Integrating Food into Urban Planning

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Articulating public agencies, experts, corporations, civil society and the informal sector in planning food systems in Bangkok

Piyapong Boossabong

Bangkok is the capital of an agriculturally productive country. There are both full-time and part-time farmers, both modern and conventional markets and both mainstream and alternative food chains. A survey in 2016 found that the number of full-time farming households working in Bangkok’s peri-urban fringe was 13,774. It can be estimated that the proportion of farming households per total households was 1:195. Although the exact number of farmers was not recorded, it can be estimated that each household would have 2–3 farmers. Thus, the number was in the range 27,000–42,000 (Policy and Planning Division 2016). They cultivated in the peri-urban areas 37,310 hectares out of the total land area of 156,522 hectares (23.84 per cent). The amount of land per farm was about 0.7–1.0 hectares. In particular, paddy land amounted to 20,031 hectares, while vegetables, cut flowers and ornamental plants were cultivated in the area of 6,473 hectares. A 2016 report also informed that 22,974 hectares were owned by farmers, while 13,870 hectares were rented and 475 hectares were mortgaged or used free of charge (Office of Agricultural Economics 2016, 178–81). Bangkok produced 124,600 tonnes of rice annually, of which the value was US$30,524,167 (2016, 10–12). The data on livestock in Bangkok showed that the numbers of cattle, broilers, laying hens, native chickens and ducks were 2,522, 17,220, 8,250, 40,974 and 26,137, respectively (2016, 123–32). In overview, this agricultural sector contributed to the metropolis’s economic gross product US$72.93 million (0.08 per cent of the total) (Policy and Planning Division 2016).
Whereas the full-time farmers are market oriented, the part-time farmers who grow food on a small scale within the inner city are subsistence, leisure and recreation oriented. About 130 community gardens also exist, developed by these part-time farmers, and play a significant role in building a sense of community as an interactive public space (City Farm Program 2014). The part-time farmers play the leading role as well in food-growing innovations, such as vertical gardens, rooftop gardens and container gardens. So, the use of new methods of food growing differentiate part-time farmers from the majority of full-time farmers, who employ traditional farming methods. They have also initiated a variety of platforms including online social media to share information and resources (Boossabong 2017).

There are three main central fresh food markets. Retailers transport food from these facilities to sell at the 337 local traditional fresh food markets in the inner city. Some retailers also sell vegetables directly at customers’ houses by carrying food on a truck as a mobile market and some are street venders. The number of food actors in this informal sector is roughly 1600–1700 (Bangkok Soi Idex 2016). They improve access to food for at least 225 907 urban poor households in 1266 poor communities (Community Organisations Development Institute 2008). Fresh and frozen foods are also sold in modern trade markets. Instant foods, in particular, are easy to find at the 1109 convenience stores located in every corner of the city (Working Group on Food for Change 2012). For customers seeking alternative markets, the city has a lot of green markets, shops and food box delivery services.

Bangkok’s food systems are shaped by various forces, and the different forces are driven by different actors through their planning exercises. Key actors include public agencies, planning experts, food corporations, civil society and the informal sector. Their roles play out on multiple scales, and to see the articulation of different actors and their planning practices is to understand how the food systems of this city are created.

2.1 The different food actors

2.1.1. State-led food systems planning: working together among public agencies and think-tanks

The planning of food systems in Bangkok is firstly driven by the cooperation of central, regional and local governments that are guided by self-sufficiency principles promoted by the late Ninth King. The Bangkok
Metropolitan Administration (BMA), which is the regional government, takes care of the whole Bangkok metropolitan region. BMA performs several food-related tasks. It plays a role in analysing the importance of farmlands in the peri-urban areas to feeding the city dwellers. It controls land use in order to maintain peri-urban farming areas as a green belt. BMA also develops and maintains agricultural infrastructure, particularly the irrigation systems.

BMA, in cooperation with the central government, also built the central fresh food markets. These markets, including Talat Thai and See Mum Moung, distribute fresh food from peri-urban farms, enabling inner city retailers to transport food to sell in the city. Thus, the central markets play an essential role in bridging rural, peri-urban and urban areas by providing good access to food provision.

The establishment of the central markets was done in parallel with controlling the quality of the hundreds of local fresh food markets scattered within the inner city. The BMA rates the quality level of those local markets and provides incentives to them to improve their hygiene. BMA also plays a role in facilitating the investment of food corporations in the city by building hypermarkets, supermarkets and convenience stores that can be accessed by each urban community.

Local urban communities are governed by the District Administration Offices (DAOs), which work under the BMA plans. These local governments promote not only nutritious food, but also nutritious food and the well-being of city dwellers. Building upon the King’s ideas, 50 DAOs in Bangkok have launched a variety of programmes to support farming in the city, such as the establishment of urban farming learning centres. Some DAOs have also created their own initiatives, such as the development of a rooftop garden and organisation of city farming training courses (see Figure 2.1). They promote organic food production and markets in their area. Some of them also link ordinary people to private sector businesses by facilitating the contract leasing of vacant private lands.

Professional urban planners and planning think-tanks have also played an important role. Smart Growth Thailand was one of the agencies that provided academic and technical assistance to the food agenda planning process. This consultancy proposed the idea that conserving peri-urban farmlands would also address problems relating to urban sprawl. It advised the BMA to consider zoning the centre of each urban community to enable food markets to develop (Bunyapravitra 2015). Planning think-tanks, from academic units in public universities, advocated developing technologies to enable vertical farming in urban
settings and promoted urban agriculture as a method to mitigate climate change. For example, Kasetsart University experimented with ‘light-weight soil and food growing plants’ for use with vertical gardening and created a vertical garden campus lab as a model to promote green universities. Thammasat University, Chulalongkorn University and Mahidon University integrated urban farming and water governance agenda and supported the calculation of draught and flood compensation for urban farmers. With their supportive research, the BMA has moved the focus from supporting rice production to supporting aquaculture. Farmers have accepted the change because they can sell their soil, from digging ponds, to the building sector.

2.1.2. Corporation-led food systems planning: connectedness of agribusiness, retailers and social enterprises

Food corporations play a large part in planning the production, processing and distribution of a variety of instant foods and some fresh foods. Large agribusinesses own the modern retail trade system throughout the
whole country, including thousands of hypermarkets, supermarkets and convenience stores in Bangkok. The top 25 largest stores were built on a total land area of 468 hectares, which is more than the total land taken up by the 25 largest public parks in Bangkok\(^5\) (Thai Climate Justice 2012). They are also attempting to develop their own brands. Traditionally, they cooperate rather than compete with one another, and they have established close links with the central government and BMA by supporting political parties. They have benefited from national and regional policies throughout modern Thai history.

It should be noted that the Green Revolution has affected the Thai food regime since 1961, when the first Thai development plan (1961–6) included the principles of the Green Revolution as a strategy for development. The government changed the way people grow food; increasing productivity by supporting research about agricultural science and technology and by promoting chemical fertilisers (National Economic and Social Development Board 1961).

As a result of the Green Revolution, a few large agribusinesses monopolised the majority of farming production, technologies, food processing and distribution throughout the country (Leaunjumroon 2011). These companies also control hybrid seeds valued at roughly US$55 million per year (97 per cent of the total hybrid seeds used in Thailand) (Thai Seed Trading Association 2011). Large-scale agribusiness also shaped consumer food culture and partly affected the reduction of local food diversity, since the growth and expansion of the modern trade system have gradually destroyed small and medium-sized enterprises as well as the local food system within the city.

However, the importance of large-scale agribusiness should be taken into account in parallel with the criticisms. It should be recognised that agribusiness has helped to boost employment in Thailand by creating around 1 171 000 jobs and the number has increased roughly 3.1 per cent per year (Food Intelligence Centre Thailand 2017). In addition, large-scale agribusiness has provided the effective food distribution services to the aforementioned 1109 stores and 337 local markets accessed by city dwellers who live in the inner city (Working Group on Food for Change 2012). Small retail and wholesale food businesses also benefited from large-scale agribusiness, since they earned from distributing its products, such as seeds, fertilisers and technology, to small-scale urban farmers.

Social enterprises are a new type of food corporation that promotes a different approach. These private companies focus on sustainable agribusiness such as organising green markets, opening green restaurants
(see Figure 2.2), publishing magazines about farming experiences and know-how, and opening farming training centres. These companies both earn money from agribusiness and contribute to the promotion of alternative and more sustainable food production and markets. Although these initiatives cannot challenge the structural injustice of the food regime, they contribute by proposing a pathway towards more resilient food supply chains and more inclusive growth.

2.1.3. Civil-society-led food systems planning: the collaboration of non-governmental and community-based organisations

Non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations (referred to as ‘civil society’) also play a role in planning food systems by facilitating the expansion of household, community and institution gardens within the inner city, especially in poorer communities. They complement rural agriculture by promoting safe, healthy and fair local food systems. They support neighbourhood planning and the role of urban agriculture by raising environmental awareness, adapting to
climate change, managing waste (reuse and recycling) and facilitating learning for urban kids. They also work with social enterprises to propose alternative food sources and distribution by promoting short food supply chains through the development of weekly green markets (see Figure 2.3), food fairs and vegetable box delivery directly from producers to customers.

These civil-society-led groups also promote community building practices. For example, a sense of community was instilled through the development of shared ‘edible green space’ (space for growing food). These collective gardens were planned and developed by the collaboration of communities and the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation, the Media Centre for Development, the Working Group on Food for Change, and the City Farm Association. There was larger-scale collaboration in cases where poor communities were the target, such as the ones in which the Slum Dwellers Network and the Informal Labour Network were engaged. These civil society organisations started by advocating alternative food movements and then began to promote local food systems. They have strengthened many part-time farmers through resources provision, knowledge transfer, network development and the facilitation of public fora in which these farmers may

Figure 2.3  Weekly green food market. (Source: Piyapong Boossabong)
exchange opinions and experiences. At least 98 well-organised collective gardens from among about 130 are active in the network. These collective vegetable gardens are involved by roughly 4900 people. They commonly grow vegetables and herbs that are used in cooking Thai foods, such as holy basil, sweet basil, Chinese kale, chilli, aubergines, spring onions, lemons, morning glory, mushrooms, peppermint, lettuce, coriander, cucumbers, cabbage, ginger and galanga. Some fruit trees are also planted, such as banana, guava, mango, tammareen and papaya (Mahasarakham University 2013).

2.1.4. Everyday food systems planning: the emergence and transformation of street food and mobile markets

The Bangkok food system is also characterised by the daily practices of street food vendors and mobile markets (including floating markets). This everyday service has no specific pattern and yet it plays a role in making Bangkok a lively city with plenty of food. The numbers of street food vendors and mobile markets are not static, but respond to stimuli such as the changing seasons, food demands and economic conditions. The vendors in each street can change at any time as a result of decisions to move to other places or changes in employment. There are more than 30 vendors along some streets, especially in commercial zones such as the Khawsarn, Sukhumvit and Sealom Roads. It can be estimated that each small street will have about 10 street vendors and mobile markets. As there are 650 streets in Bangkok (Policy and Planning Division 2008), the total number of street vendors and mobile markets in Bangkok may reach 6500.

Most of these vendors make decisions on a daily basis, especially those who sell food on trucks (rod-kub-khaw/rod-pum-poung) and food on boats. These everyday food distribution practices bypass the limitations of other methods because they can access customers at the household scale and distribute food to the poor by offering cheap prices. Their focus, thus, makes some members of middle and upper classes feel irritated by their loud voices, messy food arrangements and unfashionable food types. However, no one can deny that they play an important role in enhancing food diversity, since they provide a variety of food from different sources than those of the modern trade system. They also distribute local vegetables and seeds. Their role also encompasses that of being local food guardians, conserving the local traditional food types and species at the same time as they unintentionally sustain biodiversity in the city.
2.2. Planning approaches and instruments

2.2.1. Public agency planning

Food systems planning in Bangkok is, firstly, driven by the cooperation of public agencies and professional planning think-tanks. This state-led planning includes the conservation of peri-urban agriculture as a green belt and the development of irrigation systems by means of physical land use planning. It also supports food distribution by developing central fresh food markets that enable retailers to distribute food within the inner city.

The state-led planning is based mostly on physical land-use planning accomplished by professional planners. Supportive data are collected by the Policy and Planning Division working under the BMA in cooperation with academic units from public universities. Some information is delivered by DAOs, but the comprehensive plan is made at the regional scale before each DAO then makes its operational plan, which will focus on implementing the objectives in the comprehensive one within their sphere of authority and territory.

Technical and legal planning documents that directly relate to the promotion of food systems include the City Planning Act 1975, the Land Development Act 1982 and Bangkok’s Comprehensive Plan 2013. The City Planning Act 1975 establishes the foundation of urban planning culture in Thailand, by which peri-urban agriculture is conserved as cultural heritage of Thai cities (Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning 2016b). Since then agriculture has not been alienated from the city. Article 16 of the Land Development Act 1982 influences the protection of farmlands on the fringe of Bangkok and the development of irrigation systems, because this article specifies that soil fertility must be considered in land use and the fertile lands on Bangkok’s fringe proved to be the best for growing food (Land Development Department 2016). Although this act has been replaced by the Land Development Act 2008, the language of article 16 remains. For Bangkok’s Comprehensive Plan 2013 (see Figure 2.4), the previous two acts and the Building Control Act 1992/2015 are enforced at the same time as food markets and silos, for storing agricultural products, are zoned within the inner city (Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning 2016a). The comprehensive plan also promotes small-scale farming in the inner city, particularly where it is zoned for housing (Department of City Planning 2013).
There are other planning approaches and instruments that relate to food systems promotion either indirectly or through having spatial implications that affect food systems. To begin with, there are the four-year strategic plans adopted by BMA and the DAOs. Some of these strategic plans aimed to control the quality of food and market hygiene using specific measurable outcomes (BMA 2013; Klongtoei District Administration Office 2015; Laksi District Administration Office 2015). They also framed follow-up action plans relating to the urban food agenda, such as the Environmental Quality Management Plan, the Global Warming Reduction Action Plan and the Green Space Action Plan. The idea of edible green space is recognised by the Bangkok Green Space Action Plan 2009, while community gardens are promoted formally by the Bangkok Environmental Quality Management Plan 2012–16 (Environment Department 2012; 2009). The Global Warming Reduction Action Plan 2013–18, on the other hand, proposes measures to increase the number of public gardens, trees along the roads, and

![Bangkok's Comprehensive Plan 2013](image-url)

**Figure 2.4** Bangkok’s Comprehensive Plan 2013. (*Source: Open access. Department of City Planning, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration*)
green buildings. One strategy is to promote the planting of fruit trees, such as tamareen and mango. Another promotes the reuse of organic waste in gardening and farming activities (Environment Department 2013). Another state plan, called ‘Bangkok 2020’, looks forward to the future Bangkok and demands sustainable urban food systems. This plan addresses the role of peri-urban farming areas to enhance urban resilience and envisions that such areas could be an emergency food source and floodways for draining water to the sea in times of severe flooding (Policy and Planning Division 2015).

2.2.2. Agribusiness planning

Secondly, Bangkok food systems are planned by large food corporations to control the agricultural industries and modern trade system that dominate the city food chains and take the largest portion of food distribution. While agribusinesses influence state-led planning, they also have their own strategic business plans. In general these plans are coordinated with state-led plans and other business plans. For example, they planned to enhance profits from the market segments regulated by state-led plans – such as to link to economic crops the processing of agricultural products, food exports and food standards set by the state – and those market segments influenced by other food corporations’ plans. They also identify desired changes to governmental regulation, such as changes to Bangkok’s Comprehensive Plan. After a terrible flood that affected 72 per cent of the whole Bangkok area in 2011, it was found that some large agribusinesses planned to adapt by learning lessons from the interruption of food supply. They proposed to increase the number of distributive units to manage risks, which benefits the whole Bangkok food regime by enhancing the resilience of the urban food systems. For example, the large food agribusiness known as CP ALL was disrupted by flooding in 2011, which forced the closure of 10 per cent (about 600) of their convenience stores (‘7–11’). After the flood, the agribusiness developed 100 new distributive units in Bangkok and its vicinity to enhance the efficiency of food distribution to their retail outlets, particularly in future risk situations. These distributive units supported the 10 main distribution centres of the corporation. In a similar way, Big-C established its new fresh food distribution centre in an area of 17 hectares. It was estimated that this new centre could prevent the loss, calculated as 15–20 per cent, if the supply chain of the corporation were again interrupted by floods. Moreover, 450 agribusinesses led by Tesco Lotus developed a new joint distribution centre in Bangkok. This model allowed them to share space and costs of
transportation as well as to create more flexible food supply chains. At the same time, distribution centres developed by a third party became the new business trend. They positioned themselves as providers of logistics to other corporations (Pornchaleumpong and Rattanapanon 2015).

2.2.3. Civil society planning

Thirdly, civil society organisations play a role in planning food systems by bringing about the expansion of household, community and institution gardens in the inner city. Civil-society-led planning proposes alternative food sources and distribution that promote both safe local food and fair food supply chains. They also support spatial neighbourhood planning to highlight the role of urban agriculture in enhancing social cohesion, raising environmental awareness and managing waste.

Civil-society-led planning adopted scenario and participatory planning approaches, but in their own way. They made a plan called ‘Thailand Desires Food and Agricultural System 2033’ by brainstorming experiences and visions of different civil society organisations using deliberative panels. So, it can be claimed that this plan is a shared vision of a network of civil society organisations. They dream of seeing the expansion of organic food production to 50 per cent of the total farmland, and 50 per cent use of local seeds, and of the food produced in Thai cities growing until it can feed the entire Thai population by 2033 (BioThai 2013).

To make their scenarios possible, civil society organisations have also stimulated communities to undertake spatial community and neighbourhood planning. The approaches adopted by them encouraged advocacy and collaborative planning. In their planning vision, community empowerment is one of key goals to be achieved. The network of civil society organisations expects that urban communities will be the main agent in reforming food and agricultural systems. The civil society organisations support community planning as a tool for raising awareness using a bottom-up approach to creating local food systems. They encourage farming communities to keep their lands, to strengthen their cooperatives, to change their production to be more sustainable, to develop farmers’ markets and to think about alternative energy (BioThai 2013).

Aside from the highlights of each key planning instrument mentioned above, the connection between the various planning tools is that they share some foci and complement each other as shown in Table 2.1.
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<th>Peri-urban farming</th>
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<th>Fruit tree planting</th>
<th>Green building; vertical farming</th>
<th>Organic/healthy food; reuse; training</th>
<th>Food market/silo/transport/hygiene</th>
<th>Green/farmers’ market/shop/restaurant</th>
<th>Producer – customer relations (e.g. CSA/PGS)</th>
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(Continued)
2.2.4. Informal foods vendors – a lack of long-range planning

Lastly, Bangkok food systems are also characterised by the daily practices of street food vendors and mobile markets. Their everyday planning has no specific patterns or particular instruments, but plays a role in promoting food diversity and making Bangkok a lively city with an abundance of food.

2.3. The city farm plan – a collaborative effort

While all the food actors have specific agendas, there are planning interrelations between the various actors. For example, the public agencies and food corporations develop shared visions to achieve their mutual benefits. Although the corporations have influence upon urban food-related plans, they also adjust their plans to fit the changing state-led plans and regulations. Civil society organisations interact with corporations and the public agencies. They critique large corporations that monopolise the food regime, and they also develop links with public agencies. They implement state-led planning, rather than fight it, and learn to work and share resources with social enterprises. Government regulates and facilitates street food vendors and mobile markets, recognising that they create much of the identity of Bangkok. Without them, there would not be the Bangkok that everyone knows. BMA, in particular, helps to facilitate co-functions of formal and informal distribution activities. BMA, for example, bridges formal and informal food actors by negotiating the use of outer spaces of modern supermarkets by traditional food vendors. As a consequence, customers who go to the mall can choose whether to go inside the mall for the services of the formal distribution system or to stay outside for the services of the informal one.
In addition to this organisational interaction, the City Farm Programme has become a meeting point for all the actors and their different planning practices. Public agencies, experts, some corporations, civil society and the informal sector have come together to plan the ideal food system to serve Bangkok and ensure its sustainability. The concept of sustainability proved controversial, having different interpretations, but this collaborative process helped to define a meaningful way forward.

The City Farm Programme began in 2010 and was funded under the Food and Nutrition Programme of the National Health Promotion Foundation, part of the Prime Minister’s Office. It has been co-managed by a multitude of civil society organisations with cooperation from the public and private sectors. With such characteristics this programme can be seen as an interaction plan. The emergence of the programme was a result of concern about urban food insecurity (the poor quality and increasing price of food) as well as the intention to implement the King’s idea of low-input farming in an urban context. The programme has been granted seven million baht annually (about US$235 000). Some of this amount were used to support 50 collective/community gardens each year (35 000–50 000 baht or US$1170–1670 per garden) (see Figure 2.5). The rest is for organising training courses and alternative food markets,

Figure 2.5 Pinchareaun community garden supported by the City Farm Programme. (Source: Piyapong Boossabong)
providing inputs, sharing farming knowledge, promoting wide-ranging food initiatives, public campaigns, and fixed and operating costs of the programme (Mahasarakham University 2013).

Initiatives undertaken under the umbrella of the City Farm Programme have resulted in unexpected collaborations. A good example began when the Laksi DAO developed a rooftop garden and opened it to the public as a learning centre. This DAO also worked with various civil society organisations which played a key role in organising training courses on urban farming. Other DAOs, learning from this experience, developed their own rooftop garden and secured BMA support to organise training courses. However, the demand for training increased beyond the DAOs’ capacity. So, social enterprises stepped in by proposing alternative city gardening training courses and the City Farm Programme agreed to help them start up.

As a result, there has been an expansion of rooftop garden installations throughout the city, on private, temple, school and even hospital buildings. As the demand for rooftop gardens grew, experts from Kasetsart University engaged with the programme and proposed the use of lightweight soil and food-growing plants so this programme would impose less structural stress on the host buildings. They also conducted research on the relationship between the design of rooftop gardens and energy efficiency.

In parallel with the growing number of individual-based farms, civil society organisations, led by the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation, have worked to promote community gardens in the city. As part of the City Farm Programme, civil societies, facilitated by local DAOs, encouraged a community committee within their jurisdiction to participate in the programme. For example, the Slum Dwellers Network and the Informal Labour Network (as civil society organisations) helped to introduce the programme to the informal sector.

Similarly, the Working Group on Food for Change, another civil society organisation, led the organisation of local seeds donations from rural and peri-urban farmers to urban communities and groups aiming to develop collective gardens. When some community leaders required special know-how, the programme managers asked DAOs and social enterprises to organise training courses for them for free. As a result, many collective gardens have appeared in Bangkok and their networks have been created so they can learn from each other (Boossabong 2012).

Food production also benefited from the promotion of marketing opportunities. Apart from sharing and selling products to neighbours, the Green Market Network, as a network of social enterprises, played a key role in developing alternative markets, such as green markets,
green fairs and direct food delivery from producers to customers. Some green restaurants, particularly ones selling vegetarian foods and promoting local food systems, also agreed to buy products from these urban farmers.

From these examples, it can be seen that there is an articulation between public agencies, experts, social enterprises, civil society and the informal sector in planning food systems at different entry points and different scales. Their articulation helps in developing multiple food chains encompassing various ways of growing food to many food distribution initiatives that range from community scale to the wider scale of the city region.

2.4. Concluding remarks

Through different planning practices, different impacts are made and they either complement each other or bring about conflict or confusion. The intended impact of the aforementioned planning practices was to improve the food system of Bangkok and to increase food security and sustainability. Other objectives were to augment public infrastructure development with the investment of agribusiness and to complement the modern food trade system with street food vendors and mobile markets that can guarantee that the poor and marginalised will be able to access food.

The key lesson learned from Bangkok is that food systems are too complex to be covered by a single all-inclusive plan that attempts to address the multiple scales and mixes of formal and informal activities and that has been developed by multiple stakeholders. The best approach we discovered was to integrate and facilitate an articulation of multi-scalar, sectoral, spatial and strategic planning practices between the various food actors. This layering of plans allows us to understand how food systems really work in fragmented and pluralist societies. Such an approach also avoids the pitfalls of large-scale collaboration and consensus building, which is both difficult to do and can conceal structural injustice and embedded conflicts. Our experience offers an example of integrating food into urban planning networks in which spaces are opened up for everyone to participate in creating food systems.

We have also learned that the encouragement of urban farming is an integral part of food planning. Many Bangkok residents, particularly the poor, have moved from rural areas to live in the city and have farming skills. For many, farming not only provides food; it also heals their feelings of homesickness and opens a window of opportunity.
Moreover, civil society organisations cannot plan to create more sustainable food chains without the cooperation of social enterprises and their corporate social responsibility plans. On the other hand, conflict between different planning practices can arise from the different goals of large-scale agribusiness and civil society organisations. Whereas the former aims to control food systems, the latter dream of creating just food systems in which ordinary people are empowered with self-determination.

To cope with conflicts of interests between the different food actors, government believes that growth and sustainability can be achieved together. While large food corporations operate to maximise their profit and alternative forces seek gradual reform, government supports both sides by having two faces; one to promote food actors who advocate for more sustainable, local and fair food systems, and another to protect agribusinesses as they drive macro-economic growth.

Thus, the food governance structure includes various food sectors by which government, at the centre, allows different actors to contribute to the food system in their own ways. Two different approaches still battle over the way towards more or less sustainable, local and fair food systems. Although large food corporations seem to be the evil, their existence and power stimulate the collaboration of alternative food actors, who realise that they need to work together to be stronger in bargaining with the food corporations.

The activity of local government, civil society organisations and social enterprises responds better to such social values by enabling city dwellers’ increasing concern with sustainable, local and fair food systems to influence the strategic changes of agribusinesses. Besides that, when food exports from Thailand suffered a loss of US$330 million over four years as a result of chemical contamination found by tests (Thailand Foundation for Customers 2012), the central government started to force large food corporations to improve their supply chains so they would be more organic. This is a good sign of moving forward in a better way and may enable the interests of agribusinesses and civil society organisations to meet at some point along the way.

Finally, it should be noted that Bangkok’s efforts to integrate food into urban planning was greatly facilitated by the support of the late Ninth King of Thailand, who was the country’s symbolic and spiritual leader. As he was respected as the father of the country, his speeches promoting growing food in developed areas using low-input methods, his support for self-reliance and his encouragement of urban farming in Jitlada Garden8 (located in inner Bangkok) were a positive force that
stimulated many urban dwellers to follow his example and grow food in the city. Almost all sectors in the country, whether they agreed with his ideas or not, did not reject them and still refer to his speeches and practice to legitimise their plans and actions. For example, recently, the Agriculture and Cooperative Bank announced a programme to give credit to part-time urban farmers who intend to borrow money to follow the Ninth King’s path.

Notes

1. The estimated figure comes from a consideration of housing. Most of these people (79 per cent) live in rented lands, rooms and houses, while the rest (21 per cent) enter the lands of others without permission (trespassing on the land).
2. For those who are members of community-supported agriculture (CSA) programmes.
3. This chapter differentiates regional and local governments by considering their scales – not by their legal status in Thailand.
4. The contracts mostly agree upon a lease of 3–5 years, after which the owners can ask for the return of their lands with four months’ notice (J. Tongput, personal communication, 24 April 2013).
5. Roughly 158 acres
6. In the farming training business, the number of farming trainees in 2013 was roughly 1000; this number has been continuously increasing (Health Promotion Foundation 2013).
7. However, it is different from other strategic plans in that it discusses risk analyses and possibilities in the future without making specific recommendations.
8. Jitlada Garden is a city farm that covers 100 rais (about 16 hectares) inside the territory of the Dusit Palace located in the inner city of Bangkok. The farm was supervised by the King and aims to experiment in farming technologies and practices. It has rice fields, a dairy farm, horticulture and aquaculture.

References


Policy and Planning Division. 2008. Street Networks and Special Lanes in Bangkok. Bangkok: BMA.


