

University of Dundee

The solution cannot be conventionalized

Ajates Gonzalez, Raquel

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THE SOLUTION CANNOT BE CONVENTIONALIZED

Protecting the alterity of fairer and more sustainable food networks

Raquel Ajates Gonzalez

Introduction

We are not short of evidence on the impacts of the industrial food system on both the environment and public health: from a spiraling obesity epidemic claiming more obese people than underweight globally (NCD-RisC, 2016), to a decreased diversity of diets and cultivated crops (Lang & Heasman, 2015). Reduced biodiversity of breeds, plant varieties and wildlife, stagnated yields, increased pests and damaged soil fertility is the price we pay for industrial farming to be able to offer large retailers a year-round supply of consistent produce, standardizing purchasing and consumption patterns (Burlingame & Dernini, 2010). This standardization is the cause and the result of reduced diversity in all its manifestations in food and farming (diversity of growers, varieties, market channels, etc.), which presents a serious risk to food security (Thrupp, 2000). In more affluent countries, labor in the food system (in farming, processing, retailing and catering) is predicted to face shortages as this work is not adequately recognized or fairly paid. In the UK, for example, this is reflected in unbalanced financial flows, with farming accounting for only eight per cent of the total gross value added of the agri-food sector (DEFRA, 2012).

These problems are symptoms of a dysfunctional system. It can be argued that one of the biggest challenges facing the food system is the continuous co-optation of potential solutions by the dominant regime. This process perpetuates current dynamics and suffocates more balanced alternatives. Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) emerge with the aim to tackle the imbalances discussed above. When the strategies of AFNs are co-opted by the industrial food system, their transformative power is reduced or neutralized. One example of this trend is the organic movement that first started as a grassroots initiative and gradually became absorbed by large retailers as a mere additional product line (Buck, Getz & Guthman, 1997). While the reduced use of chemical pesticides is still a win, the fact that many organic products are now grown in monocultures, often miles away from their



place of consumption, is a loss that the organic movement is having to negotiate (Jaffee, 2010). The fair trade certification has had a similar development (Goodman, 2010), with a new label for products including “unfairly traded” ingredients attracting criticisms (Taylor, 2005; BTC, 2014).

In this sense, the signifiers become uncoupled from the signified. Fragmentation of what it means to be organic or fair-traded or cooperatively produced has facilitated the take-up of the most market-friendly dimensions by the very actors and modes of production they originally aimed to resist and transform (Goodman, DuPuis & Goodman, 2011; Griffiths, 2012). This process shifts focus towards improving dominant systems and away from addressing the root problems. This institutionalization of a standards-based and measurable approach to organic farming, fair trade or agricultural cooperativism is encouraged by policies that require groups of farmers to conform to certain criteria to be eligible for certain certifications or subsidies. In this sense, there is a rupture from the original visions of transformations as these movements are diluted by substituting their process-based approaches to standards-based ones of “allowable inputs”, or in the case of agricultural cooperatives, “allowable cooperative principles or practices”. Current literature (both from academia and civil society) is also discussing the danger of co-optation in the realm of agroecology, an approach to farming based on three interconnected pillars: a science, a set of growing practices and a socio-political movement (Levidow et al., 2014).

The “conventionalization thesis” has been put forward to explain how oppositional solutions able to catalyze transformation and social justice end up becoming institutionalized by codified regulatory bodies that adapt them into the logic of markets and consumer choice (Goodman, DuPuis & Goodman, 2011). This chapter proposes a set of strategies for resisting the uptake of alternatives to the dominant industrial and large-scale food production and retailing units to prevent them from becoming “conventionalized” and absorbed by the same system they are trying to convert. Conventionalization means quantity, standardization and price becoming the benchmark, favoring large monocultures and penalizing diverse production. Profit is prioritized over diversity, quickly moving from “value for money” to “values for money” (Lang, 2010).

But can the conventionalization thesis ever be overcome? If so, how? From a selection of solution-based grassroots projects in Spain and the UK, this chapter discusses four interlinked strategies of bottom-up cooperative endeavors that aim to effect long-lasting and transformational change by creating alternatives that are harder to be appropriated by large, powerful players. These projects suggest grassroots innovation is limitless and constantly bubbling up new initiatives, while becoming more savvy and aware of the danger of being co-opted.

While etymologically the word radical sometimes has a positive meaning, as in getting to the roots of problems rather than just focusing on symptoms (radix being the Latin word for root), being labelled as “radical” often comes with negative connotations, such as being too drastic or unreasonable. AFNs are often associated with the more negative sense of the word. This labeling can increase the “otherness” of these initiatives and reduce their impact by presenting them as too removed from reality or “normal” consumers. I argue that labels such as radical and extreme are more adequate to define the dominant agrifood regime, a regime that is radical in its management

of natural (including human) and financial resources as well as in its concentration of power and ruthless expansion (Friedmann, 2005; Lang & Heasman, 2015).

I argue that a long-term solution to the risk of being co-opted involves a combination of strategies that resist conventionalization. This chapter presents a layered framework of four interwoven strategies that stand out from the cases analyzed: rediscovering new allies, fostering diversity, rethinking access to resources while redefining success and democratizing knowledge production. The four strategies come together as a solution to address two key challenges to social justice and sustainability in food systems: lack of diversity in the conventional food system and risk of co-optation of alternative and fairer practices.

The conceptual assumption underlying these strategies refers to three cores of diversity (quantitative and qualitative diversity) in the food system: nature, producers and consumers. The relationship amongst the four resistance strategies and the three cores of diversity generation is represented by the double hourglass in Figure 11.1. As the necks in the hourglass illustrate, the cores of diversity generation in the food system are separated by a handful of powerful companies, e.g. agribusinesses developing a small range of varieties for production separate the diversity found in nature from millions of farmers worldwide. Large processors and retailers separate producers from over seven billion consumers (today’s world population). All of these actors (humans and natural ecosystems on which we rely to survive and produce food) interact and react in a contested food policy terrain that in turn is shaped by the wider socio-economic context in which food systems exist (Lang, Barling & Caraher, 2009). The strategies discussed below aim to alter the current dynamics between actors and widen power bottlenecks.

It is important to mention at this point that the food system is not linear, but circular (although not a neat closed system, but a messy, complex one). Waste and environmental impacts in every link of the chain take place, affecting the capacity of biodiversity to reproduce itself, and in turn, reducing the food system’s ability to sustainable reproduce as well. Therefore, this model does not advocate a simplistic linear vision of the food system that assumes infinite resources at one end and a limitless

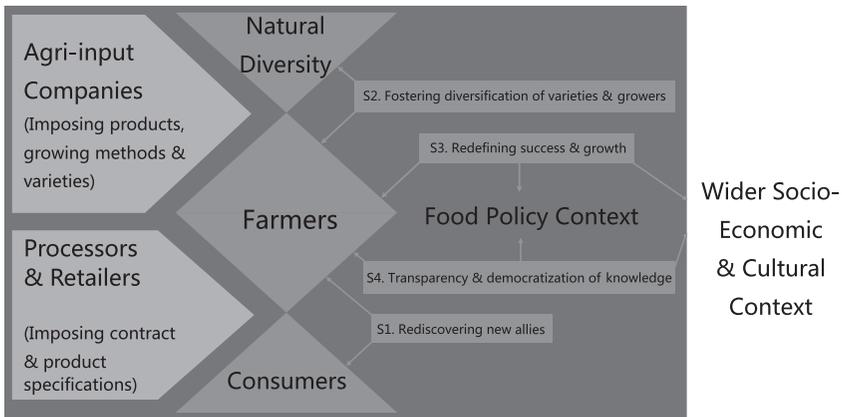


FIGURE 11.1 Double hourglass: strategies to tackle power imbalances in the food system

TABLE 11.1 Cooperative initiatives exploring new practices to protect their alterity

<i>Cooperative name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Produce/Services</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Ensetik	Basque Country, Spain	Dairy products Vegetables (for growers' self-consumption)	MSC of sheep shepherds, workers, organizations and buying groups.
Cooperativa Abastecimiento Catalana of the Cooperativa Integral Catalana (CIC)	Catalonia, Spain	Different food items	CIC is an MSC creating a cooperative network to cover education, health, housing, transport and energy needs of members.
Actyva	Extremadura, Spain	Fruit, vegetables, wool, bread, etc.	Actyva is an MSC bringing together communication and marketing professionals with ecological farmers to help them market their products more efficiently.
La Verde	Cadiz, Spain	Vegetables for direct selling and self-consumption	Workers' cooperative that was set up by a group of agricultural workers in 1986.
OrganicLea	London, UK	Vegetables and some fruit	Workers' cooperative following permaculture practices and a sociocratic model.
Manchester Veg People	Manchester, UK	Vegetables (now also sell some fruit – sometimes imported – through their vegbox scheme)	MSC of growers, workers and buyers from restaurants, cafes and the University of Manchester who are growing, trading and educating about local organic food.
Moss Brook Growers	Manchester, UK	Vegetables	Workers' cooperative. Members of Manchester Veg People. The land owner is Unicorn, a workers' cooperative organic food store.
Biodynamic Land Trust	UK	Land investments	Its purpose is to secure land for biodynamic farming, gardening and food growing in the long term through partnerships, community involvement and shares.
Ecological Land Cooperative	Eng/and	Ethical investment company (Farmland)	MSC set up to address the lack of affordable sites for ecological land-based livelihoods in England. Their solution and core business is the creation of small clusters of three or more affordable residential smallholdings.

Source: R. Ajates Gonzalez

capacity to absorb waste at the other. Figure 11.1 is just zooming in and providing a closer look at the unequal power relations these multi-stakeholder cooperative initiatives are trying to tackle through the different strategies discussed in this chapter. A list of the case studies and their locations can be found in Table 11.1.

Rediscovering new allies

For decades, large retailers have presented themselves as the indispensable middle link helping producers market their products and looking after the interests of consumers by offering cheap and “convenient” food. This discourse claims growers and consumers’ interests cannot ever be reconciled. Under what conditions can consumers and farmers become allies rather than opponents? Multi-stakeholder cooperatives (MSCs) are emerging as one possible solution. As opposed to conventional agricultural cooperatives formed by farmer members only, MSCs offer membership to consumers, buyers and worker members (Gray, 2014). MSCs normally have weighted voting for each group of members to ensure growers can maintain a voice and decision-making power even when consumer members outgrow them. In the UK, MSCs even have a new set of cooperative rules approved in 2009 called the Somerset Rules (Somerset Cooperative Services, 2009). As a worker and consumer member from a dairy MSC in the Basque Country called Esnetik (Esnetik, n.d.) told me, joining an MSC offers a welcomed opportunity to individuals wanting to develop agency and participate in agrarian projects while still maintaining their identity as consumers.

In the UK, Manchester Veg People (MVP) is another MSC bringing together growers, coordinators and buyers from restaurants, cafes and Manchester University. MVP is the only provider of food in Manchester that is both local and organically grown (Manchester Veg People, 2014; Ajates Gonzalez, 2017). MVP is working with schools to adjust their menus so that they can incorporate seasonal food cultivated by MVP growers. By tapping into public procurement, MVP aims to reach people who might not otherwise eat MVP vegetables, creating more demand for fairer and more sustainable food while democratizing access to local organic food. In London, OrganicLea, a workers’ farming cooperative very close to its consumers, has liaised with Waltham Forest Council to access and lease land for food production “in the city, for the city” (OrganicLea, 2014). These collaborations reclaim the right to have enabling local authorities supporting local communities (Böhm, Pervez Bharucha & Pretty, 2014), transforming local governments from enemies posing obstacles into allies, while connecting bottom-up initiatives with top-down resources.

Additionally, MSCs target collective rather than individual consumption for bigger impact, serving groups with a minimum number of households, neighbors associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), workplaces, etc. This approach contrasts with the focus on individualization promoted by big food brands and retailers. It also encourages long-term relations that foster new sustainable habits of food provision and consumption (Brunori, Rossi & Guidi, 2012).

As explained in the introduction, most farmers and consumers are separated by a narrow stronghold of power dominated by large processors and retailers. Local governments are also normally seen as distant actors and a problem rather than as potential enablers. However, when this distance is overcome, mutual points of interests can be found, and alliances forged. Co-opting these new alliances is hard for large actors as they lack the flexibility to adapt to micro-local dynamics; big retailers thrive by separating, rather than bringing together, farmers and producers.

Fostering diversification instead of specialization

Diversity as a solution becomes key at all levels: from the plot to the global (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010). In the farm, agroecological approaches that try to mimic cycles found in nature help growers move from monoculture to polycultures that offer more varied produce and lowers the need for artificial inputs, reducing dependency on the agri-industrial conglomerate (Actyva, 2014). By sharing land, new workers' cooperatives in farming such as OrganicLea and Moss Brook Growers (members of MVP) are able to attract growers from different backgrounds, meaning that not only crops, but also producers, are diverse (Moss Brook Growers, 2014). Some MSCs, such as Esnetik, are keen to move away from specialization and are happy to support new shepherds to install themselves with a small herd and a multi-crop plot mainly for self-consumption. This allows them to reduce the start-up investment required for standard large herds and fosters the diversity of foods they are producing.

Diversification is present not only within these cooperatives' farm systems, but also in their social systems. By including workers and consumers in the cooperative organization, MSCs offer several avenues through which different actors are able to share and negotiate their concerns or objectives, whatever they are: environmental, political, gender or health-related (Ajates Gonzalez, 2017). Diverse members bring their own networks and struggles with them, which takes them from local to global food – such as Via Campesina, an international movement of peasants, agricultural workers and landless people (La Via Campesina, 2011). Some are also developing “local to local” partnerships with the aim of bringing together like-minded initiatives in different countries, trading in their own terms and without losing the trust characteristic of face-to-face exchanges (Baggini, 2014). Esnetik also organizes “street protest markets”, a critical version of standard farmers' markets where members sell products and talk to the public about food issues.

Importantly, these global networks are going beyond food into other aspects of life. The Cooperativa Integral Catalana offers not only food, but also health, education and finance solutions to their members (Cooperativa Integral Catalana, 2014). Catasol, in northwest Spain, is also aiming to cover a wide range of needs for its members (see Tienda Catasol, 2017). Other MSCs, such as Esnetik, have a close involvement with REAS (the Spanish branch of the Social Solidarity Economy

Network) to work for a new society that takes into account the social and ethical dimension in all its economic activities (RIPESS, 2015). It was interesting to learn that REAS has six principles that, along with feminist and food sovereignty ones, are more central and core to the *raison d'être* of Esnetik than the International Cooperative Alliance cooperative principles in themselves (REAS, 2011).

Diversification for Actyva means bringing together people from different professions: media, marketing, farming, etc. under the same cooperative umbrella, with the aim of supporting small farmers with extensive farming methods but no marketing skills to market their products more effectively. At the same time, they are creating employment in a very rural area of Spain that has the highest rate of undeclared or shadow economy in the country at 31.1 per cent (6.5 percentage points higher than the national average) with over 30 per cent unemployment (GESTHA, 2014).

Referring back to the double hourglass concept, this second strategy aims to emphasize the diversity that can be found in nature, farmers and consumers: e.g. by trying new varieties instead of the mass-produced developed ones, and by offering new products through new channels instead of the mass-produced ones offered by supermarkets. This strategy is hard to conventionalize as it goes against the standardization characteristic of the industrial food system: reducing costs and risks while maximizing profit.

Accessing resources while redefining success and growth

Another strategy to avoid conventionalization involves accessing finances to be able to help new growers with fewer resources. Some models, such as workers' cooperatives, are centuries old, but are being reintroduced into farming, which is quite rare as most cooperatives in agriculture nowadays are for supply, processing and marketing services that do not require farmer members to share land or work together on a daily basis. Evidence suggest members of large supply and marketing cooperatives embedded in industrial food operations are likely to behave more like detached customers rather than owners of their cooperatives (Nilsson, Svendsen & Svendsen, 2012). Furthermore, for people who are keen to make a living as food producers but do not come from a farming family, workers' cooperatives can be a tool to access land and resources, thus facilitating access and diversity of growers from different backgrounds.

One of these initiatives is the Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC), an MSC offering positive investment opportunities to members who can buy shares in organic farms that are then offered to new tenant farmers (Ecological Land Cooperative, 2015). ELC's solution and core business is the creation of small clusters of three or more affordable residential smallholdings. Growers are given permission to build their own sustainable home. Another organization is the Biodynamic Land Trust (BLT). Similarly to ELC, BLT works to take back land from intensive farming methods, put it into trust, retaining the freehold in order to protect it for agricultural and ecological use, and keep it affordable in perpetuity (Biodynamic Land

Trust, n.d.). The BLT follows a tripartite model of the economy based on public, private and community ownership that is also being adopted by some community farms (Large, 2010). BLT is also supporting a seed cooperative project (Biodynamic Land Trust, n.d.). In Spain, many cooperatives are also rethinking the wider economic system they exist in and fostering the use of alternative and social currencies (Cooperativa Integral Catalana, 2015).

While large players in the conventional food systems are constantly chasing new markets, tight profit margins and short-term returns for their shareholders, a new trend for decent livelihoods based on non-profit farming is slowly emerging (Carvel, 2010). This quote from an OrganicLea member offers an insight into the vision for a non-for-profit food system:

So when we say we are non-for-profit we don't mean we are against fair livelihoods, it means we are against the extraction of profit from other people's labor, so after paying livelihoods, we re-invest any surplus into the organization or into similar organizations and that for us it is a bigger social movement I suppose, a bigger drive to try and create a more equal society and farmers and growers should be able to make a dignified livelihood from their labor.

(OrganicLea worker, 2014, London)

When this research was taking place, Esnetik members' objective was in fact to de-grow to a sustainable size they could maintain while growing more collective demand for their produce. This process involved not only redefining success, but also moving from vertical to horizontal growth, an approach also shared by MVP members – who, like Esnetik, see their success as the proliferation of sister cooperatives in other cities.

On the other hand, strategies for growth to reach more consumers and create more impact are also considered, but not at any price. Closely linked to their systemic thinking and allies beyond food, new models to overcome logistics barriers and achieve economies of scale are being developed. Collaborations with other ethical initiatives producing and trading non-food products to share transport costs or with driver cooperatives in the framework of the solidarity economy are in the making.

This and the previous strategy highlight how long-term solutions must acknowledge and tackle intersectionalities, e.g. gender issues, economic background, etc. (Roth, 2013). The work on redefining success and growth links back to the wider socio-economic context (outer circle in the double hourglass Figure 11.1), e.g. having de-growth as a strategy or trying to tackle current barriers to land ownership.

Transparency and democratization of knowledge production

From the pursuit of diversification emerges an ambition for the democratization of knowledge production. The starting premise is that diverse agroecological

approaches bring abundance and increase resilience in the realm of crops, animals and people, while valuing different types of knowledge – both scientific and farmers’ knowledge (Levidow et al., 2014). Peer-to-peer learning in MSCs strengthens growers’ networks, both in food relocalization initiatives (Fonte, 2008) but also in online communities. These networks function to share seed varieties and practices (Seed Cooperative, 2016). The FarmHack community shares peer-to-peer designs of new tools and machinery (FarmHack, n.d.). Participatory research projects help give value to farmers’ knowledge (Center for Agroecology, Water & Resilience, n.d.) and can have a long-term impact (Scialabba, Grandi & Henatsch, 2003; Da Via, 2012; Wakeford et al., 2017).

An example of this long-lasting impact is the case of a participatory research project with Spanish workers’ cooperative La Verde, often quoted because it has been operating since it was set up in Cadiz in 1986 by agricultural workers with the aim to overcome their previous precarious labor situation. With the help of the Institute of Sociology and Farming Studies at the University of Cordoba, the Council of the Assembly of Andalusia and the Syndicate of Farm Workers of Andalusia, a research project called “Study of the potential use of local varieties of horticultural crops for organic agriculture” was initiated in 1988. Since then, they have had an ongoing involvement in saving and recovering traditional seed varieties. Their impact has been multilevel: locally, by recuperating forgotten varieties and re-starting an interest in the subject; nationally and internationally, as they host one of the largest organic seed banks in the European Union and have become the main organic seed supplier in Spain. La Verde has received recognition from the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for its work on alternative breeding and participatory research (Scialabba, Grandi & Henatsch, 2003). Their work on local, regional and national seed networks has not stopped (Red Andaluza de Semillas, 2010).

Transparency is also a key mechanism to protect the alterity of these initiatives; the cooperatives discussed are open for visits, a practice that serves both to educate members and to reinforce relationships of trust that do not require labels. Another solution inherently based on transparency is Esnetik’s double labeling (see Image 11.2). All dairy products sold by this cooperative carry a label with a breakdown of the agreed price paid to the shepherds, and the percentage that goes to processing, packaging and marketing. Large retailers would not be able to absorb this practice, becoming a strategy for resistance that Esnetik’s members are very aware of:

When I arrived it was already in place and it was one of the things that attracted me to participate in the project. [...] Often from the agro-industrial model, many of the initiatives or the language end up being absorbed as their own, they commercialize their own organic lines even if they come from monocultures or far away places from the place of consumption [...]. The local part has also been integrated in the discourse of many big retailers, even if it also comes from big producers, from monocultures, intensive methods, no fair pay to local producers. [...] So then we thought that what



FIGURE 11.2 Transparency: Esnetik's double labeling

characterizes big retailers is the impoverishment of the peasantry, the more you deliver, the more indebted you become, tightening prices all the time even more and the other conditions in the contract, so they are not going to be able to copy this [. . .] And when the commercialization goes over 20%, then they are never going to be able to do double labelling.

(Esnetik member, 2014, Spain)

This final strategy goes beyond challenging dominant practices in food systems and refers to efforts addressed at the transformation towards new ways of producing and sharing knowledge that supermarkets cannot capitalize on.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a layered framework of four interconnected strategies used by MSCs: rediscovering new allies, fostering diversity, rethinking access to resources while redefining success and democratizing knowledge production. These four strategies come together to form a solution to improve food systems by reducing the risk of co-optation and increasing multilevel diversity (of growers, varieties, market channels, etc.). This solution is rooted in, and depends on, developing practices that are more difficult to conventionalize. The strategies discussed avoid co-optation by making it more difficult for large retailers and processors to co-opt certain practices: by increasing autonomy of growers, maintaining traditional production methods and varieties that cannot be mass-produced and industrialized; and by having a clear political and transformative vision.

MSCs offer inclusive umbrellas where struggles, but also skills, energies and hopes, converge. The connection of strategies discussed allows intersectionalities

often neglected in AFN discourses to arise, providing a space for debate and the generation of potential ways forward. Aspects such as the gender and age of farmers, land ownership, disparities in income and decision-making power are often ignored or dismissed by conventionalized and standardized food production and retailing models that reward homogeneity of growers and produce that fit strict logistic and power dynamics. Multi-stakeholder food networks, in contrast, acknowledge these issues and tackle through their practices, treating them as interconnected rather than independent cradles of both inequality and resilient diversity.

Multiple knowledges and peer-based knowledge production offer opportunities to overcome asymmetrical social power structures. Creative forms of governance and exchange give people a new identity as members of connected networks and an avenue for collective action, beyond typical classifications that label them as consumers or growers. Based on the importance of processes, not labels or certifications, the risk of replication becomes minimized as these modes of production and exchange are harder to copy by large players.

Inspired by food systems thinking that goes beyond reductionist and mechanistic models, these initiatives emerge from the awareness of being small pieces ~~part~~ of the bigger jigsaw puzzle that food is (livelihoods, taste, tradition, etc.); the starting point is to question whose voices are missing in the current system. The systemic approach of these strategies is characterized by their strong local character combined with a deep awareness of and participation in global struggles. A bold next step for these MSCs, who already include in their management boards representatives of farmers, workers and consumers/buyers, could be the addition of a representative for the environment and for future generations in their boards to ensure all key short and long term interests are taken into account.

The food system needs systemic change. There is a growing humble awareness amongst grassroots innovators that no one thinker or group is going to single-handedly achieve a fair and food-secure future. The solution lies in the hands of many allies across and beyond food movements coming together under a solidarity economy model able to create solid alternatives for regenerative ways of eating and living that cannot and should not be conventionalized.

RECIPE: POLITICAL MAFTOUL (GIANT COUSCOUS) WARM SALAD WITH ROASTED VEGETABLES

I wanted to share this recipe because, through its ingredients, this dish can trigger a thousand reflections and conversations about the interwoven complexities and joys soaked in every meal we eat: tradition, trade, gender, climate, geo-politics, land, certifications and farming methods, amongst many others.

All foods have a political dimension. This could be about the government subsidies promoting the cultivation of a particular ingredient, the conditions of the agricultural workers who harvested another or if the eaters are local people or distant and better-off far-away consumers, etc. Probably no other food gets as political as the organic and fair-traded Palestinian maftoul, or giant couscous, used in this recipe. This particular maftoul is commercialized in the UK by Zaytoun, the company that launched the world's first fair trade olive oil in 2009 and that aims to create and develop a UK market for artisanal Palestinian produce. Zaytoun aims to support farming communities in Palestinian territories through a sustainable initiative that works through trade and not aid. Organic and fair trade farming in the West Bank coupled with finding a niche market with politically-minded consumers in the UK is a solution that enables them to reproduce political and social resistance. The packaging and labeling are also done in Palestine to create additional employment opportunities.

The whole-wheat grain is boiled, sun-dried, cracked and then hand-rolled in ground organic whole-wheat flour. It is then steamed and sun-dried by women-owned cooperatives. Maftoul is traditionally made for special occasions.

I like recipes I can adapt using whatever ingredients I have at home. This reduces waste and increases creativity and confidence as a cook. I have tried to introduce as much flexibility as possible in the list of ingredients and instructions so that you can make it your own.

Ingredients

Zaytoun maftoul giant couscous (250g serves 4, calculate accordingly)

Vegetables – Select whatever vegetables you have at home, or if you are buying, buy whatever is seasonal, but avoid potatoes as the couscous will give you enough carbohydrates. Explore your local options for supporting different purchasing channels such as food assembly groups, allotment surplus, etc. Keep them varied for a more nutritional and colourful dish.

Dressing – You can simply add extra virgin olive oil or prepare the following dressing:

- honey (try to buy local as evidence suggests it is good to protect you from hay fever; also buy honey from natural beekeepers who do not feed the bees sugar and only collect a proportion of the honey produced by the hive and leave enough for the bees to feed on and survive over winter)
- extra virgin olive oil
- vinegar
- pepper
- salt

Cooking

This dish has three cooking stages:

1 *Roasted vegetables*

Turn on the oven to 180 degrees C. To make the most of the energy used to heat the oven up, try to fit in a baking session, e.g. baking oats and seeds for 10 minutes while the oven is heating up will give you the basis base for a tasty and healthy homemade muesli.

In the meantime, wash, peel (if needed) and chop the vegetables, e.g. onions, carrots, garlic (use garlic unpeeled and note it needs less roasting time), beetroot (roast in a separate small dish or it will taint all your vegetables a pink-reddish color), parsnips, cauliflower, mushrooms (also need less roasting time), etc. For green leafy vegetables, either roast for less time or steam and add at the end.

Drizzle olive oil and add a pinch of salt and pepper over the vegetables; put them in the oven and roast until you can put a knife through them easily.

2 *Maftoul*

While the vegetables are roasting, rinse the maftoul, then bring it to a boil in 400ml of water or stock. Simmer for around 12–15 minutes until the liquid is absorbed. The grains will change from white to a golden color.

3 *Dressing*

While the maftoul is simmering, whisk together the honey, oil, vinegar, pepper and salt in a separate bowl to form a smooth dressing.

Toss all ingredients together in a bowl, add dressing to taste and serve warm. After eating, if there is anything left, you can enjoy it for lunch the following day; top it up with some salad leaves and tomatoes, cucumber or whatever salad-prone ingredient you have available. Love food hate waste!

Critical questions

- 1 To what extent are the interests and objectives of consumers and producers irreconcilable?
- 2 If most people are unable to grow everything they eat, what ways of trading can foster multi-dimensional food system sustainability?
- 3 Can more sustainable methods of food growing and provisioning ever become a serious and widespread alternative without overcoming labor and logistics issues?

- 4 To what extent can linking up with other transport, retail and processing cooperatives or social enterprises sharing the same values and vision be part of a solution to those logistic issues?
- 5 How can international solidarity economy networks and principles take Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) to the next stage, where they start becoming the norm and not the alternative?

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