

## WP 2: Agri-food Exports from Brazil

This work package examines the practices of agri-food producers in export-orientated economies like Brazil, focusing on the poultry (chicken) and aquaculture (prawn) sectors.

### Context:

The modern food system is often described as a '**placeless foodscape**' that privileges the relations of political economy over those of moral economy. In this system, food is produced and retailed as part of globalized, technologically-sophisticated, commodity-based distribution networks. These networks serve to: distance consumers from producers; place financial values before ethics; make it possible to produce food year-round regardless of climate or season, and reduce specific foodstuffs to ubiquitous and interchangeable commodities. Recent 'food scares', emerging concern over human and animal welfare, and a range of other ethical issues have led consumers to question the governing logic of the contemporary agri-food system and to foster a growing awareness that food that came from 'nowhere' could have come from anywhere.

### Aims and Methods:



The research examines:

- When and how **place and provenance** matter to consumers
- The ways in which **places of production relate to places of consumption**
- The production (and later consumption) of **place and provenance narratives** within the contemporary food system
- The **geographical imaginations** and **imaginative geographies** that surround food's production and consumption.

The research employs a 'topographic' approach, including empirical research in a range of locales from sites of consumption (e.g. kitchens and dining rooms), retail (supermarkets, street markets and butcher shops) and production (farms, boardrooms). Its primary methods include semi-structured interviews, site-writing, participant observation and photography.

### Findings:

- **Provenance matters to consumers**, but only when consumption itself carries social and cultural significance. For example, provenance matters for special occasions like a Sunday meal but it less important during banal consumption events like mid-week lunch.
- The importance of provenance is linked to the **materiality of food**. So, with respect to chicken, the provenance of whole chickens matters significantly for consumers when eaten as part of a roast lunch but, as chickens are cut up and processed into smaller pieces (within a chicken sandwich or ready-meal, for example) provenance is of less concern.
- Consumers seek to establish provenance by instituting '**consumption rules**' that reflect their ethical concerns (around ethical modes of production and 'alternative' food systems).
- These rules include the sourcing of **geographically significant products** that map onto their imaginations about how food ought to be produced and consumed. This extends beyond simply buying food produced in 'safe' places to seeking to establish the safety of **entire supply chains** that conform to consumers' geographical imaginations. It also involves buying food from seemingly '**idyllic farms and 'local butchers (and everywhere in between)**', reproducing a geographical narrative derived from bucolic ideas about landscape, farming and eating.
- When provenance does not matter, consumption rules are often disregarded (e.g. quick mid-week meals) or ignored for the sake of **convenience or temporary indulgence** (e.g. when consuming 'fast food').



Photograph: © Benjamin Coles

### Key Publications:

Coles, B. F. and Hallett L. F. (2012) 'Consuming Fish Heads: Narratives of What Gets Eaten and What Gets Thrown Away', in D. Evans et al. (eds), *Putting Waste on the Food Studies Agenda*. Sociological Review Monographs, in press.