



Challenges for Agroecology: the difficulties of changing the production model
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Introduction: This work stems from research carried out and reflections arising from activities to do with the project “Agroecological Practices in Pontal do Paranapanema, (SP)”, financed by CNPq/MDA and co-ordinated by Professor Antônio Thomaz Júnior. The production models developed and/or developing in the field to-day reflect the technology package known as the “Green Revolution”. Historically, it can be confirmed that interest has increased as a result of the influence of large agribusinesses in modernizing means of production to meet the needs of foreign demand. Thus, new techniques and work control procedures are being implemented in agroindustrial activities, hence the increased use of agricultural machinery and the use of chemical additives which are being increasingly substituted for conventional and traditional forms of production.

Methodology and Development: Agroecology has emerged as an alternative means by which peasants can resist capitalist agroindustrialism, creating work and life conditions that can be maintained in the field controlled by familiar mechanisms of social reproduction. To think of changes in the production system imposed in the field to-day is to think of the hampering agents that present themselves in diverse ways. Monocultural activities have increasingly expanded and in some cases, such as the Guarani settlement in the municipality of Sandovalina and the Paulo Freire settlement in Mirante do Paranapanema, both in São Paulo state, sugar cane crops are “swallowing” the settlements with such intensity that its limit is reached only at the gate of the property. Given these conditions, family production is at the mercy of effects caused by activities developing in the sugar cane fields, such as, for example, highly toxic chemical spraying by air, a technique being increasingly used by agroindustrial companies. Another aspect impeding agroecological production is the marketing potential, although some government-inspired programmes have contributed to improve this situation, for instance, the Food Acquisition Programme (PAA), but there is still great difficulty in merchandizing the produce of small farms, particularly when sales flow and the prices offered are considered. **Final thoughts:** The production model practiced to-day is driven by economic criteria and concentrates on export, disregarding the real food needs of the population. Agroecology brings self-sufficiency in food and offers conditions which enable small farmers to develop their production with a view to local marketing potential, producing pesticide-free food and respecting the environment. We believe agroecology to be an important alternative to counterbalance the tendency of capitalism and for the traditional production methods of the peasant farmer.

Key words: Agroecology, settlement, peasant production.