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Improving Food Security and Nutrition Through

Local Public Food Procurement from Smallholder Farmers

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Contents

Executive Summary

This paper analyzes the significant potential of Local Public Food Procurement (LPFP) from smallholder farmers* as a strategic tool for Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). In a region marked by inequalities, rural poverty, and the high cost of healthy diets, LPFP for smallholder farmers is presented as a public policy tool that can articulate state demand with local supply and promote more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems.

Smallholder farmers account for more than 81% of farms in LAC (Leporati et al., 2014) and are key to food production and rural employment. However, it faces structural barriers, including low productivity, limited market access, and climate vulnerability. The LPFP allows public spending to be channeled to this sector, generating income, employment, productive diversification, and the inclusion of women suppliers.

The document presents successful experiences of LPFP in countries such as Brazil, Guatemala, and Honduras, evidencing positive impacts on agricultural production, food diversification, local employment, and the inclusion of women. Significant increases in arable area and gross production value, a greater supply of fresh and minimally processed foods, and increases of up to 106% in producers' incomes are observed (Elias et al., 2024), as well as female participation in public markets that reaches up to 80% (Conab, 2020).

To enhance these results, two fundamental conditions are identified: the existence of an enabling environment through regulatory frameworks that articulate agricultural, social, and public procurement policies; and the reduction of barriers to entry through simplified processes, fair prices, timely payment periods, and the strengthening of cooperatives.

In this context, five strategic pillars of recommendation are proposed: aligning public demand with healthy diets, establishing favorable regulatory frameworks, strengthening national LPFP systems, generating rigorous evidence on their impacts, and integrating LPFP into territorial productive development policies.

The report concludes that LPFP for smallholder farmers can be engines of economic inclusion, productive development, and improvements in FSN, provided they are implemented with a systemic, progressive, and evidence-based approach. The key is to redirect existing public spending towards purchases that generate structural impacts on agri-food systems.

* The term "smallholder farmers" is used in this document to emphasize the dimension of farm size, referring specifically to small-scale agricultural producers. See Box 1 for a definition of family farming.

Introduction

The Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region has seen a reduction in food insecurity. However, challenges persist with substantial subregional and population disparities, such as the increase in the prevalence of overweight in children under 5 years of age and obesity in adults, as well as the high cost of a healthy diet, tough challenges for vulnerable groups such as rural women and indigenous populations.

In this context, **smallholder farmers is a key pillar for Food Security and Nutrition** (FSN[1]), as it constitutes more than 81% of farms in the region, contributes between 27% and 67% of total food production, depending on the country, and generates between 57% and 77% of agricultural employment (Leporati et al., 2014; FAO, PAHO, WFP and UNICEF, 2018). Despite this, smallholder farmers face poverty, food insecurity, and low productivity, have limited access to markets, and are increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events, requiring both technical and financial support to meet the growing standards of value chains such as quality, safety, and volume.

Public food procurement is a strategic tool for moving towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems. By channeling part of public spending into food acquisition, these policies can significantly improve FSN, not only by providing social programs but also by boosting local economies and strengthening production and national productive development.

In this framework, **Local Public Food Procurement** (LPFP) for smallholder farmers introduces a conditionality component that enhances its impact on development. This conditionality – **by prioritizing vulnerable suppliers** – transforms a supply policy into a

1 According to FAO, Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

policy of productive inclusion. In LAC, traditional social policies are insufficient to guarantee decent incomes and adequate food, especially for the most vulnerable rural populations, where extreme poverty is persistent (ECLAC, 2025). Therefore, a comprehensive approach is required that combines social, productive, and market policies, such as LPFP, to sustainably improve the incomes of these households and their access to healthy diets, as well as those of the rest of the population.

Experiences of Local Public Food Procurement (LPFP) from smallholder farmers at the national level, such as Brazil, Guatemala, and Honduras, showed results in crop diversification, increases in income, job creation, and growing inclusion of women food providers, underlining the potential of these policies to impact the four dimensions of food security.

In the region, on average, a little more than 3% of total public expenditure is allocated to food purchases. This amount, which represents 0.3% of GDP, could be used to purchase food from smallholder farmers, among other productive development objectives, thereby achieving the results mentioned in the previous paragraph. In this sense, reducing undernourishment and food insecurity requires redirecting countries' spending towards evidence-based policies and programs.

This paper presents a synthesis of the evidence on the effect that LPFP can have on smallholder farmers for FSN. By articulating public demand with local supply, LPFP not only reinforces the transformation of agri-food systems but also fosters territorial economic development and social inclusion, and contributes to the population's access to healthy diets.

This report seeks to guide decision-makers and key actors towards adopting **food policies that position smallholder farmers** as protagonists in transforming agri-food systems and promoting healthy diets.

The document is structured in five sections.

- **Section 1** presents the context of food security in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the role of public food procurement.
- **Section 2** discusses how LPFP contributes to Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) for smallholder farmers.
- **Section 3** identifies the conditions necessary to maximize its impact, including regulatory frameworks and barrier reduction.
- **Section 4** provides policy recommendations organized into strategic pillars.
- Finally, **Section 5** presents the general conclusions, highlighting opportunities and challenges for scaling these policies in the region.


WFP

1.

Context of Food Security and Public Food Procurement

In recent years, Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced a reduction in hunger and food insecurity. 1.5 million people were lifted out of hunger in the region in 2024, more than 3 million compared to the previous two years (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2025). More and more families can access nutritious food, thereby contributing to the positive trend reflected in the decrease in food insecurity, which, for the second consecutive year, is below the global average (28%) (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2025). These data give us a clear clue: the instruments implemented in the region confirm the right path to successful results, the result of the region's governments' efforts[2].

However, significant challenges remain in addressing food insecurity and malnutrition. The region has notorious differences; while significant progress has been made in South America and Mesoamerica, the Caribbean has regressed in the fight against hunger (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2025)[3]. Malnutrition as a manifestation of obesity, which continues to increase among adults, especially in Mesoamerica, and signals a shift in diets that poses new public health challenges (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2025)[4].

In addition, food insecurity continues to affect women and the rural population disproportionately. In 2023, the gap between men and women was more than five percentage points for moderate food insecurity and 1.3 points for severe food insecurity, both higher than the global average (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2025). Rural populations also have higher levels of vulnerability: the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity was 4.7 percentage points higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Added to these inequalities is the high cost of a healthy diet in the region, the highest globally, with an average of $5.16 per person per day in LAC, compared to the world average of $4.46. As a result, 181.9 million people in LAC were unable to access a healthy diet in 2024 (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2025).

2 In LAC, the prevalence of undernourishment fell from 5.3% in 2023 to 5.1% in 2024, continuing the trend observed between 2020 and 2022. A total of 1.5 millionpeople in our region were lifted out of hunger compared to the previous figure, and 3.5 million over the course of two years. Moderateor severe food insecurity decreased from 26.7% in 2023 to 25.2% in 2023. This means that 8.6 million people in LAC were no longer food insecure (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2025).

3 In undernourishment, for example, the prevalence in 2024 was 3.8% for South America, 5% for Mesoamerica, and 17.5% for the Caribbean (FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2025).

4 According to data from FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP and UNICEF (2025), obesity in adults increased from 22.4% to 29.9% from 2012 to 2022, with a prevalence of 34.4% in Mesoamerica, followed by South America and the Caribbean, with 26.6% and 24.5% respectively.

Smallholder farmers play a central role in food production in LAC: **small-scale production keeps our region's kitchens active** (FAO, PAHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2018)[5]. Not only does it represent the vast majority, accounting for more than 81% of farms in LAC (Leporati et al., 2014)[6], but it is also the fundamental pillar of employment for millions of people (FAO, PAHO, WFP, and UNICEF, 2018)[7].

Smallholder farmers guarantee communities' access to fresh, culturally appropriate food (Leporati et al., 2014) by accounting for 27%-67% of total food production[8], thereby contributing to the nutritional status of rural populations. Support for smallholder farmers is, in short, a commitment to rural development and the strengthening of national agri-food systems.

In this context, **Local Public Food Procurement (LPFP) from smallholder farmers is a policy instrument with the capacity to increase incomes, reduce rural poverty, and improve the Food Security and Nutrition situation** (Paula et al., 2023; Perin et al., 2022; Elias et al., 2023; Wittman & Blesh, 2017). Its effectiveness is based on the principle of structured demand: the foreseeable food needs generated by public programs – such as school meals or food assistance – constitute a stable, predictable demand that can be fully or partially satisfied by smallholder farmers. This predictability not only supports economic planning but also stimulates investments in infrastructure, technology, and capacities that improve the sector's productivity (Mitchell, 2011).

Box 1. Definitions.

Public procurement: sequence of administrative acts executed by a public law body aimed at obtaining the supply of goods, services or works (Morlino, 2019).

Local public procurement: process of acquiring works, goods and services from suppliers located in the same geographical area as the buyer (IFC, 2011), by organizations at the national, provincial or municipal level.

Inclusive public procurement: process by which public organizations link the satisfaction of their demand for works, goods, and services to underserved or vulnerable categories of suppliers to advance social, economic, or environmental development goals (Jones, 2021).

Sustainable public procurement: the process by which public organizations meet their needs for works, goods and services in a way that achieves value for money throughout the life cycle, in terms of generating benefits not only for the organization, but also for society and the economy, while significantly reducing negative impacts on the environment (UNEP, 2017).

Family farming: a way of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, livestock and aquaculture production that is managed and administered by a family and depends mainly on the capital and labor of its members, both women and men. The family and the farm are interrelated, evolve together, and combine economic, environmental, social, and cultural functions (FAO and IFAD, 2019).

5 Family farming contributes between 27% and 67% of total food production (FAO, PAHO, WFP and UNICEF, 2018).

6 81.3% of farms according to Leporati et al., 2014.

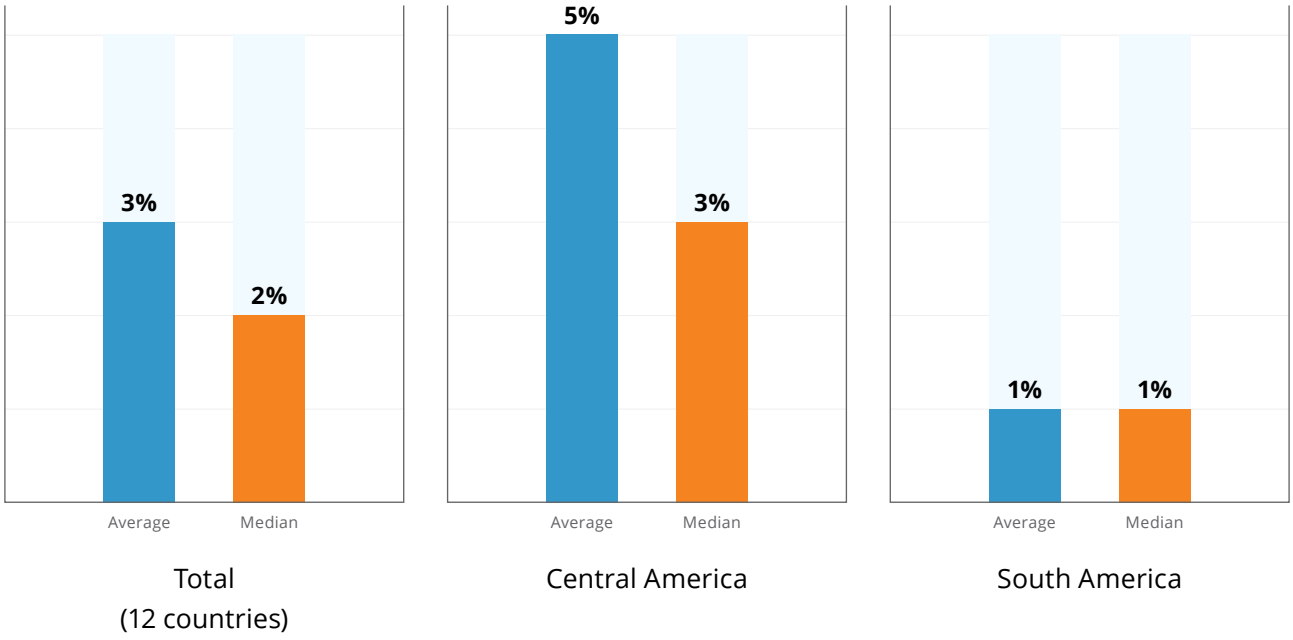
7 According to FAO, PAHO, WFP and UNICEF (2018), it generates between 57% and 77% of agricultural employment.

8 Although family farming contributes less to agricultural value added than larger-scale farming, especially in net food-exporting countries, it plays an essential role in the supply of staple foods. In countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, this sector is responsible for most of the production of key foods for food and nutrition security, such as cassava, beans, milk, pork, and goat meat. In Central America, it produces approximately half of total agricultural production and more than 70% of the food consumed (ECLAC, FAO, IICA, 2013).

In the short term, LPFP can increase incomes for smallholder farmers, generate jobs along the food chain, boost the local economy, and improve diet diversity. In the long term, they have the potential to consolidate local production, strengthen distribution chains, and promote the development of small-scale infrastructure, while also building capacity to meet the quality and safety standards demanded by markets. These processes, taken together, can translate into sustained improvements in the productivity of smallholder farmers by facilitating access to stable inputs, technologies, technical services, and marketing schemes (Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler, 2011; De Schutter, 2015; Espejo et al., 2009; FAO & WFP, 2018; Fitch & Santo, 2016; Gelli et al., 2010; Global Panel, 2015; Morgan & Sonnino, 2008; Smith et al., 2016).

In the region's countries, there is significant potential to redirect public spending on food to local procurement. Using a sample of 12 countries[9], it can be verified that, on average, 3.1% of total public expenditure, equivalent to 0.3% of these countries' GDP, is allocated to food procurement, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proportion of total public expenditure allocated to the procurement of food.



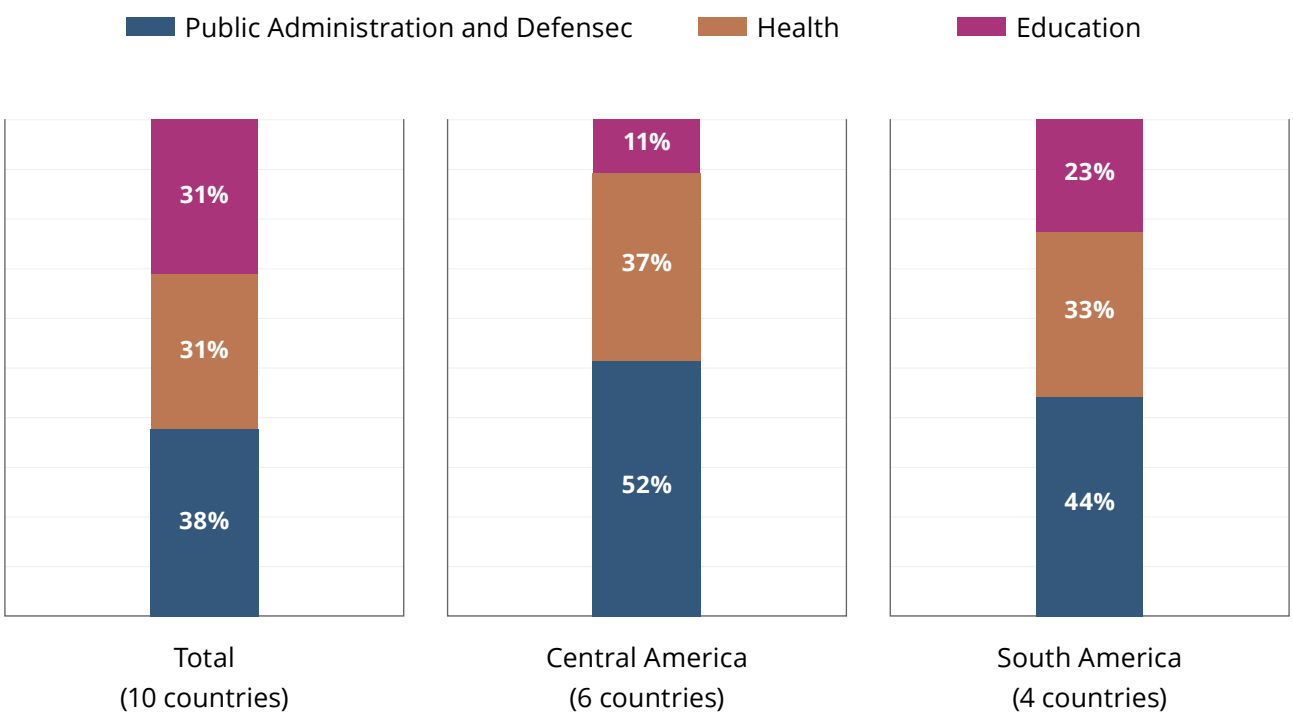
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the countries' Supply and Utilization Tables (COUs).

9 The 12 countries analyzed are El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the Do-minican Republic, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The Repository of Sup-ply and Use Tables and Input-Output Matrices in Latin America and the Caribbean is carried out by ECLAC's Statistics Division. It can be accessed through this link: https://statistics.cepal.org/repository/cou-mip/cou.html?lang=es

It is worth noting that redirecting public spending on food towards LPFP requires coordination among ministries and levels of government, given its multiple uses across the public sector. Also, based on the analysis of the Supply and Use Tables (COUs) of the countries in the region, it is found that most of the intermediate public expenditure (use) on food is allocated to public administration and defense (44%). At the same time, it is distributed similarly between health and education services[10].

Thus, while the Ministry of Agriculture can identify and support local suppliers, the ministries that concentrate demand – such as health, administration, and defense, or education – can incorporate purchasing criteria and strategies that prioritize products from smallholder farmers. These criteria can be integrated both into the regulatory framework – through the alignment of policies, laws, and regulations that enable direct purchase from smallholder farmers – and into the procurement procedures themselves, through mechanisms such as exclusive tenders, contracts adapted to their productive characteristics, and other tools that facilitate their participation in institutional markets (Siobhan & Swensson, 2017).

Figure 2. Share by use of intermediate public expenditure on food.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Country Supply and Use Tables (COUs).

10 In this case, the sample was reduced to 10 countries, since, in two cases, it was not possible to disaggregate the purchase of food according to its intermediate use.

2.

LPFP to Smallholder Farmers and Food Security and Nutrition

Food security is a global challenge that requires coordinated and sustained responses at the national, regional, and global levels. In this context, the CELAC 2030 Food Security and Nutrition and the Eradication of Hunger (hereinafter SAN CELAC 2030) and the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty are consolidated as valid and strategic supranational policy frameworks. Both instruments recognize the need to transform agrifood systems and promote LPFP as a key tool to foster smallholder farmers, improve Food Security and Nutrition, and boost rural economies.

The SAN CELAC 2030 is a roadmap for Food Security and Nutrition in the region, aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Plan considers four pillars, with lines of action, evidence-based measures, and good practices for the region. Public procurement from smallholder farmers is mentioned in Pillars 1, 2, and 3 of the Plan.

Pillar 1, on strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, establishes legislation that promotes public procurement more favorable to people in vulnerable conditions and that includes smallholder farmers, artisanal fishing, and other forms of small-scale food production.

In relation to Pillar 2, the promotion of production and access to food, it highlights the importance of developing national policies and programs for public procurement from smallholder farmers. This includes, for example, its incorporation into school food programmes, as well as progress towards the progressive expansion of smallholder farmers' participation in all public food procurement by the State. Finally, in Pillar 3, on affordability and consumption of healthy diets, the universalization and strengthening of school food programs are highlighted. It also promotes the development of policies, plans, and legal frameworks on school food and nutrition, including the acquisition of nutritious, minimally processed food from smallholder farmers and local production.

For its part, the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty was created by the Brazilian presidency of the G20 to support and accelerate efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty (Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 2) and reduce inequalities (SDG 10). The Policy Basket proposed by the Alliance serves as a repository of rigorously evaluated policies to generate resources, knowledge, and experience in their implementation, including social technologies that have proven effective in reducing hunger and poverty. Among the policies and actions included in the Policy Basket, public procurement and institutional markets stand out, with special emphasis on supporting the marketing of smallholder farmers' products. These tools help stabilize markets, facilitate access to healthy diets for vulnerable populations, and support food banks that serve as strategic reserves in situations that negatively affect food availability and access, such as extreme weather events.

By defining how and from whom to buy large volumes of food, the State can offer smallholder farmers an accessible and stable marketing channel, as well as a source of income that supports both the improvement of their productive capacity and their food security and that of the rest of the population. The positive impact of LPFP on smallholder farmers in the FSN can be materialized in multiple ways: (a) through economic access and increased consumption of more varied and nutritious food baskets facilitated by productive diversification and additional income; (b) through increased production and greater availability of and access to food, as a result of productivity-enhancing investments; and (c) through the reduction of negative survival strategies – such as the sale of productive assets or the reduction of food consumption – as well as the mitigation of risks arising from crises or crop failures.

The outcomes and impacts of LPFP depend largely on specific policy objectives and the degree of alignment and articulation between public procurement systems and other key sectors, such as agriculture and social protection (FAO, 2018).

Evidence from countries such as Brazil[11], Guatemala, and Honduras shows that implementing LPFP-based food programs for smallholder farmers has generated multiple incentives. Among them are:

(i) the increase in food production levels;

(ii) diversification in the production of fresh and minimally processed foods;

(iii) the increase in income and the generation of employment in the communities, and

(iv) greater inclusion of women in public markets.

The following sections present the evidence for each of these outcomes, along with the contextual and design factors that influenced their scope.

11 Launched in 2003 as part of the Zero Hunger strategy, the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) connects the state's purchas-ing power with a dual objective: to generate income for smallholder farmers and to improve the diets of vulnerable populations. Through modalities such as procurement with simultaneous donation (PAA-CDS) and institutional pro-curement (PAA-CI), the State acquires food directly from small producers, indigenous communities and *quilombolas*, and then distributes it in socio-assistance networks. The PAA was a pioneer in the region by opening the institutional market to smallholder farmers, laying the groundwork for decisive regulations, such as the law requiring the purchase of a minimum of 30% of food from family producers for government programs. The National School Feeding Program (PNAE), which has been operating since 1950, guarantees daily meals to stu-dents in the public basic education network in Brazil and, since 2009, has reserved at least 30% of its budget for direct purchases from smallholder farmers, simultaneously promoting food security, healthy habits and productive inclusion. Its decentralized management allows municipalities to define appropriate menus and buy fresh and local food, with support from the FNDE.
Both the PAA and the PNAE have sustained funding and their own monitoring and evaluation systems. This has made it possible to carry out rigorous impact studies on production, income and nutrition. In contrast, learnings from WFP's local procurement rely on ad-hoc assessments; food categories are limited, and administrative records do not yet capture key variables. As a result, the available literature is less abundant.

2.1. INCREASED FOOD PRODUCTION LEVELS

The existence of stable demand for food, when combined with appropriate sectoral services that meet the needs of smallholder farmers, can encourage sustained increases in production by providing the security needed for planning and investment. Thus, producers not only ensure food for self-consumption but also generate marketable surpluses that translate into additional income. These incomes, in turn, facilitate investment in technology, the adoption of better production practices, and economic access to sufficient, high-quality food (Bragatto, 2010).

Box 2. Increase in arable area and gross production values in smallholder farmers linked to the Brazilian Food Acquisition Program in the form of procurement, with simultaneous donation.

Doretto and Michellon (2007) report that, in the state of Paraná, **33%** of the farmers linked to the Food Acquisition Program in its procurement with simultaneous donation (PAA-CDS) modality had to expand the arable area to meet the demand generated by the program. In addition, **60%** of participants made investments in technological improvements.

Along the same lines, Sambuichi et al. (2022a) found that, between 2009 and 2017, participation in the PAA-CDS allowed family producers to increase, on average, their gross production value by **13%**. This impact was even more significant among households with higher levels of poverty, which registered an average increase of l **56.8%**.

The vision of structured demand that underpins the LPFP assumes that local production can at least partially meet the State's food needs. However, creating demand will not be enough, since in practice difficulties often arise in making sales, such as producing crops that are not in demand, insufficient volumes to meet the scale required by the State, or non-compliance with quality and safety standards. In addition, many smallholder farmer units face structural limitations, such as a lack of infrastructure for irrigation, storage, or transportation, and shortcomings in administrative and financial capacities (Giunti et al., 2022; Triches et al., 2021; Kelly & Swensson, 2017; FAO and WFP, 2018; Souza et al., 2023).

In this context, coordination risks — i.e., the absence of complementary actions to accompany demand generation— can significantly hinder the achievement of LPFP final objectives (Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler, 2011). Hence, its implementation requires the articulated participation of multiple government sectors, in particular agriculture, health, education, science and technology, social development, and public procurement, as set out in ECLAC's new vision of productive development policies (ECLAC, 2024). It is also key to promote the strengthening of cooperatives and producer associations, since they allow the organization of supply, the gathering of sufficient volumes of food, the improvement of competitiveness, the acquisition of inputs collectively, and access to public services such as technical assistance, credit, and insurance (Aref, 2011; Ribeiro, Nascimento, & Silva, 2013).

Demand can play a key role in encouraging, facilitating, and mitigating investment risks by enabling smallholder farmers to increase and diversify their production.

2.2. DIVERSIFICATION OF PRODUCTION

Bezerra and Schneider (2012) state that no single food or group of specific foods is sufficient to provide all the nutrients needed for good nutrition. It is in this sense that the diversification of production plays a central role in guaranteeing healthy diets, since it promotes the variety of crops and foods available locally, expanding access for the entire community to a broader range of nutrients.

Healthy diets or diet quality consist of four key aspects: they are adequate (they provide sufficient essential nutrients to promote health), they are balanced (in energy intake and their sources), moderate (in the consumption of foods and nutrients associated with harmful effects on health), and they are diverse, they include a variety of nutritious foods within different food groups (FAO et al., 2024).

Diversity in local production for food programs directly contributes to improving diet diversity and expanding access to healthy diets, as is the case with school food programs. By generating stable demand for a wide variety of products, initiatives such as the PAA not only promote productive diversification but also allow family farmers to reconcile income generation with more diverse agricultural practices (Almeida et al., 2020; Waha et al., 2018; Gbenga et al., 2020; Pellegrini et al., 2024). In addition, diversification facilitates a more balanced distribution of production and labour use throughout the year, which is highly relevant given the seasonality of most crops (Sambuichi et al., 2022a).

Box 3. Increased diversification of fresh food production and minimally processed foods in the PAA and the PNAE of Brazil.

According to Sambuichi et al. (2014), the diversification of the productive matrix of smallholder farmers was the most commonly reported impact by family farmers linked to the PAA-CDS in the state of Paraná, Brazil, observed in **72%** of the **29** case studies analyzed. In a subsequent investigation, Sambuichi et al. (2022b) conclude that between 2011 and 2019 the PAA acquired more than **1,211** different food items, of which **97.1%** corresponded to fresh or minimally processed products.

Other studies also agree that the strengthening of the participation of smallholder farmers in the supply of the PNAE has contributed to a greater diversity in the food supply for public schools, with an emphasis on fresh and quality products (Saraiva et al., 2013; Machado et al., 2018; Araújo et al., 2019). It is worth noting the results found by Vivian et al. (2021) in which it is concluded that the PNAE has been key in facilitating the transition from intensive and low-diversity agricultural systems to more diversified and sustainable systems.

2.3. INCREASED INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

The improvement in production—resulting from the supply-side market interventions mentioned above—has the potential to increase marketable surpluses, sales, and economic profits.

In addition, it can encourage diversification towards crops of greater economic or nutritional value, although in some cases the most profitable crops may not coincide with those of higher nutritional value (Hoddinott et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2014; Henson et al., 2013). In the short term, advances in post-harvest practices can improve product quality and reduce losses. In the medium term, a more favorable relationship with the market can facilitate association and integration further up the value chain, allowing family farmers to increase their participation in more demanding markets. (Gelli et al., 2015). When smallholder farmers improve quality and comply with phytosanitary standards, they can also access higher prices in other formal markets (FAO and WFP, 2018).

Box 4. Increased income from smallholder farmers in Brazil's PAA and PNAE and job creation in inclusive local public procurement supported by WFP.

Elias et al. (2024) analyzed the impact of LPFP on smallholder farmers incomes associated with the PAA and PNAE in Brazil between 2017 and 2023. Their results show increases in income of between **19%** and **39%** for producers linked to the PAA and between **23%** and **106%** for those integrated into the PNAE.

For their part, Namdar and Saa (2024) evaluated the inclusivity component of the local procurement strategies implemented in Guatemala and Honduras within the framework of food procurement supported by the World Food Programme (WFP) in coordination with national governments between 2013 and 2022[12].

The study reports that smallholder farmers obtained an average gross margin close to **75%**, which represented stable income complementary to other sources of rural sustenance. In addition, **1,070** jobs were generated per year for a decade. This equates to **371** jobs for every **1,000** tonnes of inclusive products purchased, or **478** jobs for every million dollars in these procurements.

Some food programs, such as the PAA and PNAE in Brazil, set reference prices to ensure fair incomes for smallholder farmers while protecting consumers from rising prices through in-kind deliveries.

12 WFP's Local and Regional Food Procurement Policy (2019) sets out guidelines to ensure efficiency and reliability in the food supply for WFP operations while promoting the achievement of programmatic and development objectives such as injecting resources into local economies, to strengthen the market and generate jobs; the strengthening of market actors through articulated work with all actors in the chain; the strengthening of the market and the relationships of the actors so that producers have access to credit and develop capacities to improve their performance and finally improve the performance of all actors to increase the resilience and sustainability of food systems. To achieve this, WFP leverages its purchasing power, market knowledge, and convening capacity to articulate actors and connect local supply with programs such as school feeding and climate change adaptation (WFP, 2019).

Bid selection is based on criteria such as geographical proximity and product quality (FAO, 2018). Such mechanisms can reduce market uncertainty, reduce risks associated with price volatility, and stimulate greater participation of family farmers in marketing circuits.

Indirectly, LPFP in Brazil has contributed to the creation of new local markets for smallholder farmers' products (Sparovek et al., 2007; Pandolfo, 2008; Vogt & Souza, 2009; Vannuchi & Reinach, 2012). A prominent example is "cross-fertilization" between food programs, in which smallholder farmers, after developing administrative, financial, and logistical capacities through the PAA, were subsequently linked to the PNAE market (Souza, 2012).

In addition to the potential to increase income, LPFP also promotes employment generation at the local level and strengthens the inclusion of women in public markets by expanding their participation in marketing circuits and in associative management spaces.

2.4. INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC MARKET

Although women play a fundamental role in agrifood systems, in LAC they receive, on average, 40% less income than men in the agricultural sector (Siliprandi & Cintrao, 2021). This subjects them to a situation of extreme vulnerability, without access to social security instruments such as pensions or financial aid (Nobre et al., 2017). In addition, economic and extension services are often not geared toward rural women because they are not considered responsible for crop management (Cintrão & Siliprandi, 2011). Added to this is inequality in property rights, to which men continue to have greater access than women (FAO, 2023). These structural inequities translate into worse outcomes for women in terms of Food Security and Nutrition (Siliprandi & Cintrão, 2021).

Box 5. Increase in women's participation in smallholder farming linked to Brazil's PAA.

> The PAA LPFP in Brazil has shown significant progress in the inclusion of women in the public market. According to Cintrão and Siliprandi (2011), in 2008, women's direct participation in the program represented **23%**, considering the different purchasing modalities. Subsequently, the National Supply Company reported a substantial increase, with a female participation of **80%** in 2019 (Conab, 2020). However, in 2023 this indicator stood at **61.4%**, which is equivalent to **50,153** women (Secretaria de Comunicação Social da Presidência da República, 2024).

The design of demand-side food baskets directly affects women's participation in smallholder farming in public markets. This is because, in many rural contexts, there is a gender divide in the control of production and income derived from certain crops and agri-food products (Aline, 2011). Siliprandi and Cintrão (2011) state that, in many cases, women are responsible for producing foods considered "non-commercial", such as vegetables, farmyard animals, eggs, and processed dairy products, which have historically been left out of leading value chains. In this sense, the diversity of products contemplated in the PAA's purchases has been key to its inclusion, incorporating not only traditional crops but also foods typically made by women, such as cakes, cookies, jams, cassava flour, and fruit juice.

In this context, **LPFP can incentivize women's participation as providers in public markets, either through preferential mechanisms or through simplified procurement procedures**. Access to a stable, guaranteed market helps reduce the risks and uncertainties they face when marketing their products and strengthens their economic autonomy. As a result, many women farmers allocate part of the additional income to cover basic needs, improve household nutrition, or invest in inputs and technology that enhance their productive capacity (FAO, 2019).

For Local Public Food Procurement to be efficient and to have an impact on other indicators—such as food security, rural development, or economic inclusion—it is essential to have two conditions that will be explained in the next section: the existence of an enabling environment, characterized by the alignment between agrarian development policies, social protection and public procurement, and the systematic reduction of barriers to entry, often caused by structural failures in that environment.

3.

Conditions for Enhancing the Impact of LPFP on FSN

The demand for food from smallholder farmers generated by food programs can only translate into a sustained increase in the production and marketing of nutritious food—at fair prices for both suppliers and buyers—if certain complementary conditions are met (Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler, 2011). These conditions are grouped into two fundamental dimensions:

a. the existence of an enabling environment that articulates agricultural policies, social protection, and public procurement coherently, and

b. the systematic reduction of barriers to entry into smallholder farming, which often stem from structural failures in this environment (Kelly & Swensson, 2017).

3.1. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

In terms of enabling environments, the LAC region has made progress in adopting regulatory frameworks and public procurement policies aimed at sustainability objectives. As shown in Table 1, in the National Public Procurement Systems of 17 LAC countries[13], eight countries have explicitly incorporated support for smallholder farmers into their public procurement legal frameworks: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay.

In addition, nine countries explicitly include LPFP for smallholder farmers in the regulatory frameworks of school food programs (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic).

13 It is important to note that this review does not cover the legal frameworks of other government sectors that could develop sustainability guidelines for public food procurement. This includes laws related to Food Security, Climate Change, Agricultural Development or Environmental Management.

In the cases of Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay, the LPFP for smallholder farmers can be used within the framework of the PAE, since the program's procurement comply with the provisions of the General Law on Adequate and Sustainable Food, the Law on Family Agricultural Production and Artisanal Fishing and the Law on State Procurement of Food of Origin in Smallholder Farmers, respectively.

In Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Paraguay, LPFP for smallholder farmers has been specifically designed and adopted within the framework of school food programs.

Consequently, its application does not automatically extend to other forms of food procurement or to the operation of food services across different sectors of government.

In line with the above, several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have allocated a specific percentage of the public budget to local public procurement of food to guarantee resources for the acquisition of food for smallholder farmers. However, achieving and maintaining these percentages in practice represents a significant challenge, requiring years of progressive implementation.

Table 1. LLPFP Guidelines included in the Regulatory Frameworks of Public Procurement Systems and School Food Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Country	LPFP enabled in the regulatory framework of the national public procurement system	LPFP enabled in the regulatory framework of school food programs	Budget reserves for LPFP
Argentina	-	-	-
Plurinational State of Bolivia	✓	✓	-
Brazil	✓	✓	45%[14]
Chile	-	✓	5.25%
Colombia	✓	✓	30%
Costa Rica	-	-	-
Ecuador	✓	✓	35%
El Salvador	-	-	-
Guatemala	-	✓	70%
Honduras	-	✓	-
Mexico	✓	-	15%
Nicaragua	-	-	-
Panama	-	✓	30%
Paraguay	-	✓	10%
Peru	✓	✓	30%
Dominican Republic	✓	✓	-
Uruguay	✓	-	30% and 100%[15]

Source: author's elaboration based on data from the joint project between FAO and UNEP UNUN/GLO/1228/UEP-F "Regional Pathways on Sustainable Public Procurement for Sustainable Food Systems", June 2024.

14 The new provision of Law No. 15,226/2025 raises the rate from 30% to 45% as of January 1, 2026. The provision was published in the Official Gazette of the Union on October 1, 2025, and amends Law No. 11,947/200.

15 Reserve 30% of the centralized food procurement budget and 100% of the decentralized food procurement budget for Authorized Organizations that include smallholder farmers.

3.2. REDUCTION OF BARRIERS TO ENTRY DERIVED FROM THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The objectives of LPFP—such as increasing production, access to markets, and generating income—can be compromised when the procurement process is limited to formal compliance with legal require-ments, without an effective link to local productive dynamics (Figueredo et al., 2023). In this sense, re-ducing barriers that hinder the articulation between food demand and supply by smallholder farmers is decisive for the success of LPFP policies (Kelly & Swensson, 2017).

Countries in LAC (e.g., Brazil, Paraguay) have developed smallholder farmer registers that enable better identification, profiling, and understanding of the target population. These records provide key infor-mation for agricultural, social protection, and public procurement policies. To ensure its effectiveness, the registration process must be accessible and account for the restrictions rural people may face, such as limited access to identity documents or to tax systems.

On the other hand, adapting contracting requirements and administrative procedures to the realities of smallholder farmers enables reducing the costs and complexities that usually exclude this segment from the institutional market (FAO, 2018). In addition, countries in LAC have established margins of preference that grant smallholder farmers competitive advantages to counteract the effects of large-scale pro-duction and level the playing field against medium- or large-scale producer or intermediary organi-zations (Swensson, 2018).

Among the measures adopted to reduce barriers to access to institutional markets are the definition of smaller procurement lots adjusted to the productive capacity of smallholder farmers, the reduction of payment times to meet the liquidity and working capital needs demanded by food production, and the definition of fair prices (Kelly & Swensson, 2017). In the case of the PNAE, food procurement from small-holder farmers must "... be subdivided into as many lots as necessary, taking into account the seasonality and peculiarities of smallholder farmers' production; and be preceded by an extensive and documented survey of prices in the retail and wholesale market at the local, regional, territorial, state or national level".

Additionally, to reduce delays in payments to family farmers, the PAA simplified its procurement procedures by replacing agreements with an Accession Agreement and, in 2013, experimented with a specialized bank card to allow direct, faster transfers from the federal government. In Honduras, the list of prices and products to be supplied to the PAE is jointly defined by the association, local smallholder farmers, and government agencies through meetings and field visits. For Colombia, PAE operators must deliver the product certificates of payment to the people or smallholder farmer associations that provide the food to the program.

However, these measures may not be enough, as smallholder farming also requires other conditions to produce, sustain, and scale up, such as access to knowledge, financial resources, land, and water (Sambuichi et al., 2019), i.e., a package of productive development policies. To meet these needs, complementary actions are implemented, including training and technical assistance, which strengthen food production and safety, improve access to agricultural inputs and credits, and enhance infrastructure, including irrigation, storage, and processing systems (Sambuichi et al., 2022; FAO, 2015). Likewise, the formation and strengthening of cooperatives and producer associations are promoted as strategies to improve profitability, bargaining power, and access to institutional markets (Intini, Jacq, & Torres, 2019; Kelly & Swensson, 2017).

To avoid duplication and maximize synergies, it is essential to have a coordinating body or intersectoral committees that, in addition to clarifying institutional roles, facilitate the exchange of information and resources. The ultimate goal is to articulate actions that simultaneously promote the availability of nutritious food, rural development, and social protection. The main challenge lies in ensuring that these structures function effectively at the strategic, tactical, and operational levels, both at the national and subnational levels (Kelly & Swensson, 2017).

In addition, incorporating LPFP policies into food programs helps establish an institutional framework that efficiently articulates the different sectors and levels of government. This same framework facilitates coordination with civil society organizations and the private sector, through transparent governance and accountability mechanisms, supported by robust monitoring and evaluation systems.

It is important to note that providing clear and accessible information to smallholder farmers reduces uncertainty and encourages their participation in LPFP. It is key to segment suppliers and establish permanent communication to reduce information asymmetries, align expectations between the parties, and guarantee continuous feedback that allows for adjusting purchasing strategies and processes according to the market profile. Leao et al. (2021) conclude that “in an efficient value chain, the different actors are well connected and informed, which reduces unnecessary costs that can be passed on to the buyer”.

4.

Recommendations

Local Public Food Procurement, when targeted at smallholder farmers, can significantly contribute to FSN, boost local economies, and strengthen more resilient agri-food systems. In the region's countries, there is significant potential to redirect public spending on food procurement to the LPFP. However, for this possibility to materialize sustainably and at scale, decision-makers must promote institutional, programmatic, and regulatory transformations that address the challenges identified in this report. Key recommendations are presented below, organized into five thematic axes.

1. Aligning public demand for food towards sustainable agri-food systems and gealthy diets

Products procured through LPFP should be defined not only by economic or availability criteria, but also by their contribution to sustainable agri-food systems and healthy diets. To this end, countries are recommended to incorporate their national dietary guidelines and, where possible, tools such as the Cost of a Healthy Diet (CoHD) into procurement planning. This demand orientation must be complemented by broader policies—fiscal, regulatory, or educational—that strengthen healthy food environments in schools, hospitals, and other public institutions.

Finally, procurement processes should incorporate criteria that reflect the reality of local markets—such as nutritional quality, production methods, and seasonality—ensuring fair prices and predictable contracts for family farmers. These criteria should encourage the participation of women and youth in the supply chain and ensure that the added value remains in rural communities. In this way, public demand can become an engine of territorial development, employment generation, and equitable income distribution, while expanding access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food for the population..

2. Establish a regulatory framework to facilitate the enabling environment

In the region, model laws help create regulatory frameworks that facilitate an enabling environment for smallholder farmers in public procurement. Examples include the laws developed by the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament (PARLATINO)[16] with support from FAO, such as the Model Law on Smallholder farming, the Model Law on Agri-Food Cooperatives in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Framework Law on School Meals. These three public policy models highlight the importance of smallholder farmers and cooperatives in the agri-food and rural spheres and develop a model for States to coordinate public policies that facilitate and promote smallholder farmers' and agri-food cooperatives' access to public food procurement processes.

3. Strengthen or establish a national system of local public procurement for smallholder farmers

UNEP's Global Report on Sustainable Public Procurement (2022) notes that food and catering services are among the top sectors governments prioritize for incorporating sustainability criteria into their public procurement activities, moving from 11th to second place on the list. Additionally, evidence presented by Valencia et al. (2021) shows that public food procurement programs in Brazil have incentivized a transition of family farmers towards agroecological and organic practices, highlighting the potential of these programs not only to strengthen food security but also to contribute to environmental sustainability.

For LPFP to generate sustainable impacts in FSN, it is necessary to adopt a programmatic approach that transcends specific actions and guarantees the continuity of policies over time. This approach must include, on the one hand, the stable allocation of financial resources – as countries that allocate up to 30% of the budget of their food programs to local purchases have done – and on the other, the establishment of governance structures that allow effective articulation between sectors such as agriculture, health, education, and social development. It is also essential to strengthen public buyers' capacities, so they have a thorough understanding of the policy's objectives and can implement inclusive, efficient procurement processes that support smallholder farmers.

For smallholder farmers to be successfully integrated into public procurement systems, programs must include national systems with robust components of technical, financial, and organizational assistance. This requires coordinated intersectoral articulation to facilitate the provision of productive development services aligned with public demand. It is also essential to adopt a progressive approach that recognizes current market constraints and charts a path forward for capacities, infrastructure, and supply volume. The consolidation of short circuits and stable relationships between public buyers and producer organizations is key to boosting local economies, improving rural incomes, and ensuring a sustained supply of nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

16 Repository of Model Laws approved by PARLATINO https://parlatino.org/leyes-modelo-aprobadas-por-el-parlatino/

4. Recognize and close evidence and information gaps

One of the main obstacles to consolidating LPFP as a policy instrument is the paucity of systematic evidence on its impacts and outcomes. This limitation not only weakens data-driven decision-making but also makes it challenging to design and adjust effective interventions.

It is essential to conduct rigorous studies that accurately measure the impact of these purchases on Food Security and Nutrition, as well as mechanisms to enable the detailed collection of information on the profiles of smallholder farmers at the local level to better align supply with public demand. It is also recommended to promote the intersectoral exchange of this information, so that the inputs generated by the agriculture, social development, education, and health sectors, among others, can contribute to the development of a robust, contextualized, and territorial local public procurement policy for food and be integrated into coordinated and evidence-based strategies.

5. Frame the LPFP as part of profound productive development policies to improve the supply of smallholder farmers

For LPFP to be consolidated as an effective tool for economic inclusion and food security, they must be integrated into a broader framework of robust productive development policies that aim to improve the agricultural sector's productivity through sophistication and diversification. In line with ECLAC (2024), these policies involve the articulation of efforts on multiple fronts (e.g., science, technology and innovation, extensionism, entrepreneurship, digital transformation, human talent gaps, specific infrastructures and logistics, quality agenda, etc.) and of multiple actors from the public, private, academia, and civil society sectors. Hence, the issue of governance for productive development, understood as the mechanisms – called coordination instances, dynamics, rules of the game, incentives – that allow multiple actors, resources, and efforts to be articulated around strategic agendas in the field of productive development, is a fundamental factor.

Along these lines, these policies must strengthen, among others, the technical, organizational, and commercial capacities of smallholder farmers, enabling them to meet the quality, volume, regularity, and traceability requirements of public procurement systems. The experience of countries such as Brazil shows that when LPFP is articulated with policies of technical assistance, rural financing, and cooperative strengthening, positive impacts are generated on the production, income, and food security of rural households.

These policies must consider the particularities of family production systems, such as their small scale, productive diversity, seasonality, and logistical limitations. Therefore, its implementation must be progressive, allowing producers to gradually expand their supply capacity through investments in infrastructure, access to appropriate technologies, and the strengthening of marketing networks. In Guatemala and Honduras, school meal programs linked to local procurement have shown that technical support and joint planning between producers and public buyers are key to ensuring contract compliance and the sustainability of the model.

It is also recommended to promote cluster initiatives to link smallholder farmers to Dynamic, sustainable value chains. Agri-food clusters enable the territorial organisation of productive, institutional, and commercial actors, facilitating cooperation, innovation, and market access. According to ECLAC's Platform of Cluster Initiatives, of the 411 initiatives identified in Latin America and the Caribbean, 160 correspond to the agricultural sector, underscoring its growing relevance as a productive development strategy[17].

These initiatives have proven to be effective in improving competitiveness, facilitating compliance with quality and safety standards, and strengthening the articulation between small producers and institutional buyers. Its implementation requires policies with a territorial focus that promote associativity, the provision of shared services (such as technical assistance, certification, and logistics), and the inclusion of smallholder farmers in more demanding and stable markets.

Finally, the articulation between the sectors of agriculture, economy, social development and education, among others, is essential to guarantee coherence between productive development policies and LPFP, ensuring that these policies respond to the real demands of the public market and contribute to the structural transformation of agri-food systems, generating employment, local added value and greater resilience to economic or climate crises.

17 https://geo.cepal.org/dp-clusters

5. Conclusions

The experiences analysed in this report show that **Local Public Food Procurement has a high potential to contribute to Food Security and Nutrition.** There is evidence that local public procurement increases the income of smallholder farmers, creates Jobs, and drives the diversification of food production. In Brazil, for example, the incomes of smallholder farmers participating in the PAA increased by 19% to 39% across different studies. In contrast, for the PNAE, increases ranged from 23% to 106%, depending on the type of farmer and the region. In addition, these programmes have boosted productive diversification: more than 80% of producers surveyed by the FAO reported introducing new crops as a result of their participation, thereby contributing to access to healthy diets. In terms of employment, the impact is also significant; studies in Latin America and the Caribbean show that Local Public Food Procurement programs from smallholder farmers can generate up to 478 jobs for every million dollars transacted.

However, significant limitations and challenges must be addressed to consolidate these programs as effective public policy instruments. Evidence gaps and the absence of enabling environments, such as national systems that ensure the complementary measures required for the effectiveness and sustainability of these policies, are examples that must be addressed to achieve greater impact of LPFP on smallholder farmers in FSN. Existing food programs lack evidence to document best practices and determine the effect of LPFP (Tartanac et al., 2018). Alliance Bioversity & CIAT (2022) identify 44 potential outcomes and impacts on agrifood systems arising from the implementation of LPFP policies under school food programs. In the same study, they evaluate the evidence on the impact of school food programs that adopt LPFP policies in 12 countries in the region and conclude that identifying gaps and making program adjustments is difficult, given the preponderance of studies based on qualitative data and expert opinions.

On the other hand, **one of the central tensions identified lies in the mismatch between supply and demand.** On the supply side, structural challenges remain: limited access to formal markets, limited productive capacity, insufficient technical assistance, and weak administrative and financial management capacity. Access to credit for smallholder farmers for local public procurement remains limited, constrained by perceptions of risk and producers' lack of guarantees. On the other hand, public demand tends to face operational limitations (bureaucracy, payment delays), institutional limitations (lack of coordination between sectors, limited participation of local governments), logistical limitations (inadequate infrastructure in food units), and capacity limitations (lack of training for personnel in charge). These weaknesses affect the instrument's effectiveness and hinder its scalability.

In this context, **adopting a systemic, progressive, and evidence-based approach is essential.** LPFP to smallholder farmers can meet multiple policy objectives: reducing poverty and improving security and nutrition. While achieving all these goals involves negotiating priorities among various sectoral policies and making adjustments, it also opens the possibility of generating valuable synergies among them. It is important to note that public budgets for food purchases already exist; the challenge is to redirect these resources towards smallholder farmers. It is not a question of creating new funds, but of implementing mechanisms that enable this procurement to have a transformative effect on social inclusion and territorial and local development. Developing an enabling environment, reducing barriers to entry, and structuring food programs with multisectoral participation and LPFP approaches to smallholder farmers are key conditions for moving forward.

The strengthening of the productive development of smallholder farmers also emerges as an indispensable condition for the sustained success of the LPFP. The experiences analyzed in this report show that, when these policies are articulated with strategies of technical assistance, rural financing, infrastructure, and organizational strengthening, positive impacts are generated on the productivity, income, and economic inclusion of rural households. In this sense, it is key to move towards productive development policies with a territorial approach, which recognizes the diversity of family systems and promotes their integration into more dynamic value chains. Initiatives such as agri-food clusters provide a concrete framework for bringing actors together, encouraging innovation, and facilitating compliance with quality and safety standards.

In short, **consolidating public procurement and agri-food systems with a focus on productivity and sustainability requires political will, investment in capacity, solid institutional structures, and a medium- and long-term vision.** On the other hand, public procurement systems must be oriented towards sustainable agri-food systems and healthy diets as priority objectives. If their challenges are adequately addressed and their learnings are capitalized on, these systems can be transformed into engines of local development, economic inclusion, and food security.

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Translation Notes

The definition of Family Farming (Box 1) describes FAOs concept of family farming.

WFP uses the term “smallholder farmers” to emphasize the dimension of farm size, referring specifically to small-scale agricultural producers.

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