

# WHOSE LAND IS IT AND WHAT IS IT FOR?

AN UNFINISHED DEBATE ABOUT  
LAND ACCESS IN ARGENTINA



Dossier n° 65

Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research  
June 2023

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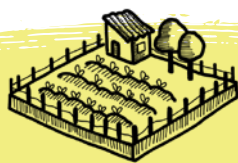
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## FOREWORD



MANUEL BERTOLDI OF FEDERACIÓN RURAL PARA  
LA PRODUCCIÓN Y EL ARRAIGO

We are living through a deep crisis in the hegemonic capitalist system. The contradictions that leave millions of people unable to access healthy food, stable work, and decent housing are becoming more acute. Liberal states no longer solve the problems of the vast majority, nor do they have the capacity to confront the advance of concentrated economic power that appropriates the land and strategic natural resources of our countries, leading to unprecedented environmental crimes.

In this context, discussions about land and land use have become central to the debate about political projects that would ensure both sovereignty and social justice. This dossier asks who owns the land, who produces from it, and to what ends. These are urgent and strategic questions that our people must grapple with in order to achieve structural transformations in land relations.

The following pages describe the increasing trend in Argentina towards concentrated land ownership, which has meant the loss of land for thousands of rural families. They also describe how the state and the governments in power have facilitated this trend, creating conditions that are increasingly adverse to rural life and food production by family-run farms. This has taken place alongside a deepening understanding of the rural as a backward place of sacrifice that lacks the opportunities otherwise available in our capitalist urban

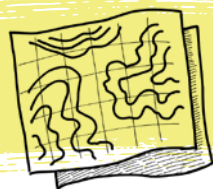
societies. One of the major obstacles that arises in these debates, as discussed in this text, concerns the extent to which communities can put down roots, especially for future generations. Although some recent policies have attempted to counter this trend, our findings show that they have been unable to staunch the general tide.

In recent years, shifts in family agriculture, especially the emergence of areas in urban peripheries where large numbers of families produce fresh food, have provided a source of hope. Thousands of small producers have organised themselves to obtain better market conditions and access to land, and, though they have to struggle against the intense discrimination and xenophobia in Argentine society, their demands are gradually gaining visibility through their direct actions and have even reached the centre of political power, Buenos Aires.

Access to healthy food is not a temporary problem; it is a central element of the times in which we live. The organisation and struggle of food producers and working people as a whole will solve a problem that, like so many others, has nothing to do with a lack of resources, but instead stems from how and to what end such resources are used. In a nutshell, what we are discussing is the world we want to build, the horizon towards which we must advance. It is clear that capitalism does not offer a sustainable framework for thinking about the future. It is our duty to propose alternatives for the future and build it ourselves. We must start talking without fear about agrarian reform, food sovereignty, agroecology, and about socialism as an alternative system, since it is through socialism that these ideas become viable.



## INTRODUCTION



How is it that a country like Argentina, with its vast rural territory, longstanding agricultural tradition, and capacity to produce food for hundreds of millions of people, is plagued by runaway inflation and high levels of poverty? More simply put: Why is there hunger and malnutrition in an agricultural producer like Argentina? This question has challenged the common sense of Argentines for years. In the midst of this apparent contradiction, there is an undeniable reality: a constant and growing rural exodus, a population that is extremely concentrated in cities, a system oriented towards the production and export of calories for animals and biofuels, and significant barriers to the democratisation both of land access and the production of food that is consumed by the population.

Argentina's landmass stretches across 279 million hectares, of which 267 million are classified as rural, 169 million are used for agriculture or forestry, and 155 million are made up of agricultural holdings known as EAPs\* that sell at least part of their goods on the market.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Argentina's land is intensively exploited.

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\* The production units that the National Agricultural Census analyses are agricultural holdings with a minimum area of 500 square meters (0.05 hectares) that produce agricultural, livestock, or forestry goods destined for the market and are managed from a single location by an agricultural producer that, in whole or in part, employs the same means of production and the same workforce across the various plots of land that make up each EAP. See INDEC, *Censo Nacional Agropecuario* 2018, 14

However, the country's population of 46 million is, for the most part, concentrated in large cities. According to the National Population Directorate, 92% of the population is based in urban areas, well above the world average of 54%, the European average of 75%, the US average of 82.2%, and the regional average of 83% across the Americas.<sup>2</sup>

Though a highly concentrated urban population is not necessarily a problem in itself, reports from the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) makes it clear that only half of the Argentine population simultaneously has access to running water, the natural gas network, and the sanitation system while more than 6% live in areas close to rubbish dumps, more than 8% live in flood-prone areas, and more than 4% live in situations of 'critical overcrowding'.<sup>3</sup>

One might think that Argentina would have solved the problem of feeding its population by now, that there would be an efficient agro-industrial system that guarantees that food reaches every Argentine's table on a daily basis. But it would be wrong to assume this: as of 2018, 14.2 million Argentines experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, an increase from 8.3 million in 2014.<sup>4</sup> These data served as the basis for the Ministry of Social Development of the Nation's resolution that created Argentina's Plan Against Hunger in 2020. This followed hot on the footsteps of the National Congress extending the country's emergency food law until December 2022 through law no. 27519. To make matters worse, inflation in Argentina in 2023 has already exceeded 100% year-on-year, well above the Latin American average, and the poverty rate hovers around 40% according to data from late 2022.<sup>5</sup>

In April 2023, social movements linked to food production led a nationwide protest against price increases and against Argentina's wheat flour cartels, distributing bread for the well below-market price of 150 pesos (USD 0.7) per kilo while handing out flyers in protest (known in Spanish as a *panazo* or 'bread protest'). Of the 155 million hectares of Argentine land that are used for agriculture, more than 36 million are dedicated to the production of a group predominantly made up of cereals and oilseeds destined for the external market. Soy, for example, occupies almost 13 million hectares, but fruits and vegetables account for less than 600,000 hectares.<sup>6</sup>

Another problem arises from the methods used by industrial agriculture and their harmful effects on the environment and on human health – both directly, during production, and indirectly, through consumption – caused by the use of the agrochemicals that are commonly employed in the dominant agricultural production model. This is laid out in detail in *Industrial Agriculture vs Agroecology: What Is the Future of Agriculture in the Region?*, published by the Argentina office of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.<sup>7</sup> The recent implementation of front-of-package labelling for industrialised foods sold in supermarkets and stores across the country, thanks to the Law for the Promotion of Healthy Eating (no. 27642), sheds light not only on existing concerns about the environmental impact of hegemonic agro-industrial production and the potential level of agrochemical residues in food, but also on the dietary guidelines for the population and the nutritional quality of the food available on the market.

It would therefore be reasonable to assume that there is at least a base-level consensus in Argentina, both among the population and the political leadership, about the need to implement and promote new forms of land use as well as food production and consumption. But as we began to write this dossier in April 2023, two perennial conflicts that come up whenever land reform is discussed have once again been in the news.

In the coastal town of Chapadmalal, roughly 400 kilometres south of Buenos Aires, the State Property Administration Agency (AABE) ceded public land to a civil association and launched an agroecological production project. The initiative, involving scientists from the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) and national universities, sought to respond to the needs of both rural producers in the fruit and vegetable belt outside of the city, who need land to produce their crops, and the local population, who need healthy and affordable food. The mainstream press portrayed this as an illegal occupation, expressing a racialised and classist imaginary.

Another instance of the conflict around land reform in Argentina manifested in 2023 in the province of Mendoza, where the provincial legislature spoke out against the extension of the Indigenous Territories Emergency Law (no. 26160) and the recognition of the land rights of native communities by the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INAI). This was done through a law that declares the indigenous Mapuche population, which it considers to be Chilean, to be ‘non-native’. Simultaneously, the National Supreme Court stopped the handover of 481 hectares of land to a Mapuche community in Bariloche, in the province of Río Negro.

Land reform in Argentina is complex and non-linear, concealing numerous twists and turns. For instance, under a production scheme that seeks to promote the export of agricultural and agro-industrial goods as a way to earn foreign currency, the coalition government led by President Alberto Fernández has tried to develop a policy aimed at identifying and strengthening family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture. This was initially done through the Secretariat for Family, Peasant, and Indigenous Agriculture (SAFCI) and is now being carried out by the National Institute for Family, Peasant, and Indigenous Agriculture (INAFCI). Along these lines, Argentina's Plan Against Hunger proposes 'promoting the production and sale of food from the solidarity, social, and popular economy as well as cooperatives and family farming', taking the view that this sector can provide solutions to this complex problem and counteract the hegemony of supermarket food sales.<sup>8</sup>

However, this debate is taking place in the context of a system of production that privileges the export of agricultural and agro-industrial goods necessary to earn the foreign currency needed for the state to function and for the current system to reproduce itself. This is a system that makes use of coercive mechanisms against small farmers and rural workers whose very existence is in opposition to the favoured status quo. This manifested, for instance, in the south of Buenos Aires Province in March 2023 during a major mobilisation and protest that *cebolleros* (small-scale onion farmers) organised against the tax persecution that they face at the hands of the national tax collection agency, the Federal Administration of Public Revenues or AFIP.<sup>9</sup>



## **FAMILY, PEASANT, AND INDIGENOUS AGRICULTURE VERSUS CONCENTRATED LAND OWNERSHIP**



We previously noted that the 2018 National Agricultural Census identified the existence of agricultural holdings on 155 million hectares of rural land. In total, there were nearly 250,000 holdings, 227,000 of which have been clearly demarcated by the census. Family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture, as well as groups of small and medium producers, account for the majority of the smallest agricultural holdings: there are approximately 31,000 holdings that have up to 5 hectares; 75,000 holdings that have up to 25 hectares; 150,000 that have up to 200 hectares; and 180,000 that have up to 500 hectares, with this last group representing 80% of the 227,000 hectares that have been demarcated by the census.<sup>10</sup>

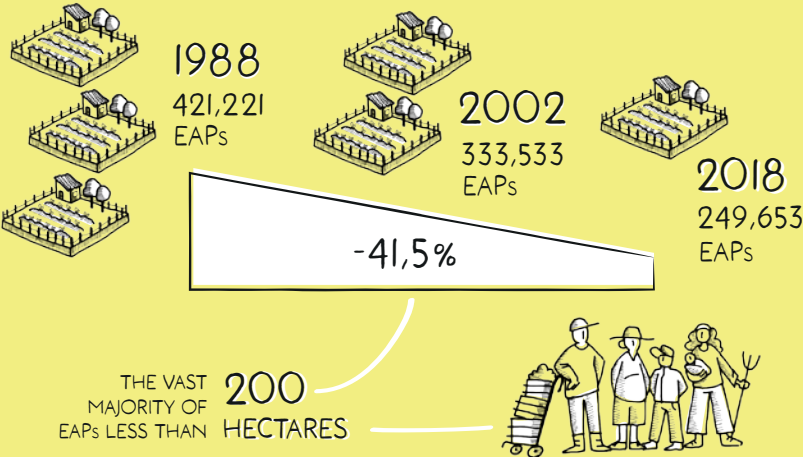
In 2022, the National Family Farming Registry (RENAF) surveyed what are referred to as Family Farming Units (NAF), i.e., a person or household who participates in the rural economy. Combined with data from the National Sanitary Registry of Agricultural Producers (RENSPA) and the National Agrifood Health and Quality Service (SENASA), almost 77,000 NAFs were counted.<sup>11</sup> In addition to being considered a way of life, family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture produces the majority of the food consumed by Argentina's population.

Family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture produces food for the local population, which helps strengthen food sovereignty and boosts regional economies. According to a study by the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA), this sector accounts for roughly 80% of Argentina's production of cassava, 75% of its goats, 60% of its yerba mate, 50% of its pigs, 41% of its vegetables, and 30% of its beekeeping and accounts for approximately half of the employment generated in the rural sector.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the importance of family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture, the state has not even begun to mitigate its rapid erosion, which is key for providing food to cities. Meanwhile, the expulsion of families from rural areas and the concentration of land ownership and production continue apace. All of this – especially the lack of land reform policies – has been condemned by rural social organisations in forums and conferences and in actions to raise awareness and protest, such as fairs, *verdurazos* ('vegetable protests'), and *panazos* ('bread protests').

Though creative protests expose the nature of the crisis, the problem is far from resolved. Its fundamental roots lie in the industrial agriculture system that grew out of the 'Green Revolution' of the late 1960s and intensified in the 1990s with what is referred to as 'soyafication' and the technology that comes with it. This includes planting crops without ploughing the soil (no-till farming), adopting the use of genetically modified seeds, the intensified use of agrochemicals, and the concentrated and increasing foreign ownership and use of Argentina's land.<sup>13</sup>

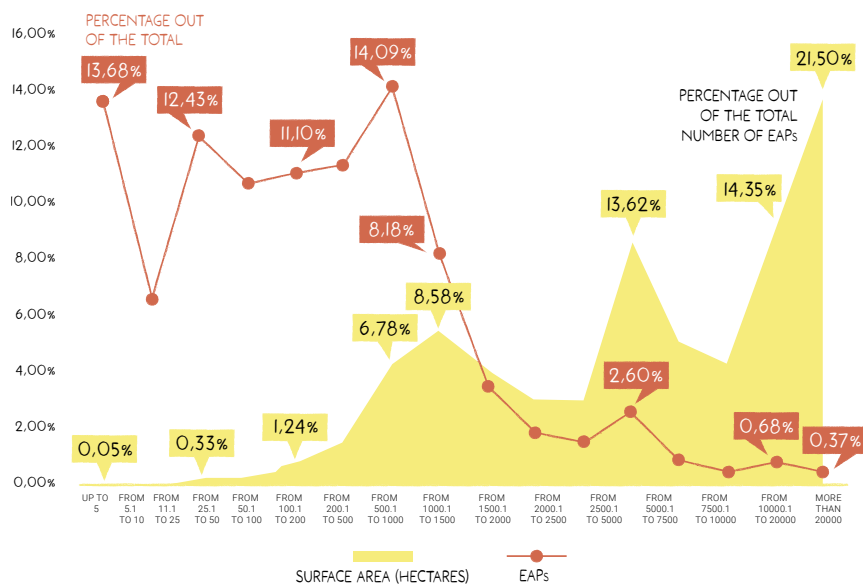
Rural social organisations point to the concentration of land in the hands of a small elite as the consequence of a mode of production that, among other effects, leads to the displacement of families from their livelihoods in rural areas. According to the National Agricultural Census, the number of agricultural holdings (EAPs) decreased by 25% in the span of just over fifteen years, from 333,000 in 2002 to roughly 250,000 in 2018. If we compare this with the 1988 census, we see that it is part of a longer-term trend: in 30 years, 41.5% of farms disappeared – an average of 5,678 per year.<sup>14</sup>



SOURCE: JASINSKI, CAGGIANO, OBERLIN, AND SOMMER, 2022.

The disappearance of these agricultural holdings does not mean that there is less land in production: as the smallest among them disappear (especially those less than 200 hectares), the largest expand and become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few. According to data from the 2018 National Agricultural Census, the approximately 180,000 agricultural holdings consisting of less than 500 hectares account for 80% of the 227,000 total holdings that have been demarcated by the census. These agricultural holdings occupy barely 11% of the land. Meanwhile, 89% of the total demarcated land is made up of the remaining 45,000 holdings that have between 500 and over 20,000 hectares (representing 20% of the total holdings), and a mere 849 holdings that have more than 20,000 hectares each (representing 0.3% of the total holdings). Yet, these holdings occupy more than 33 million hectares, or 21% of the total demarcated land. Holdings with more than 10,000 hectares add up to 1% of the total holdings – equivalent to almost 40% of the demarcated land, or some 62 million hectares – twice the size of Buenos Aires Province!<sup>15</sup>

In the following graph, we can see the size (in hectares) of EAPs as well as the percentage (out of the total EAPs) that each size accounts for. As the graph shows, the majority of the productive EAPs are small; as they increase in size, the number of farms is reduced, but the amount of land they account for increases.



SOURCE: THE AUTHORS, BASED ON THE 2018 NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL CENSUS. BASES THAT MAKE UP 100%: TOTAL AREA: 154,811,827 HECTARES. TOTAL NUMBER OF AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS: 249,663.

Because Argentina exports most of its agricultural production, those who produce food for the domestic market are exposed to extraordinarily disadvantageous conditions. This is especially the case for those with smaller landholdings, and even more so for those subjected to the precarious conditions resulting from a lack of access to land, propelled, among other factors, by expensive and short-term leases. Many of the owners of small- and medium-sized landholdings end up ceding the use of their land to large producers or

agricultural cooperatives because this pays better than cultivating the land on their own. The impact on people's everyday lives has been catastrophic, as the number of people living on these farms fell by 40% between 2002 and 2018 (the year of the most recent census), with more than 75,000 unoccupied homes registered as their former inhabitants likely fled to urban areas in search of better economic conditions.<sup>16</sup>

## THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND REFORM IN THE NATIONAL CONGRESS



Land reform poses a challenge for political forces across a broad range of ideologies. In recent years, a variety of political actors – from right to left, ruling coalition- to opposition-aligned, representing diverse strategies and objectives – have proposed bills in the National Congress seeking to democratise access to land and food production. This process has deepened in recent years, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with small peri-urban producers the most discontent and most active in conveying their claims to Congress.

In *A Historical Essay on Land Access*, jointly published by the Interdisciplinary Observatory on Agrarian Policies (*Mirador Interdisciplinario de Políticas Agrarias* or MILPA) and Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, we take an in-depth look at the bills presented in Congress that address the agrarian crisis. These bills, which seek to enable workers to put down roots in rural areas and access, live on, and produce from the land, include the Movement of Rural Excluded Workers (MTE-Rural)’s initiatives to protect peri-urban territories,\* the Union of Land Workers (UTT)’s *Procrear Rural* initiative, the call for the ‘return to the land’ promoted

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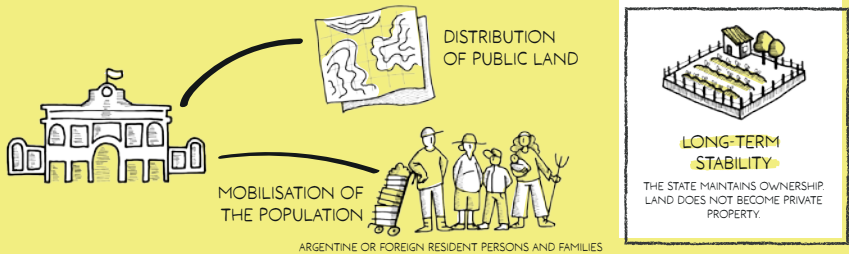
\* It is worth noting that a substantial amount of the people who were part of MTE-Rural are now part of The Rural Federation for Production and Settlement.

by organisations that bring together impoverished urban sectors, and other initiatives proposed in recent years at national fora.<sup>17</sup>

Other initiatives propose mobilising the population that has been excluded from cities around gaining access to rural public lands, where the state could cede the use of the land but retain the title. Yet others call for a system of accessible credits that would allow farmers to buy land in instalments through the creation of a fiduciary fund, instead of making rent payments. Another proposal, the peri-urban territories project, advocates for comprehensive development policies geared towards local producers, recovering a tradition of agricultural production in rural areas surrounding towns that are historically known in Argentina as *ejidos* (roughly equivalent to the English word ‘commons’.)

Other proposals have been put forth by organisations of small and medium producers such as the Argentine Agrarian Federation (FAA). The proposals of some sectors of the FAA further colonial projects and focus on educating landowners, which would recreate longstanding patterns that have been present since the country won its independence from Spain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Other sectors of the political right propose providing farming families and regional economies with different types of assistance and credits, and some even suggest the distribution of public land.

## 'MARCH TO THE COUNTRYSIDE' PROGRAMME



## 'PERI-URBAN TERRITORIES' PROGRAMME



## 'PROCREAR RURAL' PROGRAMME



## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

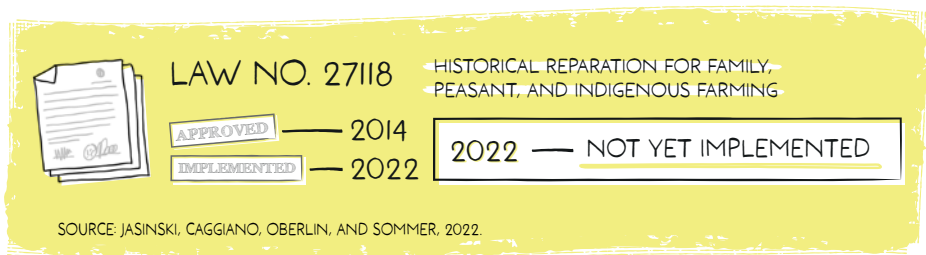


The land access bills proposed in recent years are based on two key laws that bring together longstanding discussions taking place among organisations that represent small and medium-sized family farmers, peasants, and indigenous communities: the Historical Reparation of Family Agriculture Law (no. 27118, 2014) and the Indigenous Territories Emergency Law (no. 26160, 2006). Both achievements are points of departure for thinking about comprehensive policies for the sector.

Though the Historical Reparation of Family Agriculture Law was approved in 2014, the lack of its enforcement during the following eight years left an undeniable vacuum, motivating the Secretariat of Family, Peasant, and Indigenous Agriculture (SAFCI) to present a series of partial proposals and develop a series of more focused programmes. Finally, at the end of 2022, the law began to be enforced, and an autonomous entity, the National Institute of Family, Peasant, and Indigenous Agriculture (INAFCI), was created to absorb the functions and structure of SAFCI. Today, INAFCI, with a leader of the rural people's movement at its helm, is responsible for applying the law. The challenge, however, will be to drum up the political will to set out a budget and delegate competencies in keeping with the law's objectives.

In a nutshell, the Historical Reparation of Family Agriculture Law seeks to 'construct a new rural life in Argentina' and guarantee 'access to land for family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture, given

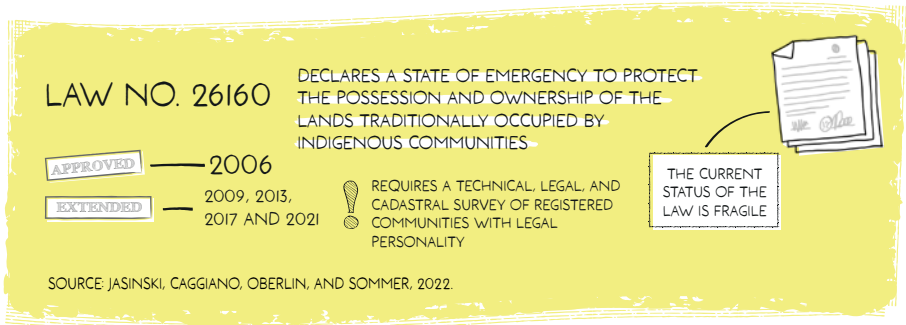
that land is a social good'. Among its fundamental aspects is the creation of a land bank with the aim of distributing, by sale, lease, or donation, land that is 'suitable and available' for family farming.<sup>18</sup>



This law, emerging from years of discussing comprehensive solutions for the sector, establishes financial, credit, social, commercial, technological, cultural, and educational policies with the aim of increasing the productivity and competitiveness of family farms and rural businesses, guaranteeing them access to markets, and increasing people's incomes and standards of living. Furthermore, it formalises land ownership for families occupying a given territory and provides them with commercial assistance such as by creating a 'national marketing chain' and other mechanisms as intermediary proposals to reach these goals.

The Indigenous Territories Emergency Law (no. 26160), approved in 2006 and extended four times (in 2009, 2013, 2017, and 2021), seeks to protect the possession and ownership of the lands traditionally occupied by indigenous communities. It also suspends the eviction of indigenous peoples, whose rights have been violated for centuries and who are also part of the heterogenous universe of

family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture. As part of the process to craft this law, a technical, legal, and cadastral survey of community lands was carried out under the aegis of the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (INAI), with the involvement of the Indigenous Participation Councils. The objective of this survey was to identify, register, and demarcate the areas that these communities occupy in order to protect them and guarantee them the right to community ownership over their lands. The first step for these communities to gain legal status of their land under no. 26160 is for them to register in the National Registry of Indigenous Communities (RENACI). The INAI then collects information on how the community is organised, its social and agricultural aspects of, and background information on land tenure and occupation.



Although the INAI does not grant land titles, this recognition constitutes institutional protection against possible evictions and is a fundamental preliminary step towards communities obtaining individual or community titles over the land that they have historically occupied. Of the almost 1,800 registered communities, more than

1,000 have been surveyed through the INAI, almost 800 of which were completed and around 300 of which are in process – and not all the existing communities are registered in the RENACI.<sup>19</sup> The conflict for the recognition of land in Mendoza that we mentioned at the beginning of this dossier was one case among many.

This law is not only a result of communities' unrelenting struggles, but also of achievements that were taking place within the country's institutions in dialogue with international developments. In 1985, law no. 23302 created the INAI, mandating the distribution of public land to indigenous communities or to indigenous individuals in cases where there is no recognisable community. In 1992, law no. 24071 was approved, which ratified International Labour Organisation (ILO) agreement no. 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples's rights.\* Furthermore, the constitutional reform of 1994 established (in paragraph 17 of article 75) Congress's obligation to recognise the 'community possession and ownership' of indigenous lands and to deliver other parcels of land suitable and sufficient for human development.<sup>20</sup>

The following decade, the 2006 Indigenous Territories Emergency Law (no. 26160), implemented in 2007, took these requirements

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\* ILO agreement no. 169 was adopted on 27 June 1989 and ratified by 22 countries, 15 of them in Latin America. It is a key international instrument that broadly protects the rights of indigenous peoples both as individuals and as collective subjects. Its 46 articles establish minimum standards of respect for the rights of indigenous peoples, including their ownership of land, use of natural resources in their territories, self-determination, and the preservation of their traditional knowledge. For more, see: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms\\_345065.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_345065.pdf)

into account and further clarified the nature of indigenous property: possession had to be current, traditional, public, and reliably accredited. Under this law, ‘full participation’ of the communities in the ‘democratic management of the territory’ was encouraged as an ‘act of justice and historical redress’.<sup>21</sup>

Three years later, in 2010, decree no. 700 established, under the purview of the INAI, the Commission for the Analysis and Implementation of Indigenous Community Property in order to achieve compliance with the provisions of the National Constitution and the constitutions of the provinces that recognise community possession and property. To this end, these provisions were incorporated into the Civil Code of the Nation in 2014. The Civil Code’s transitory article 18 lays down the right to community possession and ownership of ancestral lands and other lands ‘apt and sufficient for human development’.<sup>22</sup>

## THE GLOBAL HORIZON



Indigenous communities have recovered rights over their territories through a long process of struggle and organisation. This process has been supported by a global context that has recognised indigenous people's rights, which has in turn made an impact at the local institutional and legal levels. A similar phenomenon is taking place in the arenas of food production and the increasing expulsion of families from rural life, where the precedents and recommendations of international organisations are shaping the country's approach.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that 70% of the basic food basket in Latin America and the Caribbean is produced by family farming. This data underpinned the United Nations' declaration that 2014 would be the 'Year of Family Farming', through which it emphasised the role of family farming in the fight against hunger and poverty and for food security nutrition, environmental protection, and sustainable development.<sup>23</sup>

The various organisations that represent family farming have highlighted the need to implement rights that have already received recognition. Many of the bills presented in Congress have called for compliance with targets such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to which Argentina is a signatory. Because of popular movements, it was possible to establish points of agreement and action programmes to improve conditions for family farming through meetings such as the First National Congress for Land, Production, and Our Common Home (in 2023) as well as in the National

Agrarian Forum of 2019.<sup>24</sup> These movements have also sought effective compliance with the *United Nations Declaration of Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* of 2018, which calls for food sovereignty as a way to address the food crisis that affects more than one billion people around the world.<sup>25</sup>

Food security and food sovereignty are central in the ongoing debates that have led to bills being presented at the local level. The differences between these two terms – food security and food sovereignty – have to do with conversations taking place among rural social movements at an international level that were forged in the heat of the struggles against neoliberal globalisation. In 1992, the international organisation La Vía Campesina was created, as was the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organisations (CLOC) in 1994. In 1996, the FAO defined the concept of food security as ‘physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food’.<sup>26</sup> In response, the organisations affiliated with La Vía Campesina put forth their definition of food sovereignty in the *Nyéléni Declaration*: ‘the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems’.<sup>27</sup> In other words, if food security ensures that people can eat, food sovereignty is a way not only to achieve food security, but also to ensure that food can be produced in a healthy and fair manner and in harmony with the environment.

In Argentina, the struggle of rural actors on the local level advanced during the second half of the 1990s and in the early years of the

twenty-first century, leading to the creation of the National Indigenous Peasant Movement (*Movimiento Nacional Campesino Indígena* or MNCI) in 2003. The 2014 Historical Reparation of Family Agriculture Law is, in part, one of the achievements of this process. Since then, the concept of food sovereignty has come to be defined as citizen participation in socio-productive development, land management, and food production, taking into account the ‘quality and safety’ effects of inputs (such as seeds, agrochemicals, and specialised agricultural machinery) on the environment, without failing to observe the implications of food security (as defined in bill. no. 2494-D-2014).<sup>28</sup>

## A PROBLEM WITH HISTORY



In *A Historical Essay on Land Access*, we not only addressed these various initiatives but also set out to build bridges with the past in order to better understand land access policies in earlier periods that can help us craft our present – and future. How can the current initiatives that address land reform, produced by a range of political forces (including rural organisations), be taken forward? This question opens up interesting political and historiographic concerns: Were there other experiences that deserve to be recovered as fundamental and legitimising precedents, reaching back to the times of our revolution and independence in the beginning of the nineteenth century? In what particular circumstances did these emerge? Who benefited and who suffered?

We must consider the creation of *ejidos*, where food is produced, in old and new settlements. In many instances, the objectives motivating their creation coincide with problems that persist today, such as the need to put down roots and ensure local business. In the past, the Argentine state has financed large-scale population relocations by creating agricultural settlements, whether aimed at Europeans, Creoles, indigenous peoples, or specific social groups such as the unemployed or ‘undesirables’. Likewise, national institutions were established to plan comprehensive policies for the agricultural sector, such as the National Agrarian Council (CAN), which was created in 1940 and eliminated by the dictatorship in 1980.

In short, there are policies that consider land as a strategic resource, allowing people to put down roots, enjoy a dignified quality of life, and produce food aimed at supplying the local population and markets further afield. While some of these projects never moved beyond being statements of intent, others, with different scopes, came to fruition and have been able to produce radical transformations in the organisation of land in Argentina on a national level.

This exercise of diving into the past is not about replicating land reform experiments which may or may not have been effective but which correspond to other sets of historic circumstances. What we are seeking to do is to recover threads which were often cut short by violence exercised by the ruling classes. This is about recognising links in a story that can help us answer a fundamental and perennial question for humanity: Whose land is it and what is it for?





## NOTES



- 1 Gómez, *Registro Nacional de Tierras Rurales*, 15.; INDEC, *Censo Nacional Agropecuario 2018*, 14.
- 2 United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, cited in the National Population Directorate, *Población urbana en Argentina*, 2.
- 3 INDEC, 'Indicadores de condiciones', 3, our translation.
- 4 FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 149.
- 5 INDEC, 'Incidencia de la pobreza y la indigencia', 5.
- 6 INDEC, *Censo Nacional Agropecuario 2018*, 153, 183.
- 7 Vértiz and Seoane, *Agricultura industrial vs agroecología*.
- 8 Fontanet, *Diagnóstico de la producción y comercialización de alimentos*, 15, our translation.
- 9 Abregú, *Paro quintero*.
- 10 INDEC, *Censo Nacional Agropecuario 2018*, 108.
- 11 See data from the Ministry of Economy, 'Agricultura familiar'.
- 12 INTA, 'Potenciando las compras públicas a la Agricultura Familiar', 5.
- 13 Vértiz and Seoane, *Agricultura industrial vs agroecología*.
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