

## **The “Miracle Bean” and the Transformations of the Global Food Regime since 1870**

*Ernst Langthaler*

The global commodity chain from soybean production to human meat consumption via livestock feeding exemplifies the global burden of unsustainable lifestyles in wealthy and powerful countries. This causes social problems—such as smallholder displacement, labor exploitation and health issues—as well as environmental problems—such as biodiversity loss, soil degradation and global warming. The project aims to explain the transformations of food production, distribution, and consumption in the era of globalization from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries. It adopts a holistic perspective on the interplay of environmental, economic, political, social, and cultural aspects as drivers and effects of these transformations.

In order to gain a clear focus on this wide-ranging topic, these transformations will be assessed through the lens of soy-related commodity chains. The soybean has often been labelled a “miracle bean” due to its double potential as protein-rich vegetable and oilseed. Whether humans consider and use the soybean as “vegetable” or “oilseed” is not determined by nature itself, but depends on the societal appropriation of nature. Thus, soy-related commodity chains are widely ramified (food, feed, industrial raw materials etc.). By following the commodities “from field to fork,” the project will elaborate the upswings and downswings of soy-related commodity chains—and, above all, the emergence of the global soy-meat chain—according to their incorporation into agro-food globalization.

The project adopts the concept of “global food regime,” which refers to coherent and stable combinations of capital accumulation and regulation along the value chain from production via distribution to consumption. The literature distinguishes three historical formations: the first or “extensive” regime (1870s–1920/30s), the second or “intensive” regime (1930/40s–1970/80s) and the third or “corporate” regime (since 1980/90s). These regimes and the transitions from one to another will be examined with regard to the entanglement of world regions through soy-related commodity chains: East Asia and Western Europe in the first regime, North America and

Western Europe in the second regime, and South America and East Asia in the third regime.