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THE AGRICULTURAL CONTRACTION IN SPANISH METROPOLITAN AREAS (1989-2009). PERI-URBAN FARMLANDS AS PRIVILEGED VICTIMS OF THE SPANISH BUILDING BUBBLE

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Abstract

As is well known internationally, Spain's real estate and building sectors were experiencing a boom before the Global Financial Crisis of the late-2000s. The physical consequences of this urban development are noticeable across the country and clearly evident in statistics describing national land-use trends. The pattern of this development has been spatially uneven but appears to have affected mainly metropolitan farmlands. To date no assessment has been made to determine the magnitude of land use change or the metropolitan areas most affected.

In that context, this paper describes an evaluation of recent farmland change in Spanish metropolitan areas. This estimation was carried out by GIS integration of statistical data derived from the Agrarian Censuses (1989, 1999 and 2009), available for the municipal scale in vector format, and the CORINE land-cover raster databases (1990 and 2006). Metropolitan areas were defined within the framework of an ongoing research project, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology (ref. CSO2010-16298).

The paper also describes shifts in the composition of agricultural systems of each metropolitan area according to the available data on workforce, economic activity, physical size of the holdings, etc. This enables an assessment of not only the physical change in farmland area, but also the nature and form of farming in peri-urban regions.



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STIMULATING ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORKS? A CRITICAL SURVEY OF A RECENT AGRI-TOURISM EXPERIENCE IN THE BAIX LLOBREGAT AGRICULTURAL PARK (CATALONIA, SPAIN)

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Abstract

Since 2008, the Baix Llobregat Agricultural Park (BLAP), a protected farmland precinct covering 3,300 hectares in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, has been developing a novel alternative to conventional agri-tourism. *Holeriturisme*, which derives from the Latin word *holus*, for vegetable, and translated literally from Catalan means "vegetable tourism", seeks to reinforce links between BLAP producers, on the one hand, and nearby metropolitan consumers, on the other. Although having many of the features of better known forms of agri-tourism, such as wine tourism, *holeriturisme* is as much about developing new short chain markets for vegetable producers as it is about peri-urban leisure opportunities.

Currently, most of the BLAP farmers lose marketing control of their fresh vegetable product when selling through wholesale outlets. Likewise, local consumers cannot identify BLAP vegetables when buying at suburban markets or supermarkets. In response to this situation, the BLAP management body has developed a strategy to help farmers to connect directly with metropolitan consumers. One element of that strategy is the *holeriturisme* initiative, which includes farm visits, an interpretive exhibition at the BLAP headquarters, cooking and tasting workshops, and special events at nearby restaurants using local produce.

This paper begins by explaining the background of the *holeriturisme* initiative, contextualised by literature on alternative food networks and the changing geographies of food production, distribution and consumption. It then summarises the findings of two rounds of consumer satisfaction surveys conducted in 2010 and 2011 with a representative sample of *holeriturisme* participants. The paper concludes by discussing how *holeriturisme* might influence the development of more direct, short chain links between farmers and consumers, as well as the adoption of alternative food practices, such as consumption of organic produce, and alternative business models, such as 'box scheme' cooperatives or companies.