

COMMENTARY ON COVID-19 AND THE FOOD SYSTEM

Digital media to guarantee food security in Colombia during COVID-19

JAFSCD
Responds to
the COVID-19
Pandemic



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Abstract

In Colombia, quarantine and biosecurity measures were decreed to avoid contagion due to the COVID-19 pandemic beginning on March 24, among which is the promotion of social distancing. This has caused the use of digital media to carry out activities that were previously carried out in person, such as marketing. For this reason, people started looking for alternatives that would avoid social contacts, like digital media, which have become a channel that promotes food security, fair trade, and direct purchases from small producers in the cities.

Keywords

COVID-19, Pandemic, Digital Media, Food Safety, Colombia, Bogotá

Before the quarantine caused by the COVID-19 in Colombia began, I used to go on weekends to buy food from supermarkets and large stores in the city. However, I have not visited one for more than four months. Due to the biosecurity measures recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), I try not to leave the house or visit closed spaces. That is why, since the beginning of the quarantine until the present, my family and I have supplied ourselves with food through delivery services requested from mobile peasant markets that sell their products in the city.

My family and I are not the only ones who have changed their habits in the purchase and provision of food. Due to the social distancing measures derived from the current situation, many people have

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begun to look for alternatives that allow them to continue food access without having to leave their homes.

Thus, in Colombia and, more specifically, in Bogotá, supermarkets and neighborhood stores' delivery services have increased, as well as online direct purchases from farmers and local markets (Dinero, 2020; Solano Alarcón, 2020). It leads me to thinking of the different digital platforms (web pages, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, apps, etc.) as a channel that promotes food security, fair trade, and direct purchase from small producers in the country.

According to Google Trends, the search for “market delivery service”¹ in Bogotá increased during the week of March 29 to April 4, the week after the President had decreed quarantine. Both producers and consumers had to turn urgently to digital media to make possible the continuous supply of food—even if they were establishments and people who had never considered digital media necessary for their businesses or they did not have internet service before. Therefore, diverse initiatives began to emerge for promoting the creation and generation of digital content through profiles on social networks and web pages by families and peasant markets.

“Nubia e Hijos” is a YouTube channel² created by a peasant family from Chipaque, Cundinamarca. Seeing that their crops were lost and losing money due to the pandemic, they decided to teach people how to grow at home and to promote their products (fresh vegetables, fruits, milk, and some value-added foods like cakes, yogurt, desserts, lasagna, and sauces, depending on the season) through social networks. As they were responding to the current needs of people in the city, they quickly obtained many subscribers on their channel. Today they have more than 500,000 followers on their YouTube channel, have a profile on Instagram,³ Twitter,⁴ Facebook,⁵ and a website⁶ where customer can order and pay for their products online, and Nubia's family and their collaborators picks them up and takes them home. Their products are typical of the region and are cultivated and reaped by Nubia and her children. “Nubia e Hijos” literally delivers food from the field to the table.

On the other hand, “Mercados Campesinos Móviles” (Mobile Farmers Markets), whose motto is “our farmers markets at a click!,” is an initiative created by the Secretariat of Economic Development of Bogotá's mayoralty. It is a virtual platform that allows people to buy fresh produce from farmers in the Cundiboyacense savannah without any intermediary, grouped according to the buyer's location. This initiative has a website⁷ as well as accounts on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, and it is currently promoting the launch of its app to speed up the purchase process.

These initiatives embody a great challenge and progress for the rural population in the country, since, according to the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications of Colombia, only 17% of the rural population has internet connectivity (Frega, 2020). Considering the current situation with COVID-19, a lack of internet service would aggravate the connection, employment, communication, and provision of food between the cities and the Colombian countryside; that is, it would directly affect national food security. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize the mutual relationship between Bogotá and the countryside, in which the food produced by the peasant population feeds the city, and a large part of the peasants' economic income comes from the products that they manage to market in the city (Ministry of Agriculture, 2016).

¹ “Mercado a domicilio” in Spanish.

² YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeUlkw2mOytSyH-7GerzeLQ>

³ Instagram profile: @nubiaehijos

⁴ Twitter profile: @nubiaehijos

⁵ Facebook profile: <https://www.facebook.com/Nubia-e-hijos-102454284792175/>

⁶ <https://www.nubiaehijos.com>

⁷ <https://www.mercadoscampesinos.gov.co>

It is important to highlight that the road is still long, and it is necessary to close the existing gaps between the city and the countryside in terms of connectivity, information, technology, and internet access. However, we are all taking the first steps to move forward and looking for the best solutions to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, I want to highlight the work that different people are doing through digital media to continue guaranteeing food security for all of us: responsible, collaborative, and technological work in favor of access, availability, use, and stability of food for all in difficult times. 

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