Food systems and sovereignty in the Caribbean: Exploring new geographies of uneven development

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While the devastating effects of 1990s trade policies on Haiti’s food system rose to prominence after the 2010 earthquake, far less attention has been paid to food system transformations in neighboring Dominican Republic. In sharp contrast to Haiti and many of its Caribbean neighbors, the Dominican Republic’s food system remains strongly regulated. In particular, the institutions and arrangements inaugurated via the country’s land reform of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which articulated some 30,000 beneficiary households into domestic rice production, continue to this day despite the characterization of the country as paradigmatically neoliberal. Under the provisions of the Dominican Republic Central American Free Trade Agreement with the United States, the Dominican Republic will begin dismantling its tariffs on sensitive food imports, including rice, this year. This paper will consider how such uneven geographies might shape our understanding of food sovereignty, and the role of the state and trade agreements in regulating food systems.

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