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# Ports, Plans, and Platforms: Reordering Turkish Agriculture

## Limanlar, Planlar ve Platformlar: Türk Tarımının Yeniden Düzenlenmesi

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the trajectory of the "agrarian question" in Turkey using food regime theory and aims to explain how Turkish agriculture has been integrated into the world food system from the late Ottoman period to the present. It is a theoretical study based on documentary review of secondary sources and comparative-historical analysis. The findings show that across three food regime periods, colonial-diasporic, mercantile-industrial and corporate-neoliberal, Turkish agriculture has been commercialized and restructured in different ways through state policies and international institutions. These transformations have created new forms of dependency, inequality, and vulnerability by reshaping peasant livelihoods, production patterns and food security policies. As a manifestation of these structural changes, vulnerabilities such as exposure to food price volatility, import dependence and climate shocks are interpreted as evidences of the instability of the current corporate-neoliberal food regime. The article argues that neo-mercantilist food security, food sovereignty and agroecological initiatives can be interpreted as nascent elements of a possible fourth food regime.*

**Keywords:** *Food regimes, Agrarian change, Food security, Food sovereignty, Agroecology*

**Öz:** *Bu makale, Türkiye'de "tarım sorunu"nun uzun dönemli seyrini gıda rejimleri teorisi çerçevesinde ele almakta ve Türkiye tarımının geç Osmanlı'dan günümüze dünya gıda sistemine nasıl eklemlendiğini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, ikincil kaynaklara dayalı belge tarama ve karşılaştırmalı tarihsel analiz yöntemlerini kullanan kuramsal bir makaledir. Bulgular, koloniyal-diasporik, merkantil-endüstriyel ve şirketleşmiş-neoliberal olmak üzere üç gıda rejimi döneminde Türk tarımının farklı biçimlerde ticarileşip devlet politikaları ve uluslararası kurumlar aracılığıyla yeniden yapılandırıldığını göstermektedir. Bu dönüşümler, köylü geçim stratejilerini, üretim desenlerini ve ulusal gıda güvenliği politikasını değiştirerek yeni bağımlılık, eşitsizlik ve kırılganlık biçimleri üretmiştir. Bu yapısal değişimlerin güncel yansımaları olarak gıda fiyat dalgalanmaları, ithalata bağımlılık ve iklim şokları gibi kırılganlıklar, mevcut şirketleşmiş-neoliberal gıda rejiminin istikrarsızlığını açığa çıkaran gelişmeler olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu bağlamda makale, neo-merkantilist gıda güvenliği, gıda egemenliği ve agroekolojik yönelimlerin olası bir dördüncü gıda rejiminin nüveleri olarak değerlendirilebileceğini savunmaktadır.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Gıda rejimleri, Tarımsal dönüşüm, Gıda güvenliği, Gıda egemenliği, Agroekoloji*

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## Introduction

Turkey's agricultural development has been profoundly influenced by global economic forces and policies. Over a century ago, Karl Kautsky famously defined the *agrarian question* as "whether, and how, capital is seizing hold of agriculture, revolutionizing it, making old forms of production and property untenable and creating the necessity for new ones" (Kautsky, 1988, p. 12). In the case of Turkey, this question can be explored by situating its agricultural transformations within successive global food regimes. These were distinct periods shaped by prevailing political-economic orders. From the late Ottoman era to the present, Turkish agriculture has evolved through phases of integration into these world food systems, experiencing shifts from imperial free-trade exploitation to state-led development, and eventually to neoliberal globalization. Each phase brought new policies and power dynamics that reshaped rural society, farmer livelihoods, and food security in Turkey.

This article aims to provide a historical and structural assessment of Turkey's agrarian change using the framework of food regimes. Food regime analysis ties accumulation cycles to world food production and trade. Classic studies identify three major food regimes since the late nineteenth century. Each corresponds to a different hegemonic order (British, American, and corporate) and has led to crisis and transformations at the end of a relatively stable period.

Methodologically, the article is designed as a theoretical, comparative-historical analysis of the long-run transformation of Turkish agriculture through the lens of food regime theory. It is based on a systematic documentary review of secondary sources, including historical monographs, political economy analyses, policy reports and statistical overviews on agriculture, trade and rural development in Turkey and the wider world. Evaluating agrarian transformations in Turkey within the context of successive food regimes makes it possible to uncover the historical and structural roots of contemporary problems such as dependence on food imports, price volatility, rural poverty and climate vulnerability. The article's main contribution is to move beyond the common periodization in terms of purely national development episodes and instead read Turkish agriculture through global food regime ruptures, thereby bringing into a single analytical frame the continuities and breaks in relations of dependence, statist developmentalism and neoliberal corporate restructuring.

The article first outlines three food regimes and their defining features in the world system. Next, the ways in which each regime's dynamics played out in the Turkish context are examined. The discussion traces developments from the late Ottoman integration into the world economy during the colonial-diasporic food regime, through the import-substitution and developmentalist policies of the mid-twentieth century, to the neoliberal restructuring and global market integration from the 1980s onward. Throughout, the role of international trade, state policy, and transnational capital in shaping Turkey's agricultural policy and rural life is highlighted.

Finally, the article addresses contemporary challenges and debates. The current corporate food regime faces multiple crises (volatile markets, persistent hunger, environmental degradation, and climate change) prompting questions about the emergence of a "fourth" food regime or new agrarian paradigm. How issues like

food security in Turkey are affected by global market instabilities (e.g., food price spikes) and how domestic responses (such as food sovereignty movements or renewed protective policies) may signal future directions are discussed. Placing Turkey's agrarian question through this lens clarifies structural drivers and policy options for a more sustainable, secure food system.

## The Food Regime Framework: Global Patterns of Agriculture and Trade

Food regime theory interprets modern agricultural history as a sequence of worldwide regimes of food production and circulation, each aligned with a specific phase of capitalist development. In this respect, it offers a macro-level perspective informed by regulation theory (Aglietta, 1979) and world systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974). Friedmann and McMichael (1989), who pioneered this framework, identified three major food regimes between the 1870s and the present. Each regime was characterized by a dominant power configuration, a set of core commodities, and rules governing agricultural trade and production.

### First Food Regime (Circa 1870-1914)

Often termed the *colonial-diasporic food regime*, this phase corresponded to late nineteenth century British imperial hegemony (Friedmann, 2005a). Industrializing Europe drew in abundant cheap food and raw materials (such as grain, meat, wool) from its colonies and settler states (e.g., the Americas and Australia), which helped lower the cost of urban labor and fuel extensive capital accumulation (Friedmann, 1990, p. 14; 2005b, p. 126). European powers, facing domestic over-accumulation and class conflicts, expanded aggressively overseas (new imperialism) to secure monopolistic control of agricultural resources, thereby turning colonies into export platforms for food and inputs, and into captive markets for manufactured goods (McMichael, 2000, p. 128; McMichael, 2005, p. 272). The free-trade policies of the era (e.g., Britain's repeal of the Corn Laws, and unequal treaties with colonies) facilitated this global food circulation. In essence, under the first regime European industry fed itself by importing cheap food from the periphery, binding agrarian colonies to the metropolitan economies. This colonial order entered into crisis in the early twentieth century as intensifying imperialist competition and ultimately the outbreak of the First World War disrupted long-distance flows of agricultural commodities (McMichael, 2013, p. 31). The subsequent Great Depression and Second World War further destabilized the liberal trade regime. Taken together, these disruptions eroded British free-trade hegemony and paved the way for more nationally organized food systems.

### Second Food Regime (Circa 1947-1973)

After a turbulent interwar period, a new regime formed under the United States (U.S.) leadership following World War II, sometimes called the *mercantile-industrial food regime* (Friedmann, 2005a). This era was defined by state-managed agricultural expansion and Cold War developmentalism (McMichael, 2005, p. 272). In the U.S. and Western Europe, agriculture was heavily subsidized and industrialized as part of a Fordist model of mass production and consumption (Friedmann, 1993, pp. 32–34). Technological advances (e.g., Green Revolution seeds, chemical fertilizers) and farm mechanization boosted output, while government programs

guaranteed prices and managed surpluses. Crucially, surplus food became a tool of foreign policy. The U.S. disposed of its grain surpluses via food aid and concessional sales (e.g., PL 480 programs), thereby opening overseas markets and curbing socialist influence in the Third World (McMichael, 2000, p. 130; Friedmann, 2005a, p. 241; Araghi, 2009, p. 126). Internationally, trade in agricultural commodities was structured through agreements and new institutions. GATT initially exempted agriculture, while the U.S. promoted liberalization selectively. The paradox of this regime was that, even as the rhetoric of free trade grew, the U.S. tolerated and even funded protective measures to develop allies' agriculture (e.g., Marshall Plan aid for European farm recovery) (Friedmann, 1990, pp. 15–17; Friedmann, 2005b, p. 129). Overall, the second regime established a state-supported global food order. It featured intensive farming in the industrialized bloc, the encouragement of cash-crop production in the Third World, and a web of food aid and grain deals that tied them together. This system began to break down in the 1970s amid economic crisis (the end of the postwar boom, oil shocks) and mounting grain surpluses and debt in developing countries (Friedmann, 2005a).

### Third Food Regime (Circa 1980s-Present)

Emerging from the crises of the 1970s, the current regime, often termed the *corporate, neoliberal or financialized food regime*, is characterized by market liberalization, transnational corporate dominance, and globalized supply chains (Friedmann, 2005a; Pechlaner & Otero, 2008; Burch & Lawrence, 2009). From the 1980s onward, neoliberal policies (trade liberalization, deregulation, structural adjustment) reshaped agriculture worldwide. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture (1995) enshrined open markets, pressuring countries to reduce protective supports (McMichael, 2005, p. 277). Multinational agribusiness firms (seed/pesticide giants, grain traders, food processors, supermarket chains) rose to unprecedented power, coordinating global commodity chains from production to retail. Under this regime, food production for a global mass consumer market expanded, but with new features. Trade in high-value foods (such as fresh fruits, vegetables, seafood) expanded with year-round sourcing; even 'niche' organic/fair-trade entered mainstream circuits (Goodman & Watts, 1997, p. 8). Corporate strategies also drove the *supermarket revolution*, standardizing quality and logistics across borders (Konefal et al., 2005, pp. 293–294; Friedmann & McNair, 2008, p. 244). The agricultural sector became increasingly entwined with financial capital, as seen in the treatment of farmland as an asset class and the growing financialization of commodity markets (Burch & Lawrence, 2009; McMichael, 2009). While often touted as efficient, the corporate food regime has proven highly unequal and crisis-prone. This was evident in episodes such as the 2007-2008 food price spike, which highlighted the vulnerabilities of relying on volatile global markets. The third regime retains selected features of earlier regimes, albeit in new forms. One example is *Green Capitalism*, in which large firms market organic or sustainable products without altering underlying power relations (Friedmann, 2005a). Others emphasize that supermarketization and financialization are defining traits of the contemporary regime, as corporate retailers and investors exert control over what is produced, how it's distributed, and who benefits (Konefal et al., 2005; Burch & Lawrence, 2009).

## Historical Trajectories of Turkish Agriculture under Food Regimes

Food regime analysis evaluates national agriculture by locating it shifting configurations of the world capitalist order. In this section, the historical trajectory of Turkish agriculture is traced through three periods that partially overlap with the three global food regimes: a phase in the late Ottoman era marked by semi-dependent incorporation into the Europe-centered world capitalist economy and export-oriented commercialization; a Republican period characterized by state-led developmentalism and rural modernization; and, from the 1980s onward, a phase of neoliberal restructuring and corporate consolidation. Each subsection examines how the relevant global food regime, through its trade rules, state policy frameworks, and patterns of capital accumulation, has reshaped agricultural policy, rural social structure, and the architecture of food security in Turkey.

## The First Food Regime and Late Ottoman Agriculture

Wallerstein (1979, p. 392) states that the Ottoman Empire became peripheral for geographical, political, and military reasons during its integration into the capitalist world economy between 1750 and 1873. During the late Ottoman Empire, roughly corresponding to the first food regime, Ottoman Anatolia became increasingly integrated into the world economy as an agricultural periphery to industrializing Europe. Key international agreements and investments solidified this dependent position. The landmark 1838 Balta Limanı trade treaty with Britain, for example, formalized a low-tariff, free-trade regime that had already begun to emerge, making the Ottoman trade policy one of the most liberal in the world at that time (Quataert, 2004, p. 945). As a result, the Ottoman lands assumed a dual role, becoming an exporter of agricultural commodities and an importer of European manufactured goods. Raw cotton, tobacco, raisins, figs, grain and other products flowed from Anatolian fields to feed European industries and cities, while inexpensive textiles and other factory goods from Europe flooded Ottoman markets, undercutting local crafts (Kurmuş, 1982).

Foreign capital investment played a critical role in this process. Perhaps the most consequential were the railway projects financed by British, French, and German investors. By the late nineteenth century these lines crisscrossed Anatolia, not to integrate its regions internally but to link resource-rich hinterlands to coastal ports for export. The first major line, funded by British capital, opened in 1867 (Izmir-Aydın), followed by German-funded lines (e.g., Istanbul-Ankara by Deutsche Bank) and others (Issawi, 1966; Kurmuş, 1982; Rathmann, 2001). These railways allowed rapid extraction of grains, cotton and other agrarian raw materials to ports like Izmir and Istanbul, from where they shipped to Europe (Kurmuş, 1982, p. 28; Pamuk, 1994, p. 96-97). They also enabled imported goods to penetrate deeper into Anatolian markets. Foreign financiers were guaranteed profits through Ottoman government concessions, including kilometric guarantees and pledges of certain tax revenues like the *aşar* to service railway debt. Over time, these arrangements siphoned off a portion of the value produced by peasants to European creditors. Observers like Rosa Luxemburg, who described how Anatolian surplus value was extracted via railroads and tax mechanisms to enrich foreign capital (Luxemburg, 1975, pp. 89–94).

By the early twentieth century, the Ottoman state remained politically sovereign but economically semi-colonial. Scholars have described the empire as a *semi-colony* that, while not fully colonized, had become heavily dependent on and constrained by European capital and markets (Kurmuş, 1982; Pamuk, 1994; Keyder, 2009). Agricultural production in this period expanded for export in certain regions (often those tied into the rail network), but this expansion often occurred under terms detrimental to cultivators. Local farmers saw traditional practices disrupted and were pressed into producing for distant markets, with a significant share of the gains flowing to foreign trading companies, railroad consortiums, and Ottoman large landholders collaborating with them. The burden of foreign debt accumulated, and by 1912 an estimated 20% of Ottoman public debt was owed to Deutsche Bank alone, with peasants effectively paying heavy taxes to service these debts (Rathmann, 2001, p. 106). Moreover, because transport lines were built to funnel resources outwards, vast interior areas not served by rail experienced little improvement, and regional disparities in commercialization emerged. The production of export-oriented cash crops began in the areas connected to ports, while more remote regions remained subsistence-oriented or were integrated later on when transportation allowed.

In summary, under the first food regime the Ottoman rural economy underwent a partial commercialization and peripheralization. The combination of unilateral free trade and foreign infrastructure investment entrenched a classic dependent pattern, in which Anatolia became a source of cheap food and raw materials for the hegemonic industrial powers and an outlet for their surplus manufactures (Quataert, 2004). This laid the groundwork for many structural problems, such as vulnerability to external price swings, loss of local artisanal industries, and a foreign-controlled debt/tax apparatus. It was within this constrained context that the Turkish Republic would later seek to assert a more autonomous development path during the next regime.

## The Second Food Regime and Developmentalism in Turkey

The collapse of the world economy during the Great Depression (1929) and the disruptions of World War II created an opening for countries like Turkey to pursue more inward-oriented development. In food regime terms, this period aligns with the second (mercantile-industrial) regime, where many peripheral states adopted import-substitution industrialization and state intervention in agriculture, often with the tacit blessing or support of the U.S. led order. Turkey's experience followed this trajectory. After its establishment in 1923, the Republic initially continued liberal economic policies, but the shocks of the 1930s forced a dramatic shift toward state-led industrial and agricultural development.

During the 1930s, under one-party rule, Turkey implemented protectionist and interventionist measures to foster domestic industry and shield the economy from external volatility. As export markets withered and imported goods became scarce or expensive, the government launched a drive to produce previously imported essentials at home. A slogan of the era, *üç beyaz* (*three whites:* flour, sugar, cotton cloth), epitomized the push to domestically manufacture basic food and consumer staples (Boratav, 2010, pp. 63–64). State enterprises and initiatives established factories for sugar refining, textile mills, flour milling and more, marking the start of

Turkey's ISI strategy. Protective tariffs and import restrictions were put in place to nurture these infant industries and conserve foreign exchange. In the agricultural realm, the state intervened to stabilize prices and support producers in the face of collapsing world commodity prices. From 1932 the government (via Ziraat Bank) began purchasing crops to prop up prices, and in 1938 it founded the Turkish Grain Board (TMO) specifically to manage and support key grain markets. These measures helped mitigate the impact of the Depression on peasant incomes and ensured food supply for cities.

Notably, through the late 1930s, agriculture still dominated the Turkish economy, accounting for 40-50% of GDP and about 90% of exports (Pamuk, 1991, pp. 127–128). Production of staples like wheat increased significantly by the decade's end with state support. However, these policies came at a cost, as economists have observed that transfers from agriculture to industry were implicit in the policy (Boratav, 2010, pp. 78–79). For example, by keeping grain prices relatively low for millers and urban consumers (even as world prices remained depressed), the regime effectively extracted resources from wheat-growing peasants to subsidize industrialization. This set a precedent for the rural-urban economic pact that characterized much of the mid-twentieth century development in Turkey.

Although Turkey remained neutral during World War II, the conflict brought new strains. Several hundred thousand farmers were conscripted and inputs were diverted to the military, which caused sharp drops in agricultural output and urban food shortages (Pamuk, 1991, p. 129). Bread was rationed in cities and Turkey even requested emergency wheat aid in 1942 (Avcıoğlu, 1975a, p. 544). The government resorted to heavy-handed measures to secure food. Farmers were obligated to sell a portion of their harvest to TMO at below-market prices under a wartime decree that effectively taxed peasants' grain (Pamuk, 1991, pp. 130–131). Wartime requisitions and levies depressed farm incomes, fueling rural discontent despite postwar relief (Pamuk, 1991, pp. 134–137). While these impositions ended after the war, they left a legacy of rural discontent that, along with urban hardships of inflation and scarcity, eroded political support for the ruling Republican People's Party (CHP) by the mid-1940s (Pamuk, 2010, p. 24).

In the immediate post-World War II era, Turkey became a part of the U.S. led Western bloc and benefited from its economic programs, marking a new chapter in the second food regime. The U.S. was re-establishing a liberal world trading system but paradoxically encouraged state-led development in friendly nations to stave off communist influence and absorb surplus production. Turkey joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in 1947. As a condition, it devalued its currency and began lifting some trade controls, an initial step toward re-opening its economy (BSB, 2006, p. 11). However, full liberalization was delayed, and indeed U.S. policy at the time tolerated Turkey's protective stance. Through the Marshall Plan between 1948 and 1952 and related programs, the U.S. provided aid to Turkey. Although Turkey had not been war-devastated, it was included from 1948 after some hesitation (Tören, 2007, pp. 25–26). Marshall Aid to Turkey targeted agriculture/infrastructure and triggered 1950s mechanization via tractor imports (Tören, 2007, p. 207). Between 1950 and 1960, Turkey's tractor fleet expanded explosively, allowing new lands to be brought under cultivation and

boosting production of commodities like cereals and cotton (Köymen, 2009, p. 29; Pamuk, 2010, p. 25). This process increased productivity but also had social consequences. Rural inequality widened as larger landowners, who could afford tractors and had access to credit, gained at the expense of smallholders (Avcıoğlu, 1975b, pp. 620–621). Many marginal farmers and sharecroppers lost livelihoods, fueling migration to cities in subsequent decades (Köymen, 2009, p. 29).

By the 1950s and 1960s, Turkey firmly embraced a model of high-input, production-oriented agriculture under state guidance, aligned with the broader Green Revolution trends. The government maintained price supports for key crops and promoted irrigation and the use of agro-chemicals. At the same time, Turkey became entwined in the global grain and aid regime orchestrated by the U.S. Starting in the mid-1950s, under PL 480 *Food for Peace* programs, Turkey began to receive U.S. surplus agricultural products at very low cost (Koçtürk, 1966, p. 76). Food aid inflows stabilized prices but exposed producers to subsidized U.S. competition. For instance, cheap imported animal products undercut the market for local dairy farmers in the 1960s (Koçtürk, 1966, p. 77). Nonetheless, the Turkish state managed these inflows, sometimes using aid commodities in school feeding and other programs. In effect, the cold-war era arrangement was a trade-off. Turkey received external resources (equipment, credit, food aid) that supported its modernization, but it also opened its market in specific ways advantageous to the U.S. and embedded Turkey in a dependent agricultural trade relationship.

Through the 1960s and 1970s, Turkey continued import-substitution industrialization with planning (Five-Year Plans under a State Planning Organization) and maintained a large agricultural sector with heavy state involvement (Oyan, 2004, p. 48). By the late 1970s, however, this model ran into fiscal and balance-of-payments crises, partly due to global oil shocks and inefficiencies (Pamuk, 2010, p. 27). The second regime globally was in crisis, and for Turkey this meant the stage was set for a neoliberal turn by 1980. In summary, during the second regime period Turkey's agriculture experienced substantial growth and transformation under state-led policies. Yields rose, new crops such as sugar beets were developed, rural infrastructure improved, and the country even achieved periods of *food self-sufficiency* or net export in some commodities. Yet structural issues remained or emerged. Land reforms were largely thwarted, as the 1945 land reform law was watered down and only limited land distribution occurred, leaving an unequal landholding pattern (Yerasimos, 2005, p. 137,188). Many land-poor peasants did not benefit from state programs and eventually swelled the ranks of rural out-migrants. Moreover, by tying agriculture to an urban-focused development strategy, the policy framework sometimes treated farmers as a reservoir to tax (cheap food policy) or as clients for political patronage through support programs, rather than fully empowering the rural sector. These tensions would become more acute when the external context shifted to neoliberal globalization.

## The Third Food Regime and Neoliberal Restructuring

The early 1980s marked a watershed for Turkey's political economy, including agriculture. In January 1980, Turkey, which was in the midst of a severe economic crisis, adopted a sweeping IMF-backed stabilization and structural adjustment program. A military coup in September 1980 ensured the enforcement of these

neoliberal reforms. This pivot aligned Turkey with the emerging third (corporate/neoliberal) food regime, characterized by trade liberalization, privatization, and the diminishing role of the state in agriculture (Boratav, 2010). Over the next two decades, Turkey dismantled many of the institutions and policies that had underpinned its agrarian sector since the 1930s, integrating much more deeply into global agri-food markets.

One major change was in price and subsidy policy. Throughout the second regime, Turkish farmers had benefited from government support prices for crops, as well as input subsidies. Under neoliberal restructuring, these supports were seen as market distortions to be reduced or eliminated. International lenders and trade agreements pushed for reducing budgetary expenditures on agriculture. In the late 1980s and especially the 1990s, Turkey began scaling back subsidies and guaranteed prices (Yenal, 2001, p. 39; BSB, 2006, p. 83). The process culminated around the turn of the millennium. Following the 1995 WTO Agreement on Agriculture, which Turkey signed, and a domestic financial crisis, Turkey agreed in 2001 to an ambitious Agricultural Reform Implementation Project supported by the World Bank. Price/input supports were largely abolished and replaced with a "direct income support" scheme that paid farmers a fixed amount per hectare of land owned (Günaydın, 2009, p. 183). This shift, implemented nationwide in the early 2000s, fundamentally changed how farmers were supported. Rather than stabilizing specific crop prices, the state essentially provided cash transfers decoupled from production. While direct income support helped cushion income loss for some, it tended to favor larger landowners (since payment was per hectare) and offered little incentive to continue cultivating less profitable crops (BSB, 2006, pp. 84–86). Many small-scale producers, especially landless sharecroppers or tenant farmers, were left with minimal assistance.

Alongside subsidy cuts, Turkey privatized or closed many state institutions in agriculture. Marketing boards and state economic enterprises that once controlled significant portions of the supply chain were targeted. For example, the Meat and Fish Board, Milk Industry Board, Feed Industry, and the state Tobacco and Alcohol monopoly were privatized or restructured by the 1990s and 2000s (Oral, 2009, p. 111; Günaydın, 2009, p. 200). These entities had provided stable outlets for farmers and often ensured supply of inputs. Their removal meant farmers were more exposed to market price swings and dependent on private buyers. The cooperative system was also weakened and the role of transnational agribusiness and large domestic conglomerates expanded to fill the vacuum. Multinational seed and agrochemical companies gained more entry after Turkey updated its laws (e.g., seed patenting) to comply with trade rules (Özkaya, 2009, pp. 259–260; Oral, 2010, p. 57). The 1980s and 1990s also saw foreign food corporations and supermarket chains enter Turkey, especially after regulations on foreign investment were liberalized. Prominent examples include Carrefour and Metro, which partnered with local capital to establish supermarket networks in Turkey in the 1990s (Yenal, 2001, p. 50). By the 2000s, a retail revolution was in full swing. The number of hypermarkets, supermarkets, and chain grocery stores multiplied rapidly, while small independent shops declined by the tens of thousands (Oral, 2009, pp. 117–118). For farmers, this meant that traditional channels (local wholesalers, wet markets) were increasingly supplanted by vertically integrated chains with stringent standards

and concentrated buying power. Large retailers and food processors began sourcing produce via contract farming, imposing quality and volume requirements that small farmers often struggled to meet. Many smaller farmers were either excluded from these modern supply chains or forced to accept unfavorable contract terms (Keyder & Yenal, 2007, p. 293).

Trade liberalization had a profound impact as well. Turkey gradually reduced import tariffs on many agricultural goods. Imports of grain, dairy, and meat products became more common, and cheap oilseeds and feed imports (soy, sunflower, corn) undercut domestic growers (Yenal, 2001, p. 40; Günaydın, 2009, pp. 206–207). In the 2000s, local production in Turkey could no longer meet the demand for certain products such as oilseeds and wheat, and the country became dependent on imports for these products (Ziraat Mühendisleri Odası, 2011). Despite these challenges, some sectors thrived in the liberalized environment. Horticultural exports (fruits, vegetables) from Turkey grew, as the country leveraged its climate advantage and proximity to European and Middle Eastern markets (Günaydın, 2009, p. 200). By the 2000s, Turkey had become a leading global exporter of hazelnuts, dried fruits, and selected fresh produce (Yenal, 2001, p. 41). An agro-food trade surplus was maintained, but this masked the fact that many high-value exports relied on imported inputs. Contract farming arrangements spread in export-oriented crops, integrating Turkish farmers into global value chains. While this brought investment and technology transfer, it also often meant that transnational companies set the terms and captured a disproportionate share of value (Keyder & Yenal, 2007, p. 293).

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, the social structure of Turkish agriculture had shifted notably from the 1980s. The farming population shrank significantly as millions migrated to cities or took up non-farm jobs. Those who remained tended to be older on average, and rural poverty persisted especially in regions not suited to high-value crops. Land consolidation occurred slowly. Many small farms fragmented further through inheritance, even as some commercial farmers amassed larger holdings. Without substantial subsidies or strong cooperatives, smallholders struggled to invest in improvements, making it hard to compete (Özuğurlu, 2011). These issues have manifested in Turkey's declining overall agricultural growth rates and productivity gaps.

In summary, under the third food regime Turkey's agriculture has been liberalized and internationalized, leading to a more market-driven but also more unequal and volatile sector. The retreat of the state from direct intervention opened space for corporate actors and imports, delivering consumers a greater variety of food (often at affordable prices), but also contributing to problems like farmer indebtedness, loss of autonomy, and reliance on global supply chains for staples. The combination of neoliberal domestic reforms and global market integration fundamentally restructured Turkey's agri-food system in line with the corporate food regime's logic.

## Future Perspectives: Agroecology Regime, Neo-mercantilist Food Sovereignty or Corporate Enclosure

After decades of neoliberal policies, Turkey's agricultural sector today faces a set of intertwined challenges that resonate with critiques of the corporate food regime

globally. A primary concern is food security and sustainability in the context of climate change, market instability, and shifting geopolitical dynamics. Lessons from the food regime analysis suggest that a transition may be approaching, and a new configuration of power and practice in the food system may be anticipated (Bernstein, 2015). In this section, the contemporary issues and debates that could shape a future food regime, and their implications for Turkey's agriculture, are discussed.

One pressing issue is the vulnerability of food supplies and prices. The global food price crisis of 2007-2008 underscored regime volatility. Rapid increases in wheat, rice, and maize prices led to unrest in dozens of countries (Bobenrieth & Wright, 2009). Turkey, as a mid-sized economy with exposure to global markets, felt the impact in the form of domestic inflation and volatility in staple prices. Having become a net food importer in certain categories in the late 2000s, price increases in global markets are rapidly translating into higher import bills and consumer prices. The need to manage food security issues may signal a more structural transformation if crises continue.

Climate change exacerbates these vulnerabilities. Turkey is already experiencing the effects of more erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and extreme weather on agriculture (Karahasan & Pınar, 2023). Prolonged droughts in Anatolian grain belts or sudden frosts in key fruit areas have in recent years caused significant output drops. Studies project that without adaptation, Turkish yields for staples like wheat could decline substantially in coming decades due to climate shifts (Tita et al., 2025). Water scarcity is an emerging threat, especially in irrigation-dependent regions such as the Konya Plain (a breadbasket) (Köken, 2015). These climate-related pressures question the sustainability of the input-intensive, monoculture-oriented practices that became widespread under the corporate regime. In response, there is growing discourse in Turkey (as elsewhere) about agroecology, drought-resistant crop varieties, and resilient farming systems. Some scholars argue that globally we need to transition to a more ecologically sound *fourth food regime* that prioritizes sustainability and agroecological principles. Such a regime would entail re-diversifying cropping systems, reducing reliance on chemical inputs and long supply chains, and revitalizing local food systems (Swilling & Annecke, 2012; Altieri et al., 2015; IPES-Food, 2016). Essentially, this would mean a shift from treating food simply as a commodity back towards valuing its ecological and social foundations.

Parallel to environmental challenges, there is a notable political-economic countermovement forming around food. Farmers' unions, NGOs, and international networks (most prominently *La Vía Campesina*, the transnational peasant movement) have been advocating for food sovereignty, which is defined as the right of people and nations to control their own food systems, prioritize local production, and protect farmers' livelihoods (Desmarais, 2008). In Turkey, small farmer associations and initiatives like community-supported agriculture have echoed these themes, resisting things like patented seeds and advocating for local markets. Such movements align with what some analysts foresee as the basis of a new food regime, namely a swing back from free-market globalization to a degree of protective regulation and localization, akin to Polanyi's concept of a *double movement*

(McMichael, 2023). Indeed, recent research suggests that after decades of trade liberalization, many countries (including food import dependent nations) are reasserting controls. Examples include export restrictions during food crises or measures to attain self-sufficiency in certain foods (Giordani et al., 2016; Clapp, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced this impulse, as global supply chain disruptions led governments to rethink reliance on distant sources for essentials (FAO, 2021).

Another dimension to future perspectives is the role of technology and corporate restructuring. The third food regime has seen digitalization (smart farming, e-commerce, blockchain for traceability) begin to transform agriculture. Some argue this is simply deepening the existing corporate regime, allowing big retailers and tech companies to tighten control via data-driven logistics and farm management (Prause et al., 2021). Whether digitalization will stabilize the regime or contribute to a new one is debated. Optimists imagine that tech could enable better climate adaptation (precision irrigation, weather forecasting) and shorten supply chains (through online farmer's markets), empowering producers. Pessimists see it as the next frontier of corporate enclosure.

It is possible that the future will contain elements of these scenarios, or a hybrid. Some analysts note that Chinese state capitalism is carving out its own model, combining heavy state support with overseas land acquisitions, which could represent another variant of a new regime, sometimes termed *post-neoliberal* or *neo-mercantilist* (Belesky & Lawrence, 2019). Turkey, situated between East and West, might navigate among these influences.

## Conclusion

Over the past century and a half, Turkish agriculture has been continuously refashioned by the interplay of global forces and domestic policies. Using the food regimes framework, this article has traced the long-run trajectory of that transformation, situating successive changes in Turkey's agrarian structure and policy regime within shifting configurations of the world food systems. This perspective highlights how different historical periods of incorporation into global circuits have produced distinct, yet interconnected, patterns of dependence, inequality and vulnerability.

The findings of this theoretical and historical inquiry can be grouped under three main points. First, Turkish agriculture has been incorporated into the world food system in different ways in each food regime. In the late Ottoman era, it functioned as a semi-dependent agrarian periphery; in the Republican period, it became a state-supported sector that simultaneously transferred resources to industry; and in the neoliberal period, it has taken the form of a more fragmented structure increasingly dependent on transnational corporate networks and volatile world markets. Second, throughout these transformations, state policies and the guidance of international institutions have left a legacy that deepened inequalities within the peasantry, rendered small producers more vulnerable, and made the food security regime more susceptible to external shocks. Third, contemporary food price crises, import dependence and the pressures generated by climate change both strengthen neo-mercantilist quests for food security and bolster food-sovereignty and agroecological alternatives, thereby exposing the instability of the current corporate–

neoliberal food regime and Turkey's dual vulnerability as an importer of basic food products and an exporter of labor-intensive niche products.

Taken together, these three sets of findings show that Turkey's agrarian question cannot be understood in isolation from these wider configurations of the world food system. Across successive regimes, the agrarian question has been reworked, with new configurations of dependence, surplus extraction and vulnerability emerging in each period. Policies and outcomes in Turkish agriculture (such as land reform attempts, subsidy regimes, or shifts in crop patterns) were often responses to external pressures or models, whether by adopting import-substitution during the Depression, taking advantage of Marshall Plan aid to mechanize, or liberalizing markets under IMF and WTO guidance. Rural inequality and the marginalization of small producers have been recurring issues, worsened at times by the dictates of global capital and trade.

Looking forward, the analysis suggests that maintaining a productive, equitable, and sustainable agricultural sector in Turkey will require learning from these historical experiences. A purely laissez-faire approach leaves the country vulnerable to global market swings and undermines the livelihoods of the very producers who form the backbone of food security. On the other hand, a wholesale return to old-style state intervention is constrained by new realities such as international trade commitments, fiscal limitations, and the complexity of modern food supply chains. Therefore, many countries are seeking a balance between market and state, global integration and local resilience. Concepts like food sovereignty and agroecological farming, once considered fringe, are increasingly entering mainstream policy discussions as viable components of that balance.

In conclusion, Turkey's agricultural transformation exemplifies the notion that history matters, as emphasized in the historical institutionalist literature (Pierson, 2000). It also illustrates how a semi-peripheral country can move through colonial, developmentalist and neoliberal food regimes while continually reproducing new forms of agrarian dependence and inequality. The legacies of each food regime are still visible in the regional imbalances and land concentration from the Ottoman/export era, the infrastructural and institutional foundations from the statist era, and the competitive agro-industries and dependencies from the neoliberal era. Building a new era will necessitate addressing these legacies while navigating ongoing global transformations. If a fourth food regime is indeed on the horizon, Turkey's choices, including whether to prioritize sustainability, equity, and domestic control and how to manage its integration into global markets, will determine how the country fares in that new era.

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