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QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES BEYOND
CERTIFICATION

**BEYOND PRICE AND CERTIFICATION: TRUST, SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS,
AND CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING IN AGROECOLOGICAL MARKETS**

Gabriela De Ávila Nunes (gabriela217171@gmail.com)

Esther Escarrone Pereira (estherescarrone@gmail.com)

Maria Ketully Neyane Alves (ketullyneyane@gmail.com)

Nathália Andrade Da Silva (nathalyasilva27@gmail.com)

The expansion of organic and agroecological markets has been widely analyzed based on factors such as price, certification, and logistics, while behavioral elements remain less explored. This study analyzes how trust mechanisms operate as economic devices that shape consumption decisions, reduce transaction costs, and sustain relational stability in short agroecological marketing circuits. The theoretical framework articulates contributions from Behavioral Economics (Thaler; Kahneman) and New Economic Sociology, especially Mark Granovetter's perspective on the social roots of economic transactions. The methodology combines a literature review and exploratory

analysis of Brazilian experiences with organic and agroecological food fairs, selected for their centrality in face-to-face interactions and the social construction of trust in short marketing circuits. Direct interaction between producers and consumers reduces perceived risk, acts as an informal guarantee mechanism, and influences purchasing decisions guided by loyalty and socio-environmental values.

The results of the literature indicate that trust is a central economic asset in organic and agroecological markets, built on recurring face-to-face interactions and mutual knowledge between producers and consumers. These relationships reduce uncertainty about food quality and operate as informal guarantee mechanisms, often perceived as more legitimate than formal certification systems. Consumption decisions in these markets are strongly guided by non-monetary preferences, such as belonging, reciprocity, and socio-environmental values, which increase the propensity to consume and encourage repeat purchases. In conclusion, by highlighting trust as a central mechanism of economic coordination, this study contributes to debates on alternative value-based food systems, broadening the understanding of informal forms of quality and sustainability assurance beyond certification.

Palavras-chave: confiança; mercados agroecológicos; circuitos curtos de comercialização; decisões de consumo; enraizamento social.