family farm- and peasant-based production for domestic purposes is responsible for approximately 90 per cent of the

¹ 'The FAO (2007) estimates that as many as 200 million urban residents produce food, representing about 15 per cent of total world food output' (Jones and Corbridge, 2010, p. 8).

world's food production, much of which does not even pass through markets' (Public Citizen, available at: www.citizen.org/documents/wtofood.pdf. See also: ag-transition.org/?p=1769).

Our concern is that the political and cultural reframing of cities as the vital engines of development exacerbates food insecurity and unsustainable food systems. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, the ongoing adoption of public policies consolidating urban privilege contributes to food insecurity through a spiral of loss of farmer livelihoods and productive landscapes (de Schutter and Sepulveda, 2012).

This dynamic pivots on the 'cheap food regime' (Rosset, 2006), with two key consequences. On the one hand, the cheap food regime steadily undermines the food security of rural producers with imports of artificially cheapened foodstuffs, displacing some into urban slums, and compromising a diverse smallholder foundation that, given support, may steward the land. Further, the cheap food regime has enabled a universal 'supermarketisation', involving rising proportions of unhealthy processed foods, now accounting for over 80 per cent of the world food trade, and rising rates of obesity (Hawkes et al., 2010).

So, how has this situation arisen? And, how do these dynamics contribute to food insecurity?

'Urban Bias' Theory/Hypothesis

In 1977, development economist, Michael Lipton, outlined his 'theory' on urban bias to explain why, under conditions of economic development, 'poor people stay poor'. The theory was based on a multi-country comparison of data – from 63 less-developed countries (LDCs) and nine now-developed countries (NDCs) – describing the situation a few years either side of 1970, 10–30 years after their recent growth acceleration.

Lipton measured urban–rural disparity by calculating the ratio of non-agricultural to agricultural income per person, and found that in the NDCs the disparity was typically lower. Robert Bates, World Bank political economist, explained this outcome to be due in part to governments in poor countries 'tend[ing] to intervene in markets in ways that impose a tax on agriculture, while governments in richer nations would tend to intervene in ways that confer subsidies on farmers' (Bates, 1993, p. 221). This geopolitical variation in farm to non-farm resource transfer policy had two effects: developed country farmers had an incentive to improve productivity, while farmers in developing countries were faced with financial disincentives; and within developing countries, farm household incomes were much lower than non-farm household

incomes, resulting in urban–rural inequalities and rural poverty (Anderson, 2010, p. 23). Thus, developing country farmers were being penalised by the policies of their own governments, as well as by the policies of other agricultural producing nations, with any gains from their farming labour and other inputs accruing disproportionately to those whom Lipton referred to as 'urban classes'. Moreover, the taxes on agricultural producers were used to subsidise imported goods (often through currency overvaluation that also harmed farm exports), particularly those deemed essential to establish a more industrial future. This 'price twist' mechanism 'turns prices against a rural group' (Lipton 1984, p. 158).

Based on the analyses, Lipton defined urban bias (UB) as 'the tendency of public authorities and private persons to allocate, and their disposition to justify, for large urban areas, proportions of developmental or welfare-generating resources in excess of any reasonable norm of either efficiency or well-being' (Lipton, 1977, p. 43). Two of the most important welfare-generating resources were identified as cheap food and urban infrastructures – public transport, water, etc – typically financed through agricultural export revenues. With healthier, fitter populations and vastly superior infrastructures, urban citizens could devote themselves to generating even greater personal wealth and wealth for their nations.

In essence, rural people were being parasitised by urban populations, who benefitted disproportionately from both the consumption of cheap foods and urban infrastructures. This form of urban population appeasement had the effect of deepening inequalities between rural and urban areas. Lipton argued that UB was responsible for the growth in undernutrition in countries that were spectacularly improving their income per person (in the period 1950 to the early 1970s). Referring to Brazil between 1960 and 1970, for example, real income per person increased 37 per cent, while the levels of the poorer half of the population increased by just 1 per cent. As income per person grew, the poor spent 55–80 per cent of any extra income on food, while the rising working and middle class spent a much smaller share of 20–30 per cent (generally on varying their diets and simplifying cooking).

Numerous criticisms have been levelled at the theory, especially in relation to the difficulty in making urban and rural distinctions (see Kay, 2009); Lipton's idiosyncratic interpretation of class (Byres, 1979; Kay, 2006); and in generalisability across countries. In revisiting his original work, Lipton (1984) reframed the UB as a testable hypothesis, agreeing that in-depth, historical process case studies were required. His hypothesis received endorsement from an analysis of sub-Saharan Africa, where governments were described as using agricultural commodity boards as taxation revenue raisers, redistributing the income to urban populations to avoid food riots or coups (Bates, 1993; Jones and

Corbridge, 2010). However, this reappraisal did not deter development economists and economic geographers from further critical engagement (see special issue of *Journal of Development Studies* 1993, Vol. 29(4); Jones and Corbridge, 2010), especially on the point that the UB theory ignored ‘the urban penalty’, namely the plight of the urban poor as underemployed rural people flooded into cities, often with worse health and prosperity than those they left behind.²

While recognising the urban penalty, those denying the UB paradoxically proceed to argue that there are good development grounds for an urban, synonymous with industrial development, bias in terms of:

1. The livelihood opportunities afforded by urban employment in the face of de-agrarianisation, as well as the cross-sectoral livelihood strategies created by urban–rural economic zones or ‘city regions’;
2. The economic benefits, according to urban scale, of concentrating services and goods in cities;
3. The importance in terms of justice to individuals and to national economies of removing obstacles to mobility, even though urban problems (crime, disease) follow neglect of the countryside;
4. Important instances of agricultural demand-led industrialisation, which can be pro-rural (Jones and Corbridge, 2010).

However, there is an alternative way of interpreting the flow of rural people to cities and the ‘opportunities’ awaiting them. Mobility and migration become key mechanisms to avoid rural immiseration in the face of declining terms of trade, climate change and other obstacles to improving productivity. Not only do rural people have little choice in their actions, but also the argument about a natural coupling between rural outmigration and urban manufacturing jobs as economies grow is rarely the case (McMichael, 2009) – unless there is strong state shepherding of the twin processes, as with Taiwan and South Korea (Kay, 2009).

De-agrarianisation and the Contribution of Urban Bias to Food Insecurity – Now and into the Future

As Lipton and his critics have noted, UB and urban penalty go hand in hand. Where they differ is in describing the beneficiaries, with the critics believing that rural people are pulled rather than pushed out of agriculture. Others argue

2 In a point overlooked by his critics, Lipton (1993, p. 231) had argued that: ‘extreme relative rural deprivation of health and educational services in most LDCs risks accelerating urban drift, and hence congestion (with increasing marginal external costs, ultimately unsustainable fiscally or environmentally); curtails services for the neediest and reduces overall returns to those services ...’.

that anti-agricultural forces are at work and that systematic discrimination against the rural economy operates, expressed as 'de-agrarianisation' (Bryceson, 2004). This process has resulted in a steady growth of urban slums, where more than one in every seven humans now lives (UN-Habitat, 2003). For example, by 2015 the number of rural dispossessed in India will equal twice the population of the UK, France and Germany combined (Sharma, 2007). Mike Davis (2006) suggests that this 'planet of slums' phenomenon stems from the *decoupling* of urbanisation and industrialisation. The decoupling (as slum catalyst) can be explained only by the greater rate of deterioration of the rural economy than of growth of the urban economy, where according to the International Labour Organization, informal sectors now equal 51 per cent in Latin America, 65 per cent in Asia and 72 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (Boyd, 2006).

Deterioration of the rural economy reflects an identification of urbanism with modernism; in effect, an ontologically determined UB. Related to this discursive positioning, technologies of scale have allowed food production to be converted over (modern) time from slave plantations to agroindustrial estates, consolidating the power of corporations rather than family farms. Complementing the discriminatory effects of agroindustrialisation on smallholder farming culture has been a long-term challenge from the disposal of highly subsidised staple foods (mainly grains) from the global north into southern markets. This began with US Public Law 480 in 1954, disposing of surplus wheat at concessional prices as food aid to client states on the Cold War perimeter (Friedmann, 1982), extending into a rivalry between the USA and the European Union to capture Third World markets through surplus food 'dumping' by the later 1970s and into the present day; a process which intensified following new rules established at the inception of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 to open markets to agricultural trade (McMichael, 2005b). This is a clear illustration of Lipton's 'price twists', which may no longer operate within developing countries but which operate globally under the protection of the WTO.

Meanwhile, under the dictates of structural adjustment policies elaborated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, states in the global south have been compelled to reduce supports for their farm sectors (e.g. rural credit, marketing boards, subsidies); and, as the Bank itself acknowledged in its 2008 *World Development Report* (the first annual report to address the agricultural sector in 25 years): structural adjustment has 'dismantled the elaborate system of public agencies providing farmers with access to land, credit, insurance, inputs and cooperative organization' (World Bank, 2008, p. 138).

As above, the early development model encouraged taxation of agriculture and the process of industrialisation via 'unlimited supplies of labour' (Lewis, 1954), naturalising rural outmigration. During the 1990s, the FAO estimated that between 20 and 30 million smallholders were displaced, and food prices

reached their lowest level in 150 years (Anonymous, 1999; Madeley, 2000). The international peasant movement, La Vía Campesina (2000), noted: 'the massive movement of food around the world is forcing the increased movement of people'. Despite the rise in net farm incomes where the tax on food exports had been removed, the World Bank estimated that three-quarters of the world's poor resided in farm households (Anderson, 2010).

Access to cheap labour, whether enslaved or dispossessed, with rising sources of fossil fuel, has enabled the industrialisation of farming on increasingly concentrated tracts of land, supplying larger and larger amounts of primary products to feed machines and urban populations. The resulting rift in the human–nature metabolism has not only deprived farm soils (and food products) of natural nutrients, as rural migrants deposit night soil in urban areas and mixed farming patterns decline with the specialisation of livestock farming, but also farming and local ecological knowledge is lost, only to be replaced by commercial agro-inputs (hybrid seeds, inorganic fertilisers, agrochemicals), converting farming into an increasingly toxic industrial economic sector (Schneider and McMichael, 2010). From another angle, modern urbanism has grown via an extractive relationship with the countryside, colonised by industrial technologies involving 'biophysical override' as modern agriculture has required commercial inputs to substitute for displaced ecological processes (Weis, 2007). The Green Revolution is a paradigmatic example of urban extraction insofar as it introduces external technologies to amplify delivery of staple crops to urban residents, displacing local rural (leafy green-based) diets, privileging larger farmers, introducing herbicides and pesticides and undermining the ecological base in the long run (Patel, 2013).

As Dorward (2013, p. 44) has recently argued:

food prices, agricultural worker productivity, and global threats to supply/demand balances are fundamental long-term development issues. Not only are they critically important for poorer children's and adult food security, health and physical and mental development, they affect the global economy and the welfare of rich nations and people.

For Dorward, a primary mechanism for delivering food security for urban and rural people alike involves lower food prices, made possible by increased rural labour productivity, which, with the appropriate technological investments, can require fewer workers released from the drudgery that is so often associated with peasant and smallholder agriculture. However, we remain concerned about the social, political and health consequences of this development trajectory, particularly for the remaining rural producers and the growing numbers of rural to urban low-paid factory and service sector workers.

Applying the Urban Bias Hypothesis to Thailand

All protagonists to the UB debate agree that national case studies are required to determine the context-specific features by which groups benefit from public resource allocations, and especially transfers between agricultural producer communities and urban consumer communities. Space precludes any substantial case study development, but using key concepts of the UB approach – price twists to support export agriculture and industrial imports; government support for cheap food alongside urbanisation and industrialisation; deploying agricultural commodity revenues to underwrite social and infrastructure policies that disproportionately favour urban populations; leaving food supply research and development to the private sector – we present material on the role of rice production in Thailand's national development, and a nuanced understanding of UB.

Now classified as an upper-middle-income country, Thailand described itself up until recently as an agrarian society and even now 40 per cent of the population resides in rural areas. The nation entered the 20th century as a major rice exporting nation (Johnston, 1981), and in the period between the 1850s and 1930s, the land under rice cultivation almost quadrupled, with agricultural exports growing over many years at an annual average of 6 per cent (Resnick, 1970). During these years, rice production was undertaken by peasant farmers and private entrepreneurs, who were encouraged by government investments in agricultural infrastructure, especially canals. During the 1940s and 1950s, a rice export tax was introduced, and this, along with the earlier reduction of tariffs for foreign traders, inserted price twist mechanisms into national development. Simultaneously, government policies kept domestic food prices low (Goss and Burch, 2001), and the value of rice export earnings meant that there was no push to move people out of agriculture into the cities. This started to change from the 1960s, once the limits of further agricultural land developments had been reached, and rice export revenues started to fall relative to other agricultural commodities (Siamwalla, 1996). Despite agricultural export taxes being eliminated in the mid-1980s, and the more recent introduction of the rice mortgage scheme to guarantee farm prices for rice stocks – for Lipton, such financial supports of farmers to compete on world markets resembles developed world agricultural subsidies – Thailand's rice farmers now have among the lowest productivity levels in the Southeast Asian region (IRRI, 2013). This may, in part, be due to a marked decline in government investment in agriculture, post Green Revolution (Walker, 2012). While the deteriorating terms of trade have seen Bangkok and some regional cities grow rapidly, the steady flow of people into urban centres slowed for some years after the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis and the 2009–10 Global Financial Crisis, since urban unemployment was high.

In the last 30 years, there has been a marked shift within the agri-food sector, between primary and secondary production. Food processing, led in part by the Thai agri-business conglomerate, Charoen Pokphand, backed by a raft of government policies keen to consolidate Thailand's role as the leading southern hemisphere food exporter (enshrined in policy as Kitchen to the World and/or known as 'Asia's supermarket'), means that the manufacture and domestic sale, and export, of processed foods now account for greater revenues than primary production. The relative power of giant food manufacturers, which includes domestic and global supermarket chains with their home-brand product portfolios, has also meant that farmers are no longer self-employed but have become contracted labourers to the corporations, and hence highly vulnerable to any changes in corporate supply chain strategies. Thailand leads the world in terms of relative numbers of contract farmers, who are now at a higher risk of poverty and food insecurity than other Thais (Jitsuchon and Siamwalla, 2009). Other contributors to lower farm incomes are low levels of government investment in agricultural productivity (Walker, 2012), and the despoliation of farming lands and aquatic environments, alongside urban encroachment on fertile plains, making food yield increases problematic (Amekawa, 2010; Dorward, 2013). For Thai rural producers locked into free trade agreements and corporate supply chains, difficult choices follow: invest their own capital in agricultural productivity gains while continuing to receive low returns for supplying the cheapest food possible, move to the cities in the hope of a higher-income occupation, or engage in seasonal migration in order to keep household income streams flowing.

While Thailand, in the century following the 1850s, illustrates the operations of UB in terms of price twists, agricultural revenues underwriting industrial sector expansion, a lack of public investment in agricultural research and the growth in the production of processed foods, or 'rich men's foods', to use a phrase from Lipton, a less straightforward reading of UB is required in relation to social infrastructural investments in rural and urban areas. In the last 20 years, successive governments have instituted what could be considered pro-rural policies, particularly in terms of easier lines of credit being made available to small farmers and a higher proportion of primary health-service providers than exists in Bangkok (Yiengprugsawan et al., 2010). Another populist policy, the universal health insurance scheme, is also considered to be a pro-poor policy assisting poor urban and rural citizens alike. These policy outcomes are due to (i) the long-time potency at the ballot box of rural Thais, coupled with government fears of their pro-communist sympathies during the 1970s and 1980s (Goss and Burch, 2001); and (ii) significant levels of civil society activism, often with the support of the military (Meesomboonpoonsuk, 2013). Nevertheless, despite rapid economic growth over 60 years, regional income disparities have been widening, and the infant mortality rate has been widening between urban

and rural areas (Yiengprugsawan et al., 2010). Further, for those aged 15–39 who remain in rural areas, their incomes and education are likely to decline significantly compared to their urban counterparts (Lim et al., 2009).

Thus, it is difficult to declare Thai governments to be pro-urban and anti-rural. Rather, in common with many OECD nations, they are pursuing economic policies that cede power to corporations and to a form of neoliberal capitalist development. Global corporations and free trade agreements, Kay (2009) suggests, lie behind the fate of rural areas more than any systematic UB. However, the end result could well prove Lipton correct: without greater government attention to rural development as central to national development, the food and nutrition security prospects for poor rural and urban Thais alike look elusive. In Thailand, as elsewhere (Mei and Shao, 2011), the emphasis on cheap food appears not to be the answer to sustainable national development, given that it is both a recipe for rural producer poverty and for diet-related diseases with the cheapest food generally being processed food made available by modern retailers, including supermarkets (Banwell et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2015). It is the supermarkets and hypermarkets that so appeal to a Thai urban middle-class notion of modernity (Isaacs, 2009).

Countering Urban Bias

Global agri-food systems are coming under greater scrutiny from different quarters: food security and human rights, public health and ecosystem health. In the midst of the recent global food crisis, the UN- and World Bank-sponsored International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (2008) expressed a deepening international scientific and development practitioner consensus that sustaining Earth and its peoples requires massive support for agroecological methods that have been shown in recent studies to be equally productive, less energy-intensive, restorative, resilient and carbon-sequestering, and stabilising of rural cultures and healthy diets (e.g. FAO, 2002; Pretty et al., 2003; Badgley et al., 2007). To date, these have been the methods practised primarily by the smallholders who have left farming.

Within Thailand, a self-sufficiency movement vies with the Kitchen to the World approach to food security. Supported by government, the 'Sufficiency Economy' (SE) is a response to the wide-scale poverty that arose in the late 1980s, and it 'aims to encourage people to develop self discipline in consumption' as well as to be more self-reliant through cooperative production (Seubsman et al., 2013, pp. 57–58). The model incorporates agroecology principles including discouraging pesticide use and encouraging diverse cropping and

organic agriculture. It is concerned to help rural producers adapt to emerging market opportunities and to secure long-term agricultural futures through environmental restoration. However, a study undertaken in Thailand's poorest Isan region showed that while a majority of villagers had become self-sufficient in food through participating in the SE programme, had low levels of debt and high levels of life satisfaction, they wanted more for their children; in particular, the educational opportunities that were available in cities (Seubsman et al., 2013). This understandable predisposition reinforces the urban bias of modernity.

The Thai example is a valiant attempt to create a place for non- or less socially and environmentally exploitative food systems. For the sake of food system resilience (which requires diverse production approaches, scales of farming and food crops), there is a place for large and small rural producers practising agroecology. At present, rural areas in many nations are acting as sinks for urban waste, and they generate the clean air and pure water needed by the cities for their sustenance. Lack of recognition of the role that rural populations play in 'cleaning up' urban environments penalises them in another way; yet this contribution to the environmental commons could create opportunities for employment based on novel technologies, public investment and new income streams, and strengthen awareness of urban–rural interdependencies.

Conclusion

From our perspective, urban bias continues to operate; both as anti-agricultural bias or as corporate industrial agricultural bias, and as an ontological framing of modernity and progress. Current scholarship concerning food security policy, in all countries, needs to re-situate policy formulations in a new ontology recognising farming and food as essential to planetary and human health. The point is that our social and political theories arose in an ecological vacuum, so to speak, with urbanity as the measure of progress.

Ecological interdependencies have been ignored, with the rural seen simply as a source of labour and products. Thus, capitalist modernity has converted agriculture into an economic sector, alongside of, and serving, the manufacturing sector with foods for processing and as an outlet for industrial agri-inputs to override biophysical processes (Weis, 2007). Losing sight of our earthly foundations has thus privileged the 'urban' over the 'rural', de-naturalised food and agriculture and enabled markets (and their corporate and retailing agents) to shape social diets, often at the expense of public health.

We recommend restoring a healthier, reciprocal relation between urban and rural, requiring policies that eschew urban (developmentalist) bias, revaluing farming as an ecological act, and as such as a source of healthy food. Suitable policies should encourage urban–rural solidarity in pursuit of sustainable land use and preservation of food cultures. Some concrete proposals would include redirecting energy subsidies into rebuilding rural infrastructure (including extension services to support rather than replace farming knowledge), providing incentives for ecosystem stewardship (taxing those who use the rural sinks), shortening supply chains (localising/farmers' markets) and, where producers depend on export markets, supporting fair trade. Finally, prioritising domestic food security as a democratic and sustainable alternative to the current WTO agro-export regime is a significant step towards reuniting urban complexes with their rural foundations.

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