The threat to food security today is excess, not scarcity

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COP30 is an excellent opportunity to redefine food security, which until now has been systematically associated with producing ever more.
However, the scientific achievements and technological devices that were essential to increasing harvests and drastically reducing hunger in the second half of the 20th century have now become the greatest threat to global food security. What threatens us is no longer scarcity. It is excess.

The global agrifood system is marked by a triple separation: agriculture has been separated from biodiversity; factory farming has separated livestock from their sources of food; and food has been separated from health. This triple separation is expressed, in turn, in a triple monotony.

The first monotony is in agriculture. Humanity knows more than seven thousand edible products, four hundred of which can be cultivated. Yet, 75% of our diet comes from only six products: soy, maize, wheat, sugarcane, rice, and potatoes. And these products are obtained through techniques that have turned microorganisms, insects, fungi, and biodiversity in general into enemies to be eliminated—techniques that make the fight against life the foundation of productivity increases. This is the double face of agricultural monotony and the excess that characterises it: it is revealed both in the products and in the techniques used to obtain them.

The second monotony stems from the homogeneity of breeds and production techniques in animal farming, a regime that systematically tortures intelligent and sentient beings, with disastrous consequences for human health. These consequences are evident in the rise of antimicrobial resistance—one of the most serious current concerns of the World Health Organization—due to so-called “superbugs.”

The third monotony is that of diet, with the increasing supply of ultra-processed products that should not even be called food. The American writer Wendell Berry captures this perfectly when he says that the food industry does not care about health, and the health industry does not care about food.

This triple monotony is being increasingly challenged, not only by scientists and activists but also by the World Bank, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, and even organisations such as the World Economic Forum and the Mitsubishi financial group—the seventh largest financial group worldwide—which has just published a report warning of the dangers of ultra-processed products and the use of antibiotics in animal production.

Good news comes from Latin America: here, scientific foundations are emerging that will make it possible to move beyond the mechanisms of the Green Revolution, through a set of bio-inputs in which Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia today lead globally. Moreover, farmers themselves in soy-producing regions of Brazil are beginning to question their dependence on chemical inputs that erode their soils and undermine their yields.

The agrifood system is just one example of what we can generally call the economy of excess. It is not about opposing economic growth, but rather opposing the growth of what undermines the well-being of contemporary societies—promoting what improves social life and rejecting what harms human health, animal welfare, and the ecosystem services upon which we all depend. Food security in the 21st century lies in the abundance of life, not in the excess of what destroys it.