

Introduction: Why Agroecology?

Agroecology – the science of sustainable food systems – is both a system of agricultural production and a political framework supporting the livelihoods of smallholders across the global South. Agroecology thus functions as both scientific practice and as politically engaged environmentalism (Warner 2008). Food system scholars and policy makers have recently defined the political and material objectives of a global **agroecological transition** towards sustainable food systems in terms of **food sovereignty** – the right of a people to define their own culturally appropriate food and agricultural systems (De Molina 2012; Rosset 2006).

Global peasants' movement La Via Campesina (LVC) and its local affiliates like Central Haiti's Peasants' Movement of Papaye (MPP) – this project's field site – likewise endorse food sovereignty as a means to empower the rural poor. We do not yet know how peasants' mobilization across new transnational agroecological networks will affect the emergence of a sustainable food system driven by smallholder agriculture. Agents of international agricultural development like the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization have highlighted the role smallholders will play in the agroecological transition, but have not examined the capacity of a socially and politically engaged agroecology to alleviate the multidimensional pressures of rural poverty, including environmental degradation and socio-economic and political inequality, in addition to food insecurity.

This project examines MPP's farm school, Sant Lakay, as a nexus in networks of agroecological theory and practice that mobilize smallholders around food sovereignty. It examines the farm school as a collaborative 'living laboratory,' challenging the North-South flow of sustainability science that characterizes mainstream rural development paradigms.



Ongoing Project Goals

This research forms part of an ongoing dissertation project with three goals:

1. To provide a unique case study of a region of critical significance to rural development policy and practice;
2. To provide a model methodology for institutional collaboration between academic researchers and rural community development groups in an understudied region;
3. To offer a qualitative analysis defining the priorities and key practices of the organized rural poor in leading a global agroecological transition.

Methodology: Learning Agroecology

This project asks how MPP mobilizes agroecology as a scientific and political project. As such, qualitative methods to be employed in the ongoing fieldwork period of 9 months include: participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, a focus group, guided field walks, gathering narrative plant and animal life histories, photography and drawing.

The project methodology understands researcher and participants alike as learners of agroecology, demonstrating one of the project's main goals: to provide a model methodology for institutional collaboration between academic researchers and rural community development groups engaged in the agroecological transition. As such, it takes a first step towards a research model for educators seeking to define positions of solidarity with agroecological movements (Gaztambide-Fernández 2012) by employing methods generative of visual, documentary, and ethnographic material that allows the dissemination of peasants' work more broadly in scholarly and popular media.

Another World is Possible: Food Sovereignty, Agroecological Networks, and Rural Development in Central Haiti

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What is an agroecological network?

A technology of agroecological transition that brings together **abundant materials, political consciousness, and local environmental knowledge**



Preliminary Results

The initial phases of research examine the role of pedagogy in MPP's agroecological network, focusing ethnographic attention on agroecological pedagogy at MPP's farm school. Preliminary fieldwork (2/2015) yielded ethnographic and documentary data revealing the organizational structure of MPP and its formal and popular education programs, including photographs, ethnographic description, movement documents, and an interview with MPP's leader. Attendance at community fora and organizational planning meetings revealed the significance of critical pedagogy both in MPP's popular education and in its political mobilization, allowing the enactment of movement principles of participatory democracy and horizontal knowledge exchange across multiple scales.

This observation in turn initiated opportunities to disseminate this research to a broader audience, putting MPP's unique locally-adapted approach to a politically and socially engaged agroecological science in conversation both with other LVC movement pedagogies, and with institutional efforts to support grassroots-driven sustainable small production. Preliminary examination of the processes by which organized peasants learn, practice, and engage critically with agroecology reveals that it must be understood as both a scientific and a political project.

The trio of images to the left represents an example of an **agroecological network** in which a global environmental problem – the concentration of industrial waste material in the global South – is transformed into a local foundation for food sovereignty. Across the many agroecological networks whose nexus is MPP's farm school, smallholders' capacity to effect locally-grounded eco-social change is mobilized as a pedagogical, political, and practical principle for the building of sustainable food systems.

1) *Pedagogy*: Rubber tires proliferate across Haiti, representative both of the waste generated by global trade and the incapacity of the state to provide municipal waste services. Trainers at the farm school employ a process of horizontal knowledge exchange to guide students towards the identification of both the factors that lead to the concentration of such industrial waste in the global South and the material possibilities for transforming it into agroecological technologies.

2) *Political mobilization*: Tires are also a potent symbol of political resistance, serving as roadblocks during protest and to illustrate the effects of neoliberalized trade on local economies. Reused tires are thus bearers of cultural and political as well as material importance for Haiti's rural poor, who face persistence political repression and social exclusion.

3) *Daily practice*: The *jaden prekay*, or tire garden, is one of MPP's most successful campaigns. In this model, smallholders repurpose rubber tires as containers for kitchen gardens that allow families both to maintain nutritional security and to work around the soil exhaustion and land scarcity that make subsistence farming so difficult in Haiti. MPP trainers teach the technique at the farm school and the gardens are used across the Center region, where land is particularly rugged and scarce.

Literature Cited

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