

Food with pesticides or agroecologically-based food: symbolic game on the *field*

Alimentos com agrotóxicos ou de base agroecológica: o jogo simbólico de atores sociais

Verônica Oliveira Figueiredo¹
Maria Claudia Veiga Soares Carvalho²
Francisco Romão Ferreira³
Luciléia Granhen Tavares Colares¹
Izabela Miranda de Castro⁴
Lucia Maria Jaeger de Carvalho⁵

¹ Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro, Departamento de Nutrição e Dietética. Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brasil.

² Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro, Departamento de Nutrição Social Aplicada. Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brasil.

³ Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Nutrição. Departamento de Nutrição Social. Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brasil.

⁴ Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária. Agroindústria de Alimentos-EMBRAPA, Laboratório de Resíduos e Contaminantes. Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brasil.

⁵ Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Faculdade de Farmácia, Departamento de Produtos Naturais e Alimentos.

Correspondence
Verônica Oliveira Figueiredo
E-mail: veronica@nutricao.ufrj.br

Abstract

We emphasize pesticides as a factor that can influence the habits of the subjects that participate in the context of Brazilian agriculture, who usually take a stance for or against the use of these inputs. This article aims to analyze some hidden elements in the universe of food with pesticides and, therefore, we rely on Bourdieu's methodology, making an approach against the mechanical action of subjects; it reveals mechanisms of domination based on a game of concealment. In this context, productivism and competitiveness seem to contribute to strengthening the belief of socioeconomic development. In the field, where there is a set of disputes surrounding the food produced or not with pesticides, sustainability emerges as a value which can capitalize representatives of hegemonic force, trying to insert a way to reframe pesticide names, giving a new designation by hiding their meaning in daily life. Thus, we understand that rethinking the practices used in food production may be a possibility of building new forms of social transformation, aimed at public health.

Key words: Food. Pesticides. Symbolic Power. Sustainable.

Resumo

Destacamos os agrotóxicos como um elemento que pode influenciar no *habitus* dos sujeitos que participam do contexto da agricultura brasileira assumindo, geralmente, uma posição favorável ou contra o uso desses insumos. Este artigo busca alguns elementos ocultos no universo do alimento com agrotóxicos e, para tanto, apoiamos-nos nas ferramentas metodológicas

de Bourdieu, que insurge contra o agir mecânico dos sujeitos e desvela mecanismos de dominação a partir de um jogo de ocultação. Nesse contexto, o produtivismo e a competitividade parecem contribuir para o fortalecimento da crença do desenvolvimento socioeconômico. No campo social, onde há um jogo de disputas em torno do alimento produzido ou não com agrotóxicos, a sustentabilidade surge como um valor capaz de capitalizar os representantes da força hegemônica, que tentam inserir um modo de ressignificar o nome agrotóxicos, dando-lhe uma nova designação, ocultando seu sentido no cotidiano das pessoas. Assim, entendemos que repensar as práticas utilizadas na produção de alimentos pode se constituir uma possibilidade de construir novas formas de transformação social, visando à saúde coletiva.

Palavras-chave: Alimento. Agrotóxicos. Jogo Simbólico. Sustentabilidade.

Introduction

In Brazil, the productive pattern, grounded in a modernized field model, linked to the idea of progress, has been treating land as some asset that can move the market, which is attested by an expressive participation of agricultural products in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).¹ And agribusiness exerts a strong influence in this scenario.²

This productivity pattern has been stimulated since the so-called Green Revolution, begun in the mid-twentieth century, which has enhanced the technological structure of agricultural production systems through the use of chemical inputs (among them, agrochemicals) and biotechnological procedures, to the detriment of practices of autochthonous agriculture,³ that favors the diversity of species cultivated in some locality.

Agriculture modernization, which is continually specializing, as well as food industrialization, has caused impacts on food, which brings us back to the questions posed by Contreras⁴ regarding food insecurity perceived by a significant part of the population.

For experts, many of the food crises were just more or less irrelevant “frights” (cases like: “oil from bagasse,” “mad cows,” “genetically modified foods,” “chickens with dioxins,” “hormones for fattening up cattle...”)... However, for most of the population, these problems usually have another meaning. They are evidence of certain “invisible” aspects of the food chain (Contreras, 2011, p. 42).

In this sense, agrochemicals are invisible substances that can integrate the chemical structure of food without, however, being perceived by the population, revealing the idea that “modern consumers literally do not know what they are eating.”⁵

The increase in the use of agrochemicals in Brazil has been much more influenced by the technology implemented in agricultural practices than by the increase of cultivated area. Between 2004 and 2008, for example, there were some 4.6% growth of the cultivated area, while the quantities of agrochemicals sold in the same period have reached 44.6%, according to a survey by Brazilian *Sindicato Nacional da Indústria de Produtos para Defesa Agrícola* (SINDIVEG; National Union of the Product Industry for Agricultural Defense).⁶ Total sales of agrochemicals in 2012 showed a 14% increase over the previous year, when the financial movement, considering only the classes of herbicides, fungicides and insecticides, reached a value of around US\$9.1 billion,⁷ proving the insertion of these inputs in the agrarian market.

The *Programa de Análise de Resíduos de Agrotóxicos em Alimentos* (PARA; Program for Analysis of Agrochemical Waste in Food), by Brazilian government *Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária* (ANVISA; National Health Surveillance Agency), since its creation in 2001 has been systematically evaluating agrochemicals in fresh foods, which are placed for consumer market. In this way, what has been verified is the occurrence of a range of active ingredients (substances that are part of the pesticide formulation with action on target organisms) in fruits and potherbs, grown in most of Brazilian states.⁸⁻¹¹

Thus, according to the agrochemicals characteristics and their interaction with the environment, indicated in the official definition,¹² the Brazilian State presents regulatory instruments for the agricultural production system, which takes place through three ministries, namely: Agriculture, Health and the Environment. Within their respective areas of authority, among other actions, these ministries are responsible for establishing guidelines and requirements, aiming at minimizing risks presented by agrochemicals. In practice, this regulation has been taking place in a field of dispute, where opposing forces coexist and can be perceived in social groups that defend the use of these inputs, as well as in those which criticize such use.

In a critical approach, we perceive that in this political context each of the ministries, as social agents, proposes changes according to the rules of the very symbolic game immersed in political disputes.

It must be remembered that these different forms of action express discourses, political positions and legitimate economic interests from various actors: farmers, suppliers of inputs, exporters, machinery and equipment manufacturers, financing agencies, farm workers, food companies and state representatives.

In this sense, Bourdieu's¹³⁻¹⁶ theoretical reference can contribute to illuminate the symbolic elements represented by the dispute and interests forces from social agents in the agrochemicals (or agribusiness) universe, where cultural values and practices influence the strategies of a complex symbolic game expressed in the “*Food with agrochemicals*” conception.

Consuming healthy, agrochemical-free foods is not just a matter of personal taste or style. This consumption generates implications that go beyond everyday commensality and the interplay of individual, national or global identities. Faced with this, a question arises: How are national identities left in a world governed by the market, the flow of virtual capital, big brands and transnational corporations?

The various sides of the issue present positive arguments, whether agribusiness or agroecological-based agriculture, fast-food chains or healthy food supporters, large food distribution networks and small traders, global food and cooking. Finally, there are many interests at stake and many antagonistic perspectives and each of these social actors emphasize the positive aspects and omit the fragilities. In this paper, we shall try to understand the social complexity contained in the concept of “*food with agrochemicals*” in a critical perspective, overcoming the dichotomy that places social actors on the sides of good or evil, which often hides interests and reduces the possibilities of thinking about the field of Food and Nutrition.

Thus, by adapting some of Bourdieu's conceptual tools for the agribusiness universe, we follow a reflexive method of analyzing texts published in virtual media in order to observe hidden elements in the symbolic game played in this field to understand, from the perspective of socio-anthropology, some interests and values present in it.

In view of this political and social panorama, recognizing some food with or without agrochemicals is some conditioning aspect in food choice, which may or may not represent an exercise in citizenship. But how can lay consumers, i.e., the whole of society, recognize the use of such “invisible substances”?

Methodological considerations

This study follows Bourdieu's sociological approach in the perspective of unveiling hidden things, seeking to understand the symbolic violence invisible in social relations.¹⁴ Insofar as the symbolic elements of the relationship among agents in the field are not always understandable at first glance, Bourdieu makes a systematic observation of some elements that are present and hidden at the same time in the daily symbolic game, applying his conceptual tools in the analysis of such elements contained in relations among social agents, in order to “understand the strategies of symbolic manipulation.”¹⁵

Bourdieu¹⁴ chooses television studio and its backstage as some field for analysis and in it he carries out a critical approach for the way a medium of communication can be used as an instrument of symbolic oppression, considering that the images and speeches transmitted by television and more specifically journalism are loaded with ideologies and may influence the social construction of some reality that has the power to produce a social effect. He states being contrary to the subjects' mechanical actions without room for critical thinking. Journalism is not "very conducive to the expression of thought, it establishes a negative link between urgency and thought."¹⁴ However, "[philosophical] thinking is something capable of enlightening us inwardly and illuminating the path before us, allowing us to grasp the foundation where we find meaning and guidance."¹⁷ According to Bourdieu,¹⁴ thought, in fast-paced speed, expresses an interplay through prepackaged ideas, which would be admitted by many and considered conventional and common.

To get closer to the ideas and conventions about *food with agrochemicals*, we investigate in detail the informative texts published on the website of *Associação Brasileira de Produtores de Soja* (Aprosoja Brasil; Brazilian Association of Soybean Producers)¹⁸ in the period from October 2012 to November 2013 using the keyword "agrochemical." We consider that these discourses express the agents' interests present in this social context, which are articulated with the historical trajectory of construction of such space and, at the same time, impregnated with elements of the culture. Thus, we interpret the discourse around agrochemicals in the light of some of Bourdieu's concepts in order to capture the hidden meaning of such discourse.

The choice of this information medium was based on its comprehensiveness, since the texts published there are freely available and also represent soybean producers, whose agricultural practice is the use of agrochemicals, and these inputs are the central elements of such actors' discourse.

Treated mainly as commodities in the context of global agriculture, soybeans are some product that has wide insertion in the national or international markets and, according to the Brazilian *Sindicato Nacional da Indústria de Produtos para Defesa Vegetal* (SINDIVEG; National Union of the Industry of Products for Plant Protection^a),⁷ this crop is responsible for absorbing the largest volume of agrochemical commercialization, with 47% of the total used in 2012.

a Sindicato Nacional da Indústria de Produtos para Defesa Agrícola (SINDAG), founded in 1941. The company name has been changed to *Sindicato Nacional da Indústria de Produtos para Defesa Vegetal* (SINDIVEG; National Union of the Industry of Products for Plant Protection).

The social agents of the symbolic interplay

Different symbolic capitals are presented in the discussion about agrochemicals or agroecological food consumption, several social actors are in the game and each of them uses the meanings attributed to the food in their favor. Consumption also represents a political issue, that of controlling the redistribution of a country's wealth among social groups and between rich and poor nations, and it is in this context that the emergence of a new political consumption takes place. A speech that affirms that it is possible to make society fairer by taking into account the market itself as a regulator of social demands.

We consider that the free publication of texts in the electronic media has allowed agents, agribusiness representatives, some freedom of expression and demonstration of convincing arguments for the commercialization of food using agrochemicals and they may or may not hide their interests, intentions and preferences regarding soybeans production and marketing.

In this way, what is possible to build in terms of capital and prestige according to the position that agribusiness representatives take on? And what is their power to define rules in the dispute in this symbolic game around the use of agrochemicals?

In the field of Food and Nutrition, social agents represent conflicting forces that compete and take positions of struggle according to their arguments, interests and assumptions that are not always explicit about the use of agrochemicals. Ordinary citizens, who are laypeople in these matters, represent the great part of society that consume products and are unaware of scientific issues, health risks, interests involved and disputes in this field. Consumers seek a healthy diet. However, they have no idea of the speeches, practices, knowledge and interests that are at stake. But although they do not know how the game happens, it is in their name that actors, agents and institutions speak, everyone seeking "the common good," each with their own weapons.

In this symbolic game, soy producers are in favor of food with agrochemicals, whose production involves monoculture developed in the context of Brazilian agribusiness. Governmental institutions, represented by the different ministries, participate in this game of forces with different purposes, in different political, historical and social moments. The concept of "*food with agrochemicals*," in the political context, is immersed in this symbolic game in which government agents may or may not take opposite sides, modifying their positions in practicing the game. These agents have the power to promote emergency adaptations in the legislative system that guides Brazilian agriculture, as well as to legitimize and assign "new powers" to some ministry or other to make decisions regarding the use or disuse of an active principle of an agrochemical on a given crop.

However, government agents mingle with agribusiness representatives and turn visibility of the game interests into an obscure one, gaining strength by this stratagem. This concealment

is strategic to capitalize on agents and also to protect them from their illicit involvements that legitimize the conflict of interests of those subjects who operate as state power representatives in the position of agriculture co-entrepreneurs at the same time. A situation in which these agents, among other forms of identification and performance in Brazilian politics, can be recognized in the ruralist group,² where subjects occupy an apparently neutral position but are directly linked to the agricultural activities or are favored by groups linked to them. We know that the struggle is often uneven, real interests are not always (or can be) revealed and there is an asymmetry of discourses and strategies. Social actors representatives with the greatest political and economic weight openly act in the government legislature. However, the interests of rural workers, citizens who consume agricultural products in the city and the society as a whole are not always present in the debates forums under equality conditions.

Bourdieu¹⁴ discusses this strategy of concealment from the perspective of the news media, which reveals what is ‘necessary’ in such a way as to instigate us to seek hidden meanings between the lines or even the information that has not been explained. In the texts researched, it was possible to identify ‘ideologies’ as a recurrent term in the agribusiness discourse but that may conceal some meaning of depreciation from another form of production, such as those that do not use agrochemicals.

We have observed some depreciative meaning that detracts from the interest of devaluing the symbolic capital of agroecological food: on the one hand, agents representing agribusiness call themselves ‘food producers’, concealing the agrochemical name, as discussed below, and seek value in their large-scale productivism; on the other hand, they attribute to ‘ideologies’ the production of ideas over food. Producers and consumers of agroecology, as well as the government, represented mainly by the Public Prosecutor’s Office (MP, in the Portuguese abbreviation), are called ‘ideologies’ when they follow rules that are unfavorable for the large-scale production of soybeans, as presented in an excerpt posted on the website consulted: “(...) Unfortunately, many MP representatives have only speech and ideology and this is bad for Brazil and needs to be faced...”

The actions carried out by the MP, for the most part, appear in the discourse as insignificant or irrelevant, devaluing the role of this body and, consequently, of any social group aligned with agroecological practices. This can be seen when Brazilian bureaucracy inefficiency is pointed out in the discourse because of the ‘long’ periods of time necessary for the process of approving a new active principle. Or when some ministry, because it has such authority, deems it necessary to rediscuss the use of a certain agrochemical, seeking toxicological evaluation (or reevaluation) thereof, which may be conducted by the Brazilian government *Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária* (ANVISA; National Health Surveillance Agency) or by the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (*Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos*

Naturais Renováveis). However, in some cases, even though the MP asks for the suspension of active principles present in agrochemicals, the court can judge in favor of the use of these inputs, according to news published in the Brazilian electronic newspaper *Agrodebate*,¹⁹ in which the suspension application for agrochemicals with active principle 2,4-D (2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic) was denied.

In the above context, the MP's 'ideology' is trivialized, presenting a negative sense of the ecological being, transforming this value into something ordinary, unimportant, trying to make social agents who harmonize with the ecological being occupy a worn out and de-capitalized position in the symbolic game. Some representatives of organic food production systems can harmonize with the ecological being, as well as with agribusiness, provided that they are attuned to a productivist agriculture, following the rules that favor this mode of production. Organic food and its producers are valued by agribusiness when they accept and perpetuate its rules in the context of Brazilian agriculture, in the logic of productivism and competitiveness, distancing themselves from the precepts of an agroecological food production. In this sense, organic agriculture presents itself as a possibility of symbolic maneuvers in the game: on the one hand, it can be articulated with the agribusiness productivism; on the other hand, it can ally itself with 'ideologies' with respect to the environment with food without agrochemicals and with the promotion of sustainable actions that protect the soil from wear and tear.

In the texts analyzed, the media discourse about the use of agrochemicals has presented, at the same time, a way of understanding reality, an instrument of knowledge and some mode of reproduction of the social order. Advertising speeches thus fulfill a political function as an instrument to legitimize domination. They ensure the maintenance of the dominant order, the companies' interests and the fictitious integration of society, ensuring their places and distinguishing them. It contributes, therefore, to society demobilization, the legitimization of hierarchies and to reinforce the distinctions disguised. Agribusiness ideologies serve particular interests that present themselves as universal. Therefore, agrochemicals are identified as some technological advance, social benefit and the citizens' rights, as they make visible and fundamental the use of agrochemicals for food production on a large scale.

Sustainability as symbolic capital

From the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED; also known as the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992),²⁰ sustainability takes on a meaning of living in society, with its business, economy and technologies so as not to interfere with nature ability to sustain life for other generations. Being sustainable denotes an integration of three dimensions: social, economic and environmental.

Sustainability in the texts analyzed is presented as some value capable of capitalizing the subject of agribusiness, contributing to maintaining some privileged position and, concurrently, serving as an argument in the text to defend its market interest: “(...) Today in the field one looks for productivity gains and cost reduction. It is about the activity sustainability, producing more in the same area at lower costs....”

Producers' concern to reduce the cost of soy production involves agrochemicals high price and is expressed as a barrier to a sustainable practice in speeches with some tone of claim and injustice, such as:

What shall most impact soybeans production is the agrochemicals cost, which has much increased...;

(...) We are seeing a lot of insecticide price abuse in the field...

In this sense, agrochemicals high price assumes the role of unsustainable. When we evaluate prices increase for these inputs through data from SINDIVEG we verify that agrochemicals commercialization has allowed revenues in the sector of agricultural agrochemicals in 2013 of about US\$10,500 billion, 8% higher than in 2012,^b and this increase was mainly determined by crops such as soybeans due to the case of *Helicoverpa armigera* caterpillar, thus establishing a cycle between the occurrence of pests and the financial income of companies that sell such inputs. Therefore, even if these companies make up the agribusiness structure, monoculture farmers, in a panorama where production cost is high, demand the revision of agrochemicals abusive prices practiced in the context of Brazilian agriculture, which would bring production reduction, making feasible, in these farmers' view, a sustainable practice in food production.

The technical rotation of varying the type of agrochemical in the crop is used both to reduce production costs, which generates competitiveness among the companies that manufacture and commercialize these inputs, and to reduce environmental damages, understanding that the continued use of the same active principle is not considered a careful environmental management. In this context, we are interested in reasoning: Does the lower cost of production due to agrochemicals cheapness include an economic dimension of sustainability? It is clear that cost reduction in the final product price matters to all, but taking into account Gadotti's²¹ questions, would this be the best possible use for all in terms of sustainability? Would the environmental dimension be encompassed with continued use or with active ingredient rotation in the crop? And what about the social dimension? What about the health of rural workers and final consumers of food marketed with agrochemicals?

b Statistical data from SINDIVEG have been acquired by e-mail and are archived.

Subjects committed to some mode of production based on agricultural technologizing develop a weak sustainability, according to Atkinson,²² representing a certain facility in replacing the natural capital by human or manufactured capital, justified by the gain of economic capital. Those who rely on an agroecological production are treated by this same author as practitioners of strong sustainability, where natural, human and manufactured capital complement each other and are irreplaceable. Experiences accumulated in the context of agroecological production, when considering the environmental dimension, demonstrate already exploited soils recovery practices, making possible the execution of agricultural activities without the intervention of agrochemicals. In addition to this way of managing land, actors who represent an “*ecologization*” of agriculture³ value health promotion actions from subjects participating in such space, as well as care for the environment, conveyed by recovery or preservation of flora, fauna and water sources.

The approximation of the sustainability social dimension in the texts analyzed is related to cultivation practices that use agrochemicals, because they are placed as some solution to supply a vital need of humanity – hunger –, presenting themselves as a construct of this space, evidenced in this statement:

(...) In campaigns against the use of these inputs – necessary and without which humanity would be condemned to starve – it is important to say: organic ones are not able to feed everyone...

Analyzing from a productivist perspective, the solution to the hunger issue is associated with large-scale production and the use of agrochemicals becomes essential. However, analyzing some social, political and historical factors, we can think of whether in the Green Revolution, or in other times where profit was the main regulator of food production, the solution to sustainability is this type of large-scale production. We understand that in a sustainable economy the issue of hunger can not be analyzed outside the sociocultural and political contexts of our history of generating social inequality, since historically it is possible to understand that “[...] Symbolic properties, even the most negative ones, can be strategically used due to material interests and also symbolic ones from their bearer.”¹⁵

In a capitalist and productivist society, disputes appear in a disguised and not always explicit way, with well-constructed arguments that operate as principles of selection or exclusion from the use of agrochemicals without being formally stated. In this sense, agribusiness social agents reveal some capitalization that is not only economic but of prestige and power when in the game of disputes they emphasize other groups’ inability to keep food production high without agrochemicals. This is a situation that seems to be a strategy of maintaining some privileged agribusiness position in the symbolic game disputes. On the other hand, rejection of food with agrochemicals by agroecological producers and consumers expresses the social dimension of sustainability, which argues that

food with agrochemicals represents risk to rural workers' and consumers' health. According to Carvalho and Luz,²³ the planet's sustainability motivates the construction of some natural food, some production that is non-polluting of nature and so little predatory of the soil and ecosystem that is built in large urban centers such as Rio de Janeiro.

Considering that sustainability is a subject of relevant visibility in the current social context, strategically, such agents insert it in their texts in the site, although, perhaps, their approach is in the condition presented by Bourdieu¹⁵ as something “constructed in such a way that it acquires some meaning that does not correspond absolutely to reality,” because it shows what is sustainable from the perspective of their own lucrative interests. There is some channeling of this concept to legitimize the use of agrochemicals, in which agribusiness, as a “symbolic system, fulfills its political function as an instrument of imposition or domination legitimation [...]”¹⁵

In a study by Furtado,²⁴ we see that the logic of a capitalist regime is to continue to generate profits by intensifying the exploitation of nature and peoples in a movement in which there is an extinction of cultures, territories and historical heritage legacies. Small farmers and fishermen questioned about the unequal responsibilities and impacts generated by climate change show that the most disadvantaged sections of the population are those which bear some disproportionate share of environmental destruction. We realize that, although this political-economic context is marked by consumerism, individualism and, not infrequently, by social injustice, developmentalism stands out as a belief and productivity becomes some possible means of reaching “socioeconomic development.”

In this sense, agrochemicals are a positive value that capitalize the subject in the context of agribusiness because it allows productivity gains for the farmer, besides providing the country social development. This is a recurring idea in his speech, which highlights the importance of the food quantity produced, in a logic of safety in numbers, illustrated in the following lines:

(...) After all, one expects to harvest a few million tons more...;

We need to face the reality: pesticides are necessary because without them the country would never reach production records.

Participants in social environments where the productivist cultivation model stands out value market transactions, assigning the productivist farming system the capacity to promote the country's economic and social development. Therefore, *productivity*, allied to *sustainability*, are vehicles – portmanteau subjects –, as said by Bourdieu,¹⁴ since the meaning that these concepts take on in the discourse is one of “commonplace” because of the favorable perception they present in everyday conversation, playing a role of easy assimilation by the subject. Thus, they are used as strategies for an “instantaneous communication,” inciting a positive value for *food with agrochemicals*.

Far from the intention to dichotomize the quality of food as 'good or bad' produced in the social environments discussed so far, we seek to understand some characteristics of these places in order to stimulate some critical reflection of what is presented for our consumption. We understand that the food chain is complex. Therefore it requires the construction of some thinking capable of integrating many symbolic elements present in whatever be the system of food production and commercialization. In his theory, Bourdieu¹⁴ points to the *market shares* of the journalistic world "as indicators of the power relations existing among stations that invisibly compete with each other." This seems to us to be a reality in the relations existing in the social spaces that foment foods with agrochemicals, as well as in those that produce food of an *agroecological* base if we think that the holders of a solid (economic/symbolic) capital have the conditions to determine the scale of values that is more favorable to their products.

Agrochemicals: an almost hidden word

Bourdieu¹³ gives words an important role of domination in the television world, assigning them some deep responsibility for what one really wants to reveal.

If we consider that every social space is characterized, among other elements, by words and terms that it propagates, in the present study we perceive the variation of the meaning that the agrochemical word takes on in different social contexts. The various terminologies reveal the multiplicity of views surrounding these chemicals used in agriculture. In the context of agribusiness and the biological sciences, agrochemicals can be grouped according to their mode of action in plant cultivation, bringing into existence some more perceptible denominations in productivist agriculture, such as herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and acaricides, respectively related to the control of weeds, fungi, insects and mites. However, soy producers, by referring generally to agrochemicals, usually use the expression "agricultural pesticides," inferring an idea of protection of food during cultivation or postharvest, because they attribute to these compounds protection against pests and diseases, considered to be the cause of business agriculture disorders, since they can result in economic losses.

On the other hand, some terms used as a synonym for agrochemicals may represent toxic activity in the organism, such as the case of "biocide," which carries the meaning of "killing life," and when used refers to the substance with toxic activity on organisms that are or are not targeted for its action.²⁵

In Chapter V of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988,²⁶ dealing with social communication, there are references to legal restrictions on commercial advertising of products, practices and services that may be harmful to health and the environment, including agrochemicals, tobacco and alcoholic beverages subject to such restrictions.

Although “agrochemical” is a word widely used in people’s daily lives, in the texts analyzed the word “event” is placed as its synonym. However, we understand that for common sense this word is closer to the idea of having some appointment (party, meeting, health professionals’, among others). But when critically analyzing the use of this term in the following excerpts^c we can apprehend its real sense:

Speeding up the release of events from different companies is key to meeting this challenge;
 (...) It is the lack of knowledge or ideology to prevent the release of new events...

This is one of those cases in which what is visible, which is given immediately, hides the invisible that determines it.¹³ In this way, we understand that “event” is the element revealed and used with the intention of attenuating the meaning that the word agrochemical can arouse in common sense, that of being harmful to the environment.

According to Bourdieu,¹⁴ “Naming is making see, creating, leading to existence.” A new denomination for agrochemicals can be understood as a symbolic strategy of minimizing tensions and reconstructing what has been socially rejected, thus guaranteeing and protecting hegemonic groups’ discourses and social interests.

Final thoughts

Social agents, when apprehending the symbolic objects through strategies of perception and appreciation, called *habitus* by Bourdieu, provide different senses and meanings in their practices. Articulation of symbolic elements in a game of disputes over financial and cultural capital is present in social relations among the agents involved in practices related to the use of agrochemicals in food production. In the scenario analyzed, agents representing agribusiness take on some hegemonic position in the symbolic game, revealing an imbalance of forces in the social context of Brazilian agriculture, influenced by holding an expressive economic capital.

The agricultural production system guides, in the relations of production, the agents’ position and the mechanisms that allow access to positions. In this way, cultural practices can allow the achievement of the distinction in and for some social group, where power and privilege are related to economic, cultural and symbolic capitals, as well as in the development of meanings that these capitals can assume in each social configuration and temporal domain of the field.

c These excerpts were extracted from one of the texts consulted, which emphasized the lack of knowledge about the use of chemical inputs in agricultural practices as some limitation for the technological progress in the field and consequently productivity increase.

When appropriating the concept of sustainability, they use it as a convincing argument to value some productivist practice of cultivation, where the use of agrochemicals translates into some modern technology capable of maximizing productive potential, fostering the strengthening of a dominant productivist ideology which, in everyday life, presents an idea that increasing food production is socially desirable.

In the symbolic game present in the context of agricultural productivism there is an interface that needs to be considered between the technological operationalization of the crop and the need for some positive publicity for the use of chemical inputs. In order to do this, the agents that use these compounds use as a strategy an attempt to re-signify the word “agrochemical,” which is socially worn out, replacing it with the term “event.” This is an artifice that is configured as a resource of concealment that can determine what should be seen by the subject receiving the message.

It is worth mentioning that agrochemicals and their relation to the environment can be thought of by all governmental institutions agents in a collective way, whose legal competences are exercised for an evaluation of the responsible use of these inputs, concentrating efforts in a conjunction of political, moral, ethical and social parameters. Practices of social agents submissive to the dominant forces represented by subjects allied to precepts of agricultural of agroecological base, in the context of this research, can be conducted to construct new paths for collective health, with strategies in the symbolic game that lead more to transformation than to social reproduction, as said by Bourdieu.

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