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FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

**EMERGING ORGANIC SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS IN JAPAN:
ANALYSES ON ENABLING POLICIES, AGENCIES, AND CONTRADICTIONS**

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Public Food Procurement initiatives are considered policy-based measures to accelerate the transformation toward sustainable food systems. Japan, known for its history of organic/natural farming and community supported agriculture, has partaken in related worldwide efforts, especially by promoting organic school feeding programs. Since 2021, when the government drew out a new strategy for sustainable food systems, the number of municipalities engaging in these programs sharply increased. The research questions were as follows: what are the enabling policies and agencies for the dissemination of organic school feeding programs? What are the contradictions in related processes? This paper employs an interdisciplinary approach of sociology of agriculture and food and political economy, aiming to provide empirical evidence through analyses of public policies, statistics, literature, questionnaires on all municipalities, and interviews regarding selected municipalities in Tokai Region, Japan. Data collection procedures were conducted from 2024 to 2025. Results showed that,

first, the flagship policies and financial support provided by the central government, along with local governments' arrangements, played a significant role in breaking long-established policies and practices that favored conventional food systems. Second, various agencies, including those associated with the government, policymakers, nutritionists, teachers, students' parents, farmers organizations, and civil society organizations and their coalitions, materialized the public procurement of locally-sourced organic foods for school meals, and became conscious about the interrelated barriers against the transformation toward sustainable food systems. Third, while a growing number of municipalities embrace the organic school feeding programs as a key measure to open doors to address social, environmental, economic, and governance challenges, their percentage remains as low as 16% in 2023. The worldwide price spikes, fiscal austerity, adverse climate and seismic events, rapidly aging population, rise of greenwashes and populism, and persisting neoliberalism, among others, show the contradictions/challenges toward the sustainable transformation of society.

Palavras-chave: school feeding programs; organic; local sourcing; public policies; japan.