

The world is taking inspiration from the National School Feeding Program, but can Brazil maintain the progress?

O Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar: o mundo se inspira, seremos capazes de manter os avanços?

El Programa Nacional de Alimentación Escolar: el mundo se inspira, ¿seremos capaces de mantener los avances?

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The enormous strides made by Brazil's National School Feeding Program (PNAE) would have been impossible without a political, institutional, and technical scenario that fostered a broad approach, integrating food and nutritional policies and programs. In the context of food and nutritional security and the human right to adequate food, strategies to link different dimensions and empower the process are indispensable, beyond simply providing meals, for example. In other words, the means condition the ends. We begin to record results showing both an increase in food purchases from family farming and identifying improvements in the quality of eating, increasing the dynamics of local development, among other complementary and fundamental characteristics of the PNAE.

According to data from the Brazilian National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE), from 2010 to 2014 the share of Brazilian municipalities that purchased the equivalent of 30% of the Federal transfers for the program increased from 15% to 65%, while the share of municipalities that purchased no foods from family farming dropped from 51% to just 10%. This significant trend is the result of measures taken both at the local level and in other administrative areas. The municipalities adjusted their processes, professionals acting as technical references established channels for dialogue with farmers and farm cooperatives to learn about the local agriculture, define the needs in detail, and contribute to planning crop production. Meanwhile, there is an increasingly evident and urgent need for schools to have a better infrastructure for storing foods and preparing the meals, and for enough sufficiently trained staff workers to do the work. Just as schools need classrooms, they need a dining hall, safe water, and kitchen equipment and utensils. This set of needs is quite different from when school meals consisted of opening a package or can, mixing with water, heating, and serving. At the Federal level, in addition to updating the rules and procedures, measures have been taken in partnership with the Collaborating Centers for School Feeding and Nutrition. Technical materials and training courses were elaborated, and measures were taken to strengthen an essential forum for improving the Program, namely the School Feeding Councils.

In this broad approach to the program, other initiatives deserve attention, like the special per capita amounts for students in indigenous and *quilombola* (slave-descendant) communities, contests for local recipes that feature not only local culinary traditions but also the work done by the school

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kitchen and dining hall staff, technical materials to orient the technicians in charge of food purchases, and special situations such as serving schoolchildren with special dietary needs. Initiatives to mobilize and promote local experiences such as the contest for Good Family Farming Practices for School Meals, in which a wide community of school administrators, staff, farmers, representatives and institutions for technical assistance and rural extension, school feeding council members, and researchers and the academic community can share their experiences on various themes such as school meal menus, food and nutritional education, public procurement, supply and distribution, inter-sector collaboration, farmers' cooperatives, social participation, and sustainable, organic farming systems and agroecology. Likewise, measures have been taken to expand and upgrade another essential component of the program, namely the promotion of adequate, healthy food through strategies in food and nutritional education. The back cover of schoolbooks distributed by the Ministry of Education displayed messages on the subject, and a complex process is underway to encourage the crosscutting inclusion of food and nutrition in the school curriculum by revising the contents of schoolbooks. Activities in food and nutritional education in the school routine are also being encouraged through initiatives like the Drive for Food and Nutritional Education in preschools served by the PNAE. The drive aims to encourage the debate and action in food and nutritional education and increase the visibility of activities already developed in Brazil's public schools. The themes for discussion and action are complementary nutrition and prevention of childhood obesity, regional Brazilian foods, prevention and reduction of losses and waste of foods, school vegetable gardens, family farming and schools, and fun activities for social development and healthy eating. Participating schools will record the activities based on the proposed themes.

All these activities confirm that the National Program has come a long way in offering meals in schools through a public policy that helps achieve the human right to adequate food, meeting the multiple dimensions of food and nutritional security, like the right of everyone to regular, permanent access to healthy and nutritious foods in sufficient amounts, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on healthy eating practices that respect cultural diversity and are environmentally, culturally, economically, and socially sustainable.

Given so much progress, it is worthwhile to ask about the risks facing the PNAE considering the institutional changes and budget cuts made since 2016. The Ministry of Agrarian Development, responsible for the set of programs to support and develop family farming, was extinguished, its technical staff was undermined, and its responsibilities were transferred to the Special Secretariat for Family Farming and Agrarian Development (SEAD), under the Chief of Cabinet's Office. The set of programs to support family farming (technical assistance and rural extension, crop guarantee fund, support for sustainable development of rural territories, purchase and distribution of family farm produce, rural productive inclusion) suffered a 15% budget cut in 2017. Essential actions such as rural extension and the Food Procurement Program (PAA) have been compromised. Access to the PAA is in jeopardy, both for family farmers and individuals in situations of food and nutritional insecurity served by the program. Under this new format, the PAA is no longer a program to structure and strengthen family farming, but has been downgraded to a social assistance program, with a 39% budget slash (compared to 2016), which will reduce the number of families served from 91.7 thousand to 41.3 thousand. The budget cut is even more worrisome considering the rigorous earmarking of funds, plus the cuts in activities related to women farmers (-38%), access to safe water (-33%), agrarian reform and land tenure regularization (-36%), and actions targeted to indigenous peoples and traditional communities for access to land and territory and sustainable management and use of biodiversity (-48%). Although the per capita allotment for school feeding was recently updated, in light of the results recorded in the current article and others already published, budget availability is necessary

(but not sufficient) to maintain and expand purchases from family farming. For example, measures to support and strengthen sustainable local farm production, assigning priority to more vulnerable groups, structuring administrative processes consistent with the objectives of purchases from family farming, feasibility of measures in food and nutritional education, that is, the set of characteristics in the PNAE as an example to follow, need to be maintained and expanded.

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