

Abstract

Food waste has become a social, economic and environmental problem, gaining wider significance in academia, politics and popular culture during the past years. With a global population estimated to achieve 9 billion by 2050 and the increasing pressure on natural resources, there is an urgency in addressing the issue. While food waste in developed countries is mainly attributed to consumption, in less developed nations it seems to result from inefficiencies in production and distribution. Brazil, as an emerging country, has characteristics from both regions resulting from its industrial agricultural coexisting with family farming, poor infrastructures of distribution, a retailing sector dominated by supermarket chains and cultural differences among consumers. Given the significant role small farmers play in internal food supply and their struggles with intermediaries in mainstream markets, the question arises whether supporting the development and consolidation of Alternative Food Networks (AFN), with its more direct, fair and ethical production and consumption practices, could help to tackle and mitigate food waste in the Brazilian context. Drawing attention to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a kind of participative farming in which producers and consumers get together in the belief that shorter, direct and participative chains are better and more fair ways of producing and consuming, this thesis aimed at exploring the potential role of this alternative system in food waste prevention and management in Brazil. In addressing this goal, this study examines whether and why food waste occurs in this system, how stakeholders understand and act towards food waste and what CSA characteristics contribute to food waste reduction. To comply with this aim, this thesis adopted a qualitative research design with four CSAs units as case studies. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with farmers and consumers and direct observation at the distribution point and WhatsApp group, and it was analyzed through the lens of social practice theories. Results show that the direct relation between producer and consumer, short transportation distances, careful handling, predictable demand, and minimum grading system reduces waste at production and distribution. In addition, stakeholders showed an increased awareness about their levels of food waste and a positive attitude to avoid it. Farmers play an important role in educating the consumer about farming and the food they receive, promoting changes in meanings around food that support the reproduction of more sustainable production and consumption practices. Along with measures of food redistribution and reutilization through composting and animal feed,

it results in less food discarded in the system as a whole. However, waste of CSA food is still a problem at the household and is sometimes a reason for membership withdraw. Trade-offs between food routines and other practices feature as the major cause of waste, followed by the need to handle volumes and types of food that are not always at the best convenience. Thus, it shows opportunities for CSA to further improve their contribution to food waste prevention and management and its practical implications. Besides contributing to the literature on AFN and food waste in Brazil, it also provides additional insights for the application of social practices theories to understand food waste as a result of reproduction of and interactions between and within practices around food provisioning rather than individual actions or social structures alone.