



# Agriculture and Food

The E-Newsletter of the ISA Research Committee on Agriculture and Food

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## CONTENTS

From the President (Gianluca Brunori) .....	1
Are the Food Safety Concerns in Japan Well-founded? (Tomiko Yamaguchi) .....	2
Report from the Editors of the IJSAF.....	3
Theme of the RC40-organized session for ISA 2010, Sweden .....	4
RC-40 Mini-Plenary: Theoretical Perspectives on the Food Crisis .....	5
Preliminary Announcement for 2010 Election for next president of RC40.....	5
Upcoming Events .....	6
By-Laws of the RC-40 .....	6
Executive council and Regional Representatives (2006-10) .....	7
From the Secretary .....	8

## *From the President*

Gianluca Brunori  
President, RC-40  
[gbrunori@agr.unipi.it](mailto:gbrunori@agr.unipi.it)

I wish to warmly welcome our members to August 2009 issue of RC-40 newsletter.

After having reached an unprecedented peak in mid-2008, food prices have fallen in the second semester of 2008. Oil prices and the world recession are considered the most important causes for this. But as soon as oil prices have started to recover, and despite the still incumbent recession, prices have risen again. Structural causes, such as nutritional transition from grains to meat and the growing world population, are at the basis for a long term trend to agricultural inflation. If oil prices rise further, there will be a pressure to shift from crops for food to crops for fuel, and this will give more impulse to inflation and consequently to new food crises.

For many, the solution is to boost food production in the world, first of all by improving soil productivity in poor countries

with fertilizers and facilitation the access to markets. But fertilizers' prices are linked to oil prices, so that increasing costs for farmers may be not compensated by increase in productivity. Furthermore, for phosphates there are clear signs of exhaustion of world reserves, that may limit considerably increases in productivity. Moreover, fertilizers contribute in a substantial way to greenhouse gas emissions.

The trend to 'land grabbing' of foreign investors, concerned about imbalance between food production and consumption, in poor countries is assuming worrisome proportions, as they deprive poor local people of the sources for their livelihoods.

The solution to food crises will not be found into old approaches. Specialization for cash crops, scale enlargement, massive use of commercial seeds, fertilizers and pesticides has largely shown their failure in many poor

countries. The recent International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for development (IAASTD), sponsored by most important multilateral organizations, advocates that a new approach to agriculture is to be put into practice, centered on diversified and multifunctional family farming, farm or community self sufficiency in food production, agro-ecology and functional biodiversity, mobilization of local knowledge, participatory research, equitable intellectual property regimes. And, perhaps even more important,

consumption patterns in the world should change radically.

Sociology of agriculture and food may give an important contribution to a regime transition in agriculture. Strengthening its capacity to make invisible links visible, it may have an alert function to anticipate the crises, and be a key to stimulate a new governance of food systems based on the principle of social justice and common good.

[Insights around the Globe]

### *Are the Food Safety Concerns in Japan Well-founded?*

**Tomiko Yamaguchi, International Christian University, Japan**

Food safety scares – from BSE concern over beef imported from the U.S. to fears of Chinese-made frozen dumplings tainted with chemicals and from confectionary mislabeling scandals to widespread distribution of tainted rice – have become mainstays of Japanese news. Hardly a day passes when one does not see the phrase ‘shokuno anzen anshin’ (food safety and trust in food safety) in the news. Consumers have lost confidence not only in the food purveyors who were involved in food scandals but also in the government agencies for allowing these scandals to erupt and being unable to deal with these problems immediately when they occurred. In 2003, the Japanese government established a Food Safety Commission, whose role is to provide scientific assessment of food risks and evaluation of the effects of these risks on human health, independent of other government agencies. The government will also establish a new consumer agency in October 2009 to help improve the current administrative bodies that have often been criticized for bureaucratic factionalism. Food manufacturers are attempting to improve their operations by upgrading food processing facilities and setting up new inspection systems, among other measures.

One could argue that all of the safety-minded changes reported in the news have served to whip up increased worry about food safety in Japan. Observing these

phenomena, I felt that it is important to explore how news reporters communicate the essential facts of food safety controversies, particularly given the significant role that the mass media plays in communicating food safety issues to the public. The media’s central position has recently received increased scrutiny in the public policy arena as well: For example, the Risk Communication Panel of Japan’s Food Safety Commission has several times commented on the significant role that the mass media plays in communicating about food safety issues.

My approach to this topic has been to identify the ecology of information, that is, the ways in which social hierarchies within the profession of journalism may influence the ways in which reporters cover the news. As I began to interview news reporters, I quickly discovered that specialized agriculture reporters are small in number and that those few who exist seem to lack status within the news organizations. Although associations such as the Japan Agricultural Journalist Association were established as far back as 1957 to support the sharing of information for accurate and fair journalism and to support journalists specializing in agriculture, science and technology, changes have been few and hard-won. Through interviews, I also learned that reporters are stratified within the news organizations in accordance with the topics that they cover. Generally, a division covering

the topic of politics and economics is seen as higher in status. The press clubs that exist in the offices of government ministries are also stratified according to the divisions that reporters belong to. For instance, only economic journalists are permitted to have offices at the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Economy.

Given this stratification within organizations, amounting to a “pecking order” among reporters, it is easy to imagine that non-controversial agriculture-related topics are unlikely to compete successfully for space in the newspapers. What we hear and read daily is the news that has survived the competition

within the news organizations. Preliminary analysis of the news content and interviews with reporters has uncovered a critical question which deserves much deeper exploration: to what extent the perception of rampant food safety problems as reported in the media reflects the reality, and to what extent these fears and concerns may be unduly inflated. A better understanding of the ways in which the culture of the news media influences both the gathering and the reporting of food-related news will help us not only to sort out the reality from the media-influenced perception but also to better understand the forces that help drive public debate on food safety and food technology.

## ***Report from the Editors of The INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD (IJSAF)***

### **1. Numbers of Issues since the last RC-40 Newsletter**

Since the last newsletter one issue of the journal has been published online (Vol 16); see <http://www.ijsaf.org>

It is hoped that a second issue will be published later in the year.

### **2. Visibility and Impact of the Journal**

The IJSAF editorial assistant, Joek Roex, has recently revamped the journal website so that it has a new look and is easier to navigate.

### **3. Proposed Special Issues**

Future planned special issues include:

- Financialisation of Food and Agriculture. Guest edited by David Burch Griffith University, Australia) and Geoffrey Lawrence (The University of Queensland, Australia).
- Sources and Mechanisms of Power in the Global System and in Rural Sites: Domination, Counter-Domination, and Alternatives. Guest edited by Alberto Arce (Wageningen University, The Netherlands)

and Tomiko Yamaguchi (International Christian University, Japan).

The editors would be pleased to hear from anyone interested in guest editing a special issue, especially if it covers one of the following topics:

- Climate change challenges to the agri-food sector.
- The global food crisis.
- Global restructuring in the dairy industry
- Neoliberalism, de-peasantisation and peasant mobilisation.
- NGOs and corporate social responsibility.
- Labour processes in the global agri-food system.

Vaughan Higgins

Farshad Araghi

Mara Miele

RC40-organized session

## *World Agriculture and Food in Search of New Paradigms*

XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology  
(July 11<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden)

**DEADLINE of abstract submission**  
**October 15, 2009**

There is a growing consensus, among international institutions, that the present mechanisms that regulate the way food is produced, distributed, consumed are unsustainable and uneven. Global drivers such as climate change and resource exhaustion give further motivation to the search for alternatives. However, if one moves from diagnosis to the possible solutions, it is evident that the consensus is much lower on the alternatives to the present state of matter. Issues such as the energy crisis, adaptation to climate change, human health, food security are now the object of attention and of intervention by grassroots movements as well as transnational corporations. But beyond the apparent consensus over catchphrases such as 'sustainability', 'equity', 'resilience', there are deep conflicts over the ways these concepts are worked out and put into practice. These conflicts can be seen as 'wars between paradigms,' that is among coherent systems of meanings able to orient people's behavior as well as their expectations with regard to change.

If on one side the crisis stimulates the growth and the increasing legitimization of alternative coalitions such as fair trade, organic farming, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, consumers' purchasing

Joint Session with RC47 (social classes and social movements) is also under planning. Detailed call for paper may be announced soon.

groups, that have long ago anticipated issues that are now at the centre of public attention, on the other side food corporations invest into 'corporate responsibility' projects in order to improve their image toward the public, trying to demonstrate that coexistence among profits, sustainability and equity is possible.

In this war between paradigms, large 'grey areas' (ethical dilemmas, unsolved contradictions, knowledge gaps, uncertainties) emerge, that need to be addressed.

What is wrong and what is right with corporate responsibility projects? Are there only internal contradictions between these projects and their core business, or are these projects inherently wrong? How should we assess corporate attempts to make alliances with segments of the alternative networks, such as organic or fair trade?

And what are the strengths and weaknesses of alternative coalitions? What are their roles and their impact, and how does it change when they grow? What are the problems they fail to take into consideration? What are their contradictions? What are the constraints that limit their capacity to change?

What is the role of the State, of local administrations, and of the Media in this conflict? How paradigmatic conflicts turn into policies and governance arrangements? How they are involved into alliances?

The workshops organized by RC40 will develop theoretical reflection and bring empirical evidence on these issues from a broad range of countries

and contexts.

**Announcement**  
**[RC-40 Mini-Plenary in ESRS, Vaasa, Finland]**  
***Theoretical Perspectives on the Food Crisis***  
**11.00 - 15.00, August 20, 2009**

**[Speakers]**

**Geoffrey Lawrence, David Burch & Reidar Almas**

*Food security in a globalised world: a critical assessment*

**Peter H. Feindt & Terry Marsden**

*The food crisis – systemic risks, regime change and system transformation*

**Mark Tilzey**

*Neoliberalising Global Agriculture: The Food Crisis and the 'First' and 'Second' Contradictions of Capitalism*

**Alia Gana**

*Food crises, land grab and farm offshore production: the re-emergence*

*of the land question*

**Leo Granberg**

*Towards a regime change in global food system?*

**Gianluca Brunori & Angela Guarino**

*Security for whom?: The restructuring of discourse on food in Europe facing the global food crisis*

Please refer to the following website which contains abstracts of contributions:  
<http://www.esrs2009.fi/pdf/rc40.pdf>

ESRS conference website is as follows:  
<http://www.esrs2009.fi/index.htm>

**Preliminary Announcement for 2010 Election for next president of RC40**

Dear RC40 members:

As the 2010 ISA meeting is approaching, we need to have a new office of RC40 before the meeting. New office, according to the By-Laws, consists of president, secretary/treasurer, and four elected representatives.

Provisional schedule for the next election is as follows;

- 31 January 2010: Opening for solicitation from RC40 members
- March 31 2010: Deadline for

presentation. As of president's candidates, he or she should provide a short CV and a short text with the president's vision and program for the next term.

- 1 to 30 April 2010: Elections will be held.
- Early May 2010: New office will be announced.

If you have further questions and comments, please let me know.

Masashi Tachikawa  
([mtachi@mx.ibaraki.ac.jp](mailto:mtachi@mx.ibaraki.ac.jp))

# Upcoming Events

[2009]

- XXIII European Society of Rural Sociology Congress  
“Re-Inventing the Rural Between the Social and the Natural”  
Vaasa, Finland, 17-21 August 2009  
<http://www.esrs2009.fi/>
- ISA International Laboratory for Ph.D. Students in Sociology  
Shonan Kokusai Village, Hayama, Japan  
October 3 - 9, 2009  
Submissions: May 31, 2009  
<http://www.isa-sociology.org>

- XVII World Congress of Sociology  
“Sociology on the Move”  
July 11th -17th, 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden  
<http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2010/>
- Fourth Meeting of the Asian Rural Sociological Association (ARSA)  
September 6<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup>, 2010,  
Legazpi City, The Philippines
- Innovation & Sustainable Development in Agriculture and food  
ISDA 2010, Montpellier, France  
28 June - 1 July 2010  
<http://www.isda2010.net/>

[2010]

## By-Laws of the RC-40

### I. MEMBERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

I.A. Members are those who pay RC-40 dues and participate in the scientific activities of the committee. Dues are set by the Executive Committee of RC-40.

I.B. Members of RC-40 have the right to

I.B.1. Run for office

I.B.2. Vote in all RC-40 elections

I.B.3. Participate in RC-40 business meetings

I.B.3.a. To participate in the quadrennial business meetings, individuals must be members of the International Sociological Association

I.B.4. Have priority status for participation in any of the scientific activities of the committee

I.C. Members are strongly urged to maintain membership in good standing in the International Sociological Association

I.D. Officers of the RC-40 are

I.D.1. The President

I.D.2. The Secretary

I.D.3. The Executive Committee, which consists of

I.D.3.a. The current president and secretary-treasurer

I.D.3.b. The immediate past president and secretary-treasurer

I.D.3.c. Four elected representatives

I.E. Officers are elected in the year prior to the quadrennial World Congress and take office at that Congress

I.E.1. Officers can not succeed themselves

I.E.2. All Officers must be members in good standing in the International Sociological Association

I.F. Duties of the President

I.F.1. The president has executive authority to organize the scientific and administrative work of the committee in consultation with the secretary-treasurer and members of the executive committee

I.F.2. The president convenes and organizes the quadrennial business meeting as well as any meetings of the executive committee  
 I.F.3. The president appoints the editorial committee of the International Journal of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food  
 I.F.4. The president, with the assistance of the secretary, organizes the publication and distribution of the semi-annual newsletter

**I.G. Duties of the Secretary-Treasurer**

I.G.1. The secretary assists the president in the coordination of the scientific and business activities of RC-40  
 I.G.2. The secretary-treasurer shall maintain a record of all committee business and executive meetings, and maintain the financial records  
 I.G.3. The secretary shall make a yearly financial accounting to the executive committee and a quadrennial financial accounting to the membership at the quadrennial business meeting  
 I.G.4. The secretary shall be responsible for conducting the elections of new officers

**I.H. Duties of the Members of the Executive Committee**

I.H.1. Advise the President and Secretary on all scientific and business matters pertaining to the activities of the Research Committee  
 I.H.2. Review the secretary's annual financial report

**II. SCIENTIFIC WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

II.A. To promote and encourage scientific analysis of the social organization of agriculture and food systems  
 II.B. Organization of the substantive content of the RC-40 session of the quadrennial meetings of the World Congress of Sociology

II.C. Organization of additional international meetings, including those that are held in conjunction with the World Congress and other scientific meetings

**III. ORGANIZATION OF THE JOURNAL**

III.A. The International Journal of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food is the official scientific journal of RC-40  
 III.B. The editor(s) are appointed by the president in conjunction with the executive committee transmit a complete record of journal finances to the secretary of RC-40, who shall add those records to the yearly financial report that is to be submitted to the executive committee and the quadrennial report submitted to the business meeting

III.D. The president of RC-40, in consultation with the editor and the members of the executive committee, shall appoint the members of the editorial board

III.E. The content of the journal shall reflect the scientific interests of the Research Committee, which is the sociological study of agriculture and food

**IV. AMENDMENTS TO THE BY-LAWS**

IV.A. Amendments to the by-laws can be submitted by any member in good standing of the Research Committee.  
 IV.B. Amendments must be initially approved at RC-40 business meetings  
 IV.C. Amendments must then be ratified by mail ballot of members by a majority of those voting

**RC-40 Executive Council, 2006-2010**

Office	Officer	Organizational Affiliation	Country	E-mail
President	Gianluca Brunori	University of Pisa	Italy	<a href="mailto:gbrunori@agr.unipi.it">gbrunori@agr.unipi.it</a>

Secretary/ Treasurer	Masashi Tachiakawa	Ibaraki University	Japan	<a href="mailto:mtachi@mx.ibaraki.ac.jp">mtachi@mx.ibaraki.ac.jp</a>
Executive Council	Mónica Bendini	Universidad Nacional del Comahue	Argentina	<a href="mailto:mibendini@yahoo.com.ar">mibendini@yahoo.com.ar</a>
	Vaughan Higgins	Monash University	Australia	<a href="mailto:Vaughan.higgins@arts.monash.edu.au">Vaughan.higgins@arts.monash.edu.a u</a>
	Elizabeth Ransom	University of Richmond	USA	<a href="mailto:eransom@richmond.edu">eransom@richmond.edu</a>
	Marie-Christine Renard	Universidad Autónoma Chapingo	México	<a href="mailto:mcrenard@gmail.com">mcrenard@gmail.com</a>
	Tomiko Yamaguchi	International Christian University	Japan	<a href="mailto:tyamaguc@icu.ac.jp">tyamaguc@icu.ac.jp</a>
	Manuel Belo Moreira	Universidade Técnica de Lisboa	Portugal	<a href="mailto:mbelomoreira@isa.utl.pt">mbelomoreira@isa.utl.pt</a>
	Wynne Wright	Michigan State University	USA	<a href="mailto:wrightwy@anr.msu.edu">wrightwy@anr.msu.edu</a>

### RC-40 Regional Representatives, 2006-2010

Latin America	John Wilkinson	<a href="mailto:jwilkins@uol.com.br">jwilkins@uol.com.br</a>
Australia/New Zealand	Geoffrey Lawrence	<a href="mailto:g.lawrence@mailbox.uq.edu.au">g.lawrence@mailbox.uq.edu.au</a>
East Asia	Yoshimitsu Taniguchi	<a href="mailto:tani@akita-pu.ac.jp">tani@akita-pu.ac.jp</a>
South Asia	Bishnu C. Barik	<a href="mailto:bishnu_barik@rediffmail.com">bishnu_barik@rediffmail.com</a>
Northern Europe	Reidar Almås	<a href="mailto:reidar.almås@rural.no">reidar.almås@rural.no</a>
Southern Europe	Maria Fonte	<a href="mailto:mfonte@unina.it">mfonte@unina.it</a>

## From the Secretary

### [1] About the electric Mailing List of the RC-40:

- You can post information which could be shared among the members of the RC40 via the mailing list: [isaRC40@ml.affrc.go.jp](mailto:isaRC40@ml.affrc.go.jp).
- If you would like to joint this e-list, please send an e-mail to the secretary: [mtachi@mx.ibaraki.ac.jp](mailto:mtachi@mx.ibaraki.ac.jp).

### [2] About the membership fee:

Every member shall pay their fee for every 4 years. Please refer to the amount of the fee at the website of the ISA ([http://www.ucm.es/info/isa/memb\\_i/index.htm](http://www.ucm.es/info/isa/memb_i/index.htm)). Current RC-40 secretary do NOT accept personal cheques because of the banking system in Japan (due to the high cost for money transfer fee).

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Editor: Masashi Tachikawa, RC40 Secretary  
Ibaraki University, Japan  
[mtachi@mx.ibaraki.ac.jp](mailto:mtachi@mx.ibaraki.ac.jp)  
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