

Green Belt Project: Promoting agroecological food production in peri-urban Rosario

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The Green Belt Project Rosario (PCVR, Proyecto Cinturón Verde Rosario) seeks the conversion of productive peri-urban areas in Rosario to agroecological systems. The general aim is to achieve production of healthy food (meaning without contaminants) and improvement of the socio-economic conditions of producers, their families and farm workers. It also aims to contribute to the health of consumers and the environment, as well as revitalise short food supply chains that target differentiated markets.

The city of Rosario is located in the Santa Fe province of Argentina. The city covers an area of 179km² and has an estimated population of almost 985,000 inhabitants. Together with other 24 localities it comprises the Metropolitan Area of Rosario (AMR, Área Metropolitana de Rosario).

In the past, horticulture production from Rosario's greenbelt used to supply most of the fruits and vegetables to the city, including potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce, onions, carrots, squash or pumpkin, and different varieties of fruit. However, the local agricultural production area and capacity have diminished over the past years. This is due to urbanisation of agricultural land as well as shifts from horticulture production to soy production for export.

Soybean producers as well as remaining horticulture farmers currently produce their crops by applying high levels of

chemicals with corresponding risks for environmental contamination and human safety. Overall, the city has seen a reduction in its local production capacity to feed its population, becoming more dependent on longer-distance food imports, while horticulture farmers have lost their livelihoods. Human health concerns for food safety have also increased.

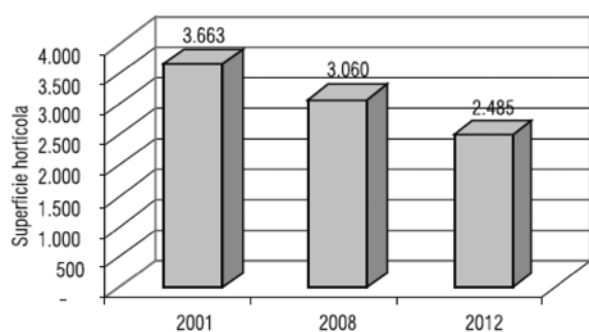
A production survey showed that current local production is mainly provided by small-scale family farmers who cultivate small areas of land and generally apply large amounts of agrochemicals. Most do not benefit from technical assistance and are advised only by vendors of agrochemicals. Research and laboratory analysis showed high levels of bacterial and chemical contamination of produce and lack of protection for agricultural workers, especially when applying pesticides. Producers also indicate increasing competition from imported products from other regions and low-quality production. At the same time, the Rosario population shows increasing consumer consciousness and demand for quality and healthy food products.

The Rosario Green Belt Project (PCVR) promotes new forms of sustainable and agroecological food production. This is understood as the stable production of goods and services that meet the nutritional, socio-economic and cultural needs of the population without compromising the health of people, natural resources, or the environment. The PCVR brings together government actors, technical institutions and civil society. It builds on work done through the Urban Agriculture Programme (as described in the previous article) and seeks to consolidate the city's agroecological public policy.

The Rosario Green Belt (PCVR) project

The PCVR is implemented in the peri-urban area of Rosario. It seeks to promote conversion to agroecological production systems in the entire productive peri-urban region.

The PCVR is based on land use ordinance no. 9144/13, which establishes the protection of 800 ha of productive peri-urban land to be used for fruit and vegetable production and safeguarded from urban expansion. The urban plan includes a proposal for this area to be an agroecological production area. It is also built on ordinance no. 8871/11 which sets an area of 100 m from the urban boundary as an agrochemical-free zone where no application of agrochemical pesticides is



Loss of horticulture area (in hectares) in the Rosario green belt from 2001 (3663 ha) to 2012 (2485 ha)

allowed. The 800 ha green belt is also recognised in the 2018 Strategic Plan for the metropolitan Area of Rosario.

The project addresses growing concerns about food safety and quality. It also seeks to strengthen the linkages between the city and its hinterland, local food production and consumption, food quality and responsible consumption, as well as stimulating the local and regional economy. Moreover, the project seeks to advance and reward horticultural activities based on ethical production principles as much as the producers' identity in their relationship to healthy food.

The project strategy is based on participatory technical support at individual and group levels. The project offers incentives for agroecological conversion processes, quality monitoring, and marketing under a provincial collective brand – which recognises the product as agroecological.

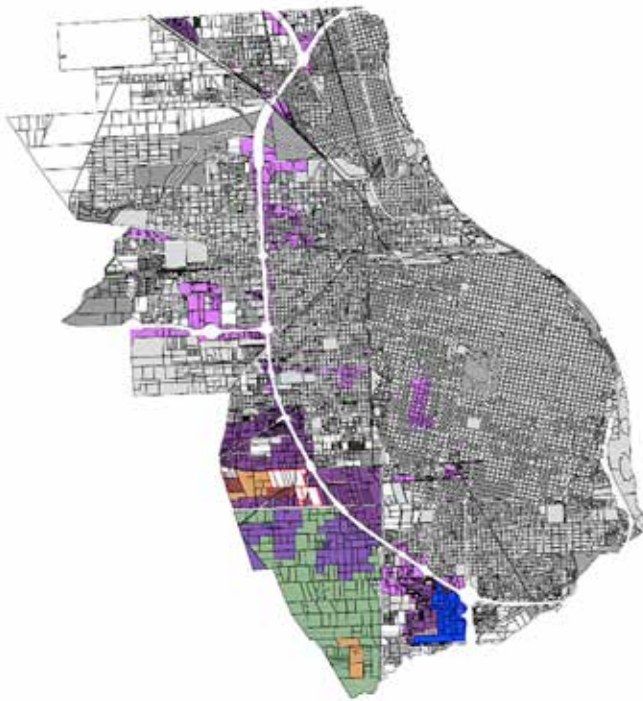
The project falls under the responsibility of the Municipal Secretaries of: Production and Local Development, Environment and Public Space, Health and Social Economy. It is implemented in conjunction with neighbouring municipalities, the Pro Huerta programme and the Ministry of National Family Agriculture.

Project implementation

The project started with the development of eight demonstration production units in the Rosario peri-urban area and six additional ones in the neighbouring town of Soldini. This accounts for a total of 40 ha being converted to agroecological production. At this trial stage, producers are converting either their entire farm, or a smaller area of minimum one hectare.

The project has three main work streams: productive, social and commercial. In terms of *production*, technical support is provided through participatory methodologies at group and individual levels. The aim is to achieve an attitude change. Support also comes in the form of provision of infrastructure and incentives to advance the agroecological transition. At the *social* level, the project aims to strengthen the relationship between producers and to improve their quality of life, for example housing, health and road infrastructure. At the *commercial* level, the aim is to increase the sale of differentiated products of higher quality. In the initial project stage this is achieved through direct sales based on customer orders, participation in four weekly market fairs organised by the municipality, sale of bulk food packages and deliveries to stores that stock organic produce. The project also plans to reach an agreement with grocery stores so that the produce is presented on special produce displays. Producers will also be able to sell their produce in the new Patio Market that will bring local and regional producers together in a retail space designed for food products of differentiated quality.

Products are sold under a 'Product of My Area' (Producto de Mi Tierra) logo, a quality label provided by the Government of the Province of Santa Fe. The logo aims to characterise the products by their location of production, tradition and excellence, to support their distinctive place in the market and their recognition and trust by consumers.



Green area: Protected area for the horticulture greenbelt. 800 ha of land that cannot be built upon. Municipality of Rosario

At the municipal level, a cross-departmental, technical and political team has been formed to be in charge of project implementation. The team is made up by members of the Secretariat of Production and Local Development, Secretariat of Environment and Public Space, Secretariat of Social Economy and the Food Institute. It is also connected to the Sustainability Cabinet through which all municipal areas collaborate in the designing of public policies.

At the provincial level, the project enjoys the technical and financial assistance of the Ministry of Production of the Province of Santa Fe, which is provided through the Provincial Peri-urban and Sustainable Food Production Programme. The project collaborates with several educational and technological institutions, NGOs and the private sector (the latter to promote productive use of organic waste). It collaborates with the Chamber of Commerce to monitor product quality and levels of agro-chemical residues.

Lessons learned

- It is important to have agroecological public policies that provide security to producers. When conditions such as secure land tenure and support at the productive and commercial levels – that ensure a stable income – exist, producers are quick to participate and allocate land to agroecological conversion.
- It is important to work with producers in coordination with civil society, educational and technological institutions to promote the behavioural change required for a transition towards sustainable systems. Through this project, agroecological production at large scale is being demonstrated. This builds up confidence for more

In larger cities, opportunities for formal and informal employment creation are becoming scarce. Urban growth may also impact food security. In response, our city has developed an Urban Agriculture Programme for the past years. Amongst others, the programme supports fruit and horticulture producers in peri-urban and semi-rural areas. These are areas often characterised by family production units and applying traditional production techniques to sustain and improve their enterprises. Given the fact that these producers have the capacity to provide consumers with safe and nutritious food, they will be supported in the adoption of good production practices that guarantee sustainability in production, social inclusion, hygiene and safety and environmental management www.rosario.gov.ar/web/sites/default/files/perm.pdf.

producers to join and increases consumers' access to healthy foods.

- Support for (improved) localised or regional production systems needs to combine production and marketing support with consumer education and awareness. Once citizens are made aware of where their food comes from and the quality of the food they consume, more responsible consumption habits will increase demand for more healthy and local products.

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