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This paper aims at provoking further thoughts on our current vision of the food and the agri-food chain. With an increasing population and a scarcity of resources, there is a current need to step back and think about the moral values that motivate people to produce, sell and consume food. In this way, this article offers an interesting point of view on how we should reconsider food as a common and not as a commodity.

Firstly, this article develops a historical point of view of our relationship to food. Thousand years ago, food was considered as a global common good. It means that it was freely accessible for all. After crop and animal domestication, people started to exchange their food surplus and the food trade grew quickly. The privatization of the production led to the privatization of food products and during the XXth century until now, an excessive commoditization of the food has occurred. Food is now subject to the market rules and transnational companies exert near monopoly power all along the food chain, maximizing the profits whatever the consequences. This situation leads for instance to the waste of one third of all food produced every year (FAO, 2011). Resources, such as soil, being limited, it is obvious that this system is unsustainable. Moreover, our current system has also failed at guaranteeing an equitable food access to everyone. Indeed, while the food production would allow to feed everyone, it still remains more than 800 million undernourished people (FAO et al., 2012).

In order to feed the projected 9 billion people and ensure equity and sustainability, reports show that we need to reconsider our agricultural methods but also our current consumerist vision of food (IAASTD, 2009). One way to solve this situation is to reconsider food as a common global good. A standard economic definition of a common global good (or a public good) is a good that is both non-excludable and non-rivalrous in that individuals cannot be excluded from use and where use by one individual does not reduce availability to others. While the food production exceeds the consumption, food can meet these criteria. One of the major issue with the current system is that the power between the three actors of the agri-food system (private sector, government and civic collective actions) is unbalanced. Defining food as a “mixed good” in a balanced tri-centric scheme could make a good transition towards a more sustainable system (Ostrom, 2009). Food, considered as a public good, is defined as the minimal quantity that prevents from suffering hunger. The government would have a central role in providing the commons and guarantee its access to everyone. On the other side, the private sector could prosper from the unnecessary food production surplus, considered then as a private good. The civic collective actions could complement the regulatory mandate of the state and build equitable and sustainable alternatives to conventional food markets. Local communities share an interest for a sustainable use of their resources and could reach food security through the creation of associations, cooperatives or self-help groups.

Considering a good as private or public is the result of social or political choice. Reconsider the food as a “mixed good” is then possible. Changing the means of production (using natural inputs instead of agro-chemical fertilizers related to some transnational companies, using uncopyrighted seeds...), using patent-free agricultural

practices and national institution innovations, considering human health as a public good, so indirectly nutrition as a public good, are some of the means that could be used to reconsider our agri-food system. One way to initiate this transition is to test these ideas in small to medium-scale governance units that could act as experimental laboratories. The involvement of the public sector (with appropriate funding policy for instance) is necessary to guarantee a minimum food for all and to ensure food security. Besides guaranteeing food access to everyone, considering food as a public good would solve the problem of price fluctuation, avoid the current land grabbing process and avoid the monopoly of transnational companies along the whole agri-food chain. Moreover, it could stimulate the innovations. Current proprietary rights by private companies of food related elements prevent further innovations. Millions of people innovating have far more capacity to find adaptive and appropriate solutions than a few private laboratories.

Considering that water is currently following a similar path to that of food with a privatization process (Mehta et al., 2012) and that air commodification has already started, it is important to think about a process of de-commodification of historical public goods in order to create a sustainable system guaranteeing a bearable use of resources and an equitable food access to everybody. One of the major challenges in the XXIst century will be to prioritize human well-being instead of market benefits that are triggered by the human greed for resources.

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