



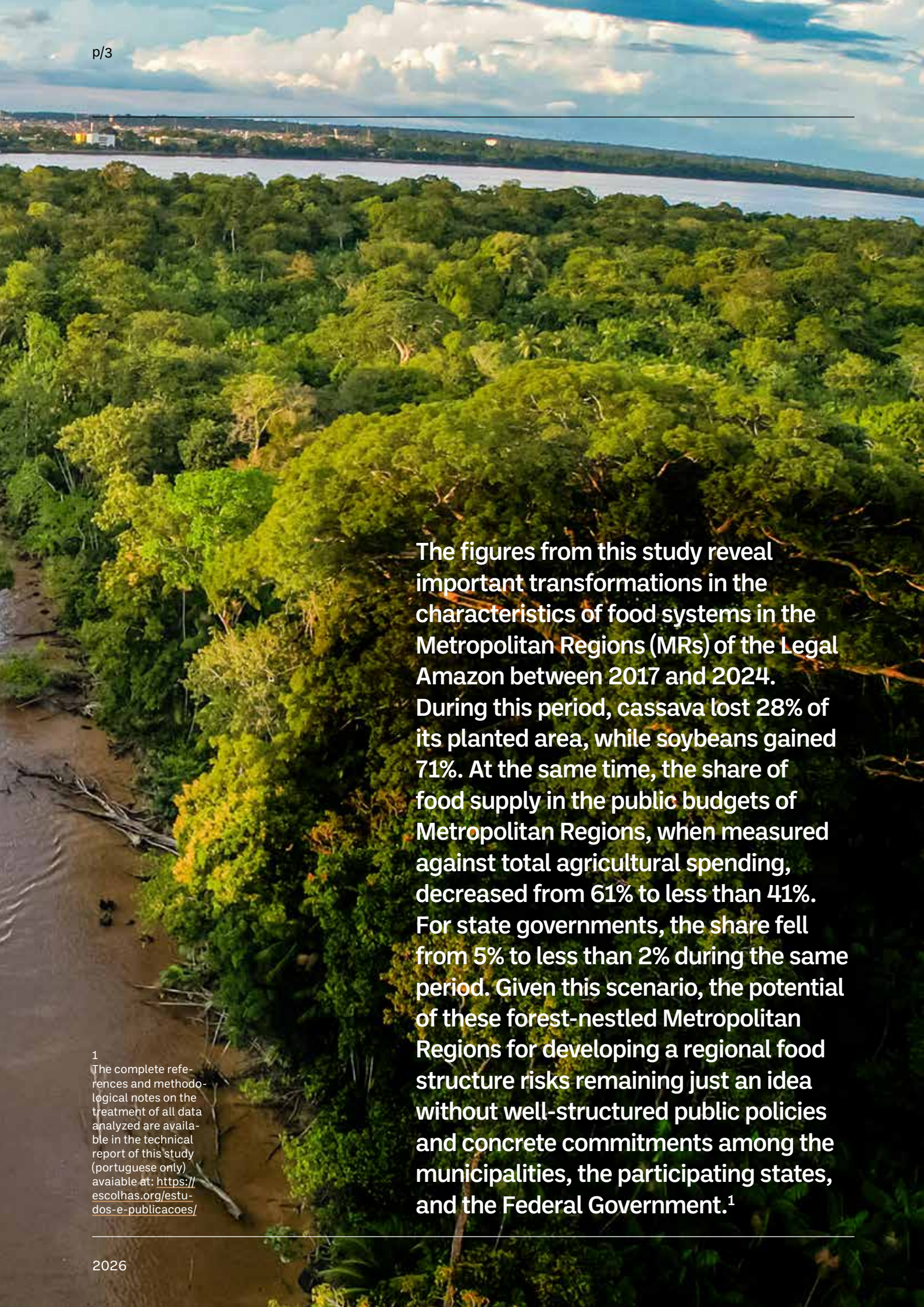
Too much soy, too little cassava: food in the Metropolitan Regions of the Legal Amazon

AUGUST / 2026





View of the city of Belém
from Combú Island
(Pará, Brazil). Photo:
Ricardo Stuckert/PR

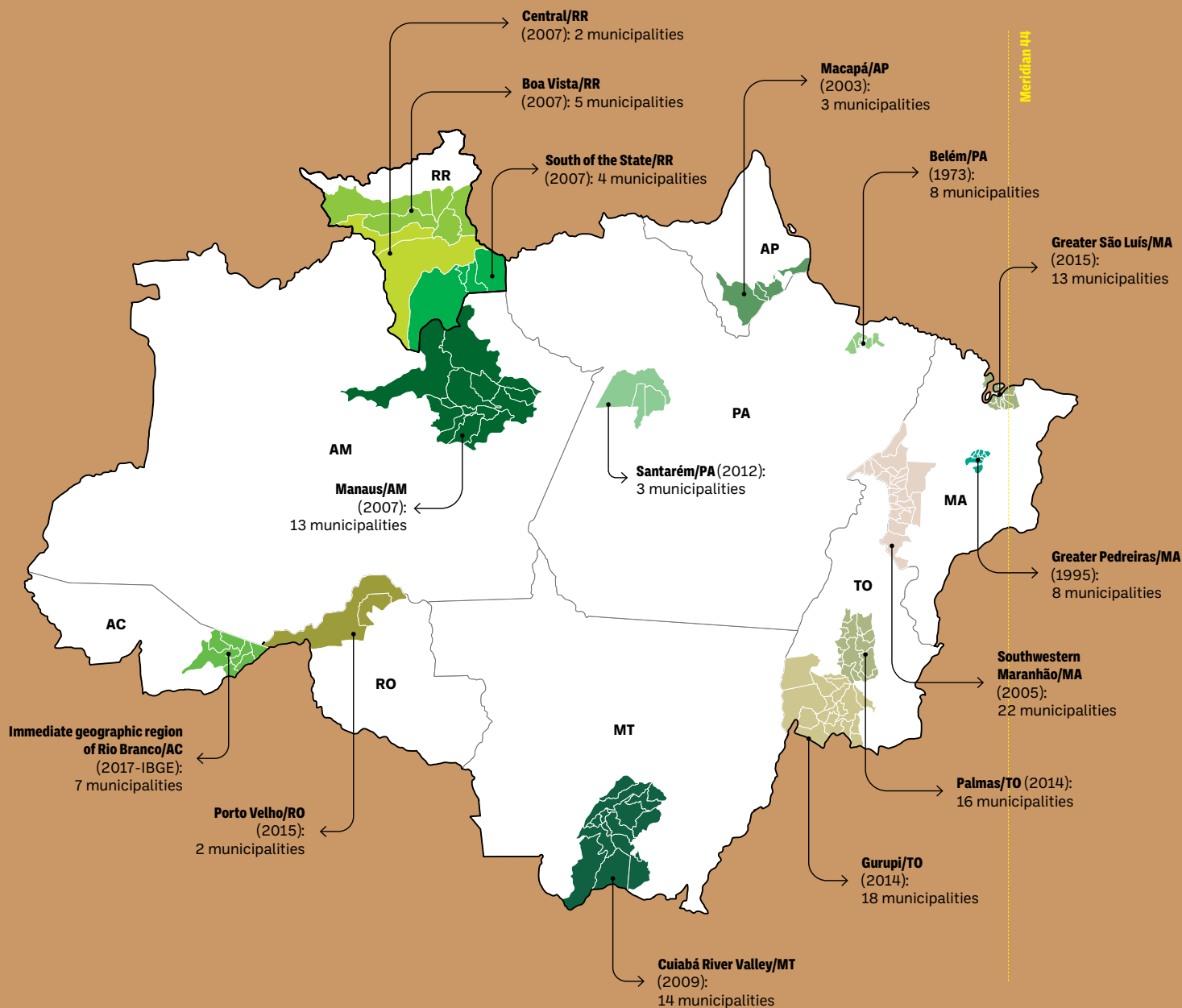


The figures from this study reveal important transformations in the characteristics of food systems in the Metropolitan Regions (MRs) of the Legal Amazon between 2017 and 2024. During this period, cassava lost 28% of its planted area, while soybeans gained 71%. At the same time, the share of food supply in the public budgets of Metropolitan Regions, when measured against total agricultural spending, decreased from 61% to less than 41%. For state governments, the share fell from 5% to less than 2% during the same period. Given this scenario, the potential of these forest-nestled Metropolitan Regions for developing a regional food structure risks remaining just an idea without well-structured public policies and concrete commitments among the municipalities, the participating states, and the Federal Government.¹

¹ The complete references and methodological notes on the treatment of all data analyzed are available in the technical report of this study (portuguese only) available at: <https://escolhas.org/estudos-e-publicacoes/>

Map 1

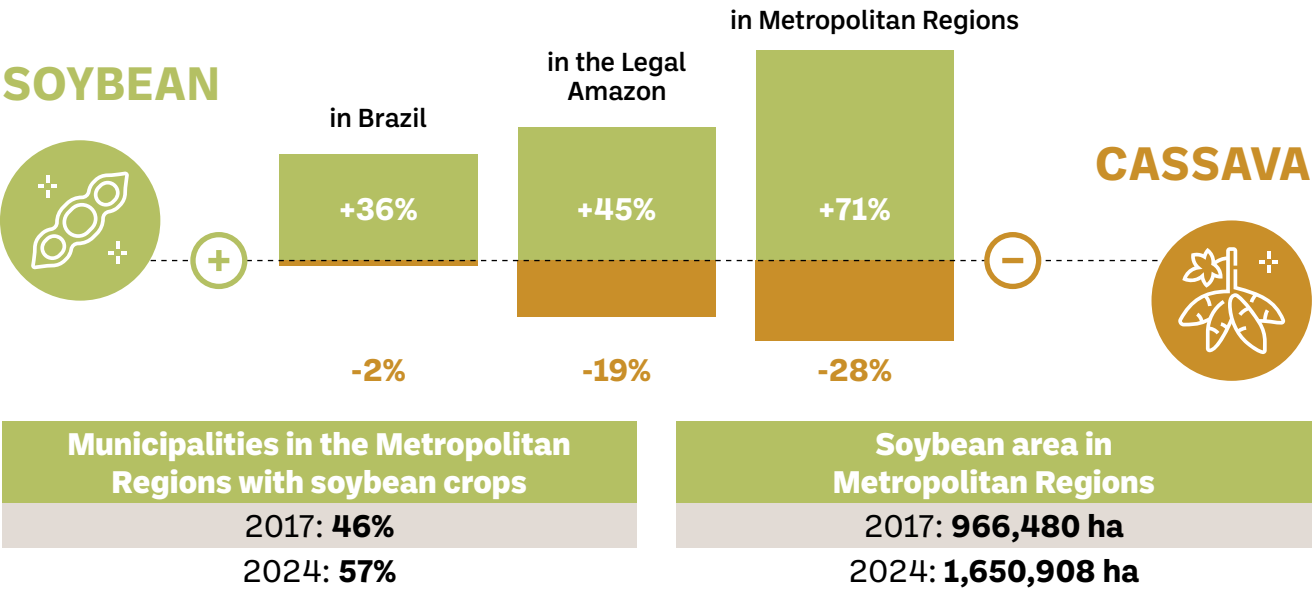
METROPOLITAN REGIONS OF THE LEGAL AMAZON



Amazonas: Metropolitan Region of Manaus (Complementary Law No. 52/07, No. 59/07, No. 64/09). | **Rondônia:** Metropolitan Region of Porto Velho (Law No. 3654/15). | **Roraima:** Metropolitan Region of Boa Vista, of the Central Region and of the South of the state (Complementary Law No. 130/07 and No. 229/14). | **Pará:** Metropolitan Region of Belém (Complementary Law No. 14/1973, No. 27/1995, No. 72/10, No. 76/11, and No. 164/23) and Metropolitan Region of Santarém (Complementary Law No. 79/12). | **Amapá:** Until 2025, there was only the Macapá Metropolitan Region (Complementary Law No. 21/03 and No. 96/16). Law No. 178/25 maintained the Macapá Metropolitan Region and created six other Metropolitan Regions with the remaining municipalities of the state. The new Metropolitan Regions are: of the Vale do Jari, of the Região dos Lagos, of the North of the State, of the Vale do Amapari, of the Vale do Araguaia, and of the East of the State. Beyond the scope of this study's time frame, the new organization is not part of the analysis presented in this document. **Tocantins:** Until 2026, the Metropolitan Region of Palmas (Complementary Law No. 90/13) comprised 16 municipalities, and the Metropolitan Region of Gurupi (Complementary Law No. 93/14) comprised 18 municipalities. Law No. 172/26 reorganized the Metropolitan Regions of Palmas (now with 38 municipalities), Gurupi (now with 36 municipalities), and created a 3rd Metropolitan Region referred to as Metropolitan Region of Araguaína (with 65 municipalities). Beyond the scope of this study's time frame, the new organization is not part of the analysis presented in this document. | **Maranhão:** Metropolitan Region of Greater São Luís (Complementary Law No. 174/15), Metropolitan Region of Southwestern Maranhão (Complementary Law No. 89/05 and No. 204/17) and Metropolitan Region of Greater Pedreiras (Complementary Law No. 26/95). | **Mato Grosso:** Metropolitan Region of the Cuiabá River Valley (Complementary Law No. 359/09, No. 557/16 and No. 796/24). | **Acre:** Immediate geographic region of Rio Branco (IBGE, 2017). The state does not have a Metropolitan Region established by state law. For comparative purposes with the other states in the Legal Amazon, we reviewed the region defined by the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics).

Graphic 1

CHANGES IN SOYBEAN AND CASSAVA AREAS (2017-2024)

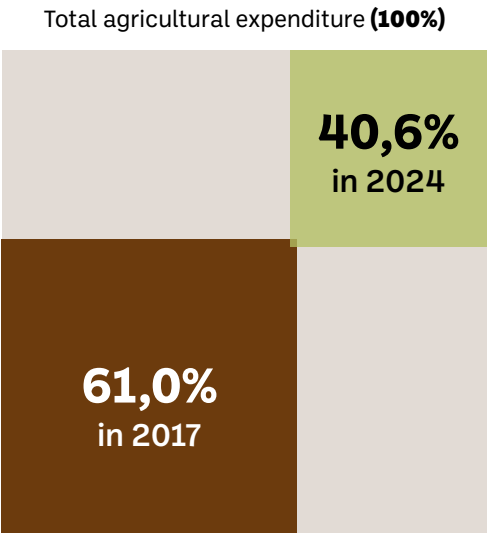


Source: Instituto Escolhas based on IBGE-PAM, 2024.

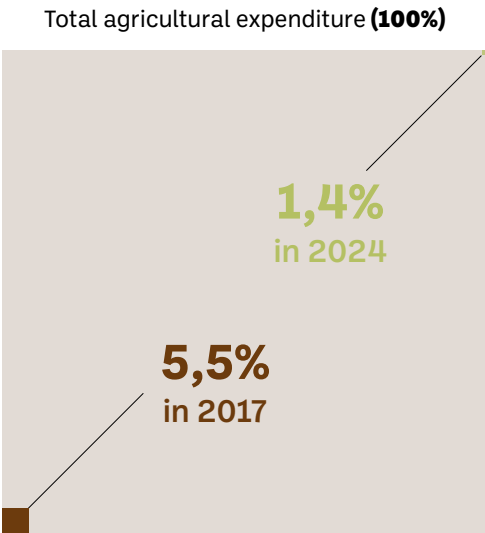
Graphic 2

PUBLIC SPENDING ON FOOD SUPPLY (2017-2024)

In Metropolitan Regions



In the states



Supply expenses in 2024:	
BRL 113 million	BRL 14 million

Source: Instituto Escolhas based on Sincofi/Serpro/Brazilian Ministry of Finance data (DCA 2017-2024), total expenses committed and settled with the sub-function “Food Supply” within the function “Agriculture” (excluding expenses under 20.122 – General Administration), indexed to December 2025 amounts by the IPCA index.

1. Introduction

Mercado 2000 in
the city of Santarém
(Pará, Brazil). Photo:
Rafa Neddermeyer/
Agência Brasil

² Acre, Amapá, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima, and Tocantins are entirely part of the Legal Amazon. Maranhão has 83% of its municipalities (181) belonging to the administrative region. Whenever possible, the research was focused on the municipal level, observing the municipalities of the Legal Amazon and, consequently, excluding the 36 municipalities of Maranhão that do not belong to the region.

³ In 2025, the municipality of Boa Esperança do Norte (MT) was established from the division of part of the municipalities of Sorriso (MT) and Nova Ubiratã (MT), bringing the total number of municipalities in the Legal Amazon to 773. However, several public databases still lack data on the new municipality. Furthermore, the study's time frame ranges from 2017 to 2024; therefore, the observed dynamics refer to the 772 municipalities that existed during that period.

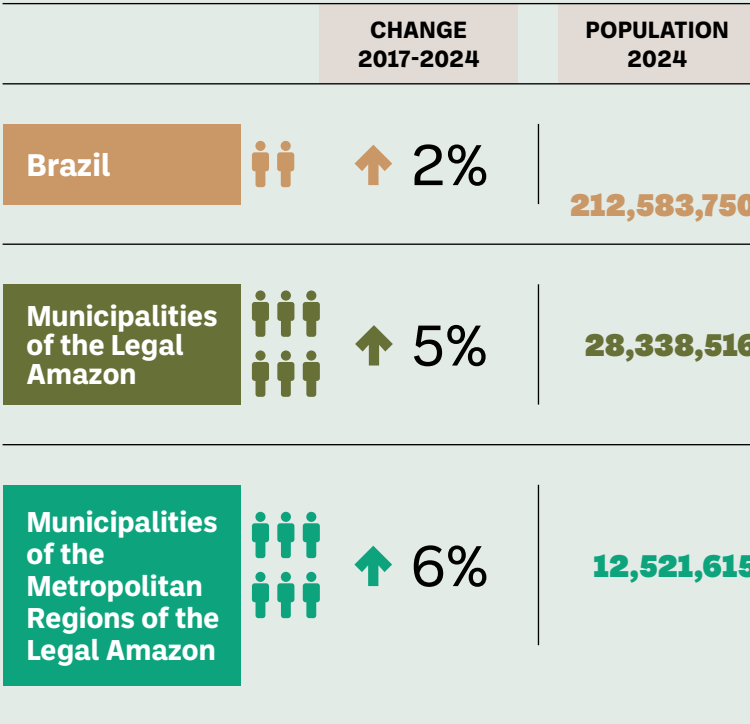
⁴ According to the latest update from IBGE, Brazil had 77 Metropolitan Regions in 2024, and 14 of them were in the Legal Amazon. In recent months, the states of Amapá and Tocantins have reorganized their territories and their respective Metropolitan Regions. Amapá now has seven Metropolitan Regions, comprising all 16 of its municipalities. Tocantins has three Metropolitan Regions, comprising all 139 of its municipalities. The universalization of metropolitan status at the state level is a peculiar phenomenon that falls outside the scope of analysis in this research. Furthermore, since the analysis period ranges from 2017 to 2024, the study focused on metropolitan arrangements established up to 2017.

⁵ Acre does not have a state law that officially creates a Metropolitan Region. Its organization is based on the IBGE's territorial division (Complementary Law No. 126/03), which divides the territory into regions. For comparison with other states, the latest update of the territorial division established by IBGE in 2017 (i.e., the immediate geographic region of Rio Branco) was used as equivalent to the Metropolitan Region.

The Legal Amazon, comprising nine states² and 773 municipalities³, occupies more than 58% of the Brazilian territory. Despite the low population density, the number of Brazilians residing in the region has been growing above the national average. The increase in the population living in its 15 metropolitan⁴ and immediate regions⁵ is even more pronounced.

Graphic 3

POPULATION CHANGE (2017-2024) AND ESTIMATED TOTAL POPULATION (2024)



Source: Instituto Escolhas based on IBGE data, 2026.

Metropolitan Regions are created by state laws. Their goal is to better organize, plan, and execute public functions of common interest that extend beyond the boundaries of neighboring municipalities. Food, as well as transportation and sanitation services, require coordination across cities. Coordinated municipalities can improve the flow between food production and consumption, share food supply infrastructure, and optimize government actions to support food systems. For the Legal Amazon region, these institutional strategies can be even more relevant if they combine efforts to reduce social vulnerability (which grows at a higher rate around capital cities and Metropolitan Regions) with efforts to reduce regional reliance on extensive, extra-regional food transportation chains.

Graphic 4

VARIATION IN THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE REGISTERED IN THE CADÚNICO⁶ AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION (2017-2024)



Source: Instituto Escolhas based on IBGE, 2026, and SAGICAD-MDS data, 2026.



⁶ The Single Registry for Social Programs (CadÚnico) identifies and characterizes low-income families residing throughout the Brazilian territory, being the main public instrument for selecting and including these families in federal programs.



Fishermen in the
city of Imperatriz
(Maranhão, Brazil).
Photo: Fernando
Frazão/Agência
Brasil.

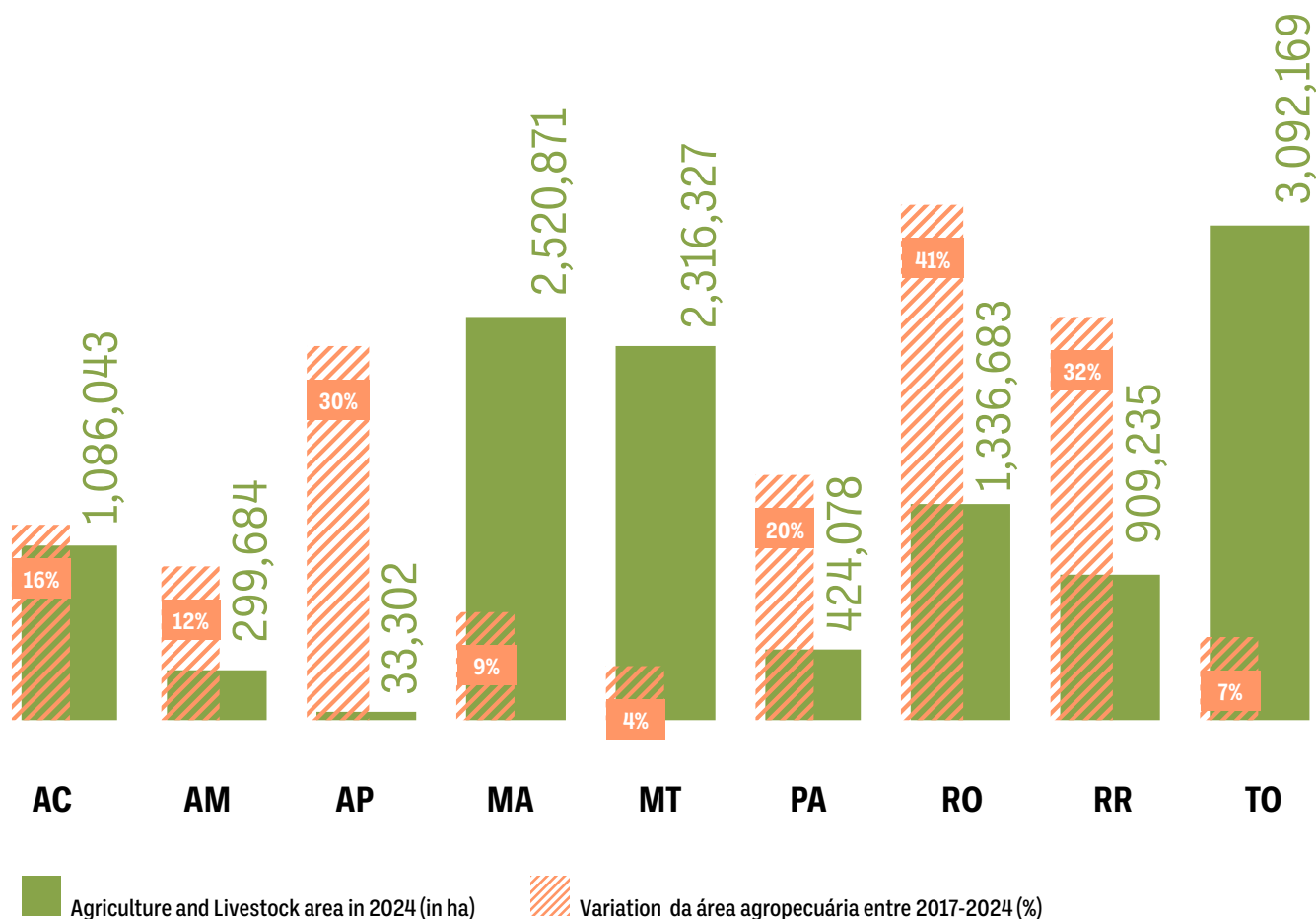
This study is the first among a series of studies developed by the Instituto Escolhas with an updated description of food in the Legal Amazon and its Metropolitan Regions, based on data from 2017 onwards, since 2017 was the year of the last Agricultural Census and the Family Budget Survey (POF), which are essential surveys for analyzing the Brazilian food system. In this first publication, we provide a general overview of the 15 Metropolitan Regions of the Legal Amazon. In upcoming releases, we will explore the food environment in the Metropolitan Regions of each of the nine states that make up the Legal Amazon.

MORE AREA, BUT FEWER ESTABLISHMENTS FOR AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK

In the analysis of food production across the 15 Metropolitan Regions, the land-use category that grew the most between 2017 and 2024 was the “Agriculture and Livestock” category (13%). In Brazil and throughout the Legal Amazon region, the greatest growth occurred not in these areas but in “Non-vegetated Areas” (14% and 29%, respectively). The extent of “Agriculture and Livestock” areas across the 15 Metropolitan Regions increased from 11,146,730 hectares in 2017 to 12,588,419 hectares in 2024, with regional variations, as shown in the chart below.

Graphic 5

AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK AREA IN THE METROPOLITAN REGIONS OF THE LEGAL AMAZON IN 2024 AND VARIATION BETWEEN 2017 AND 2024

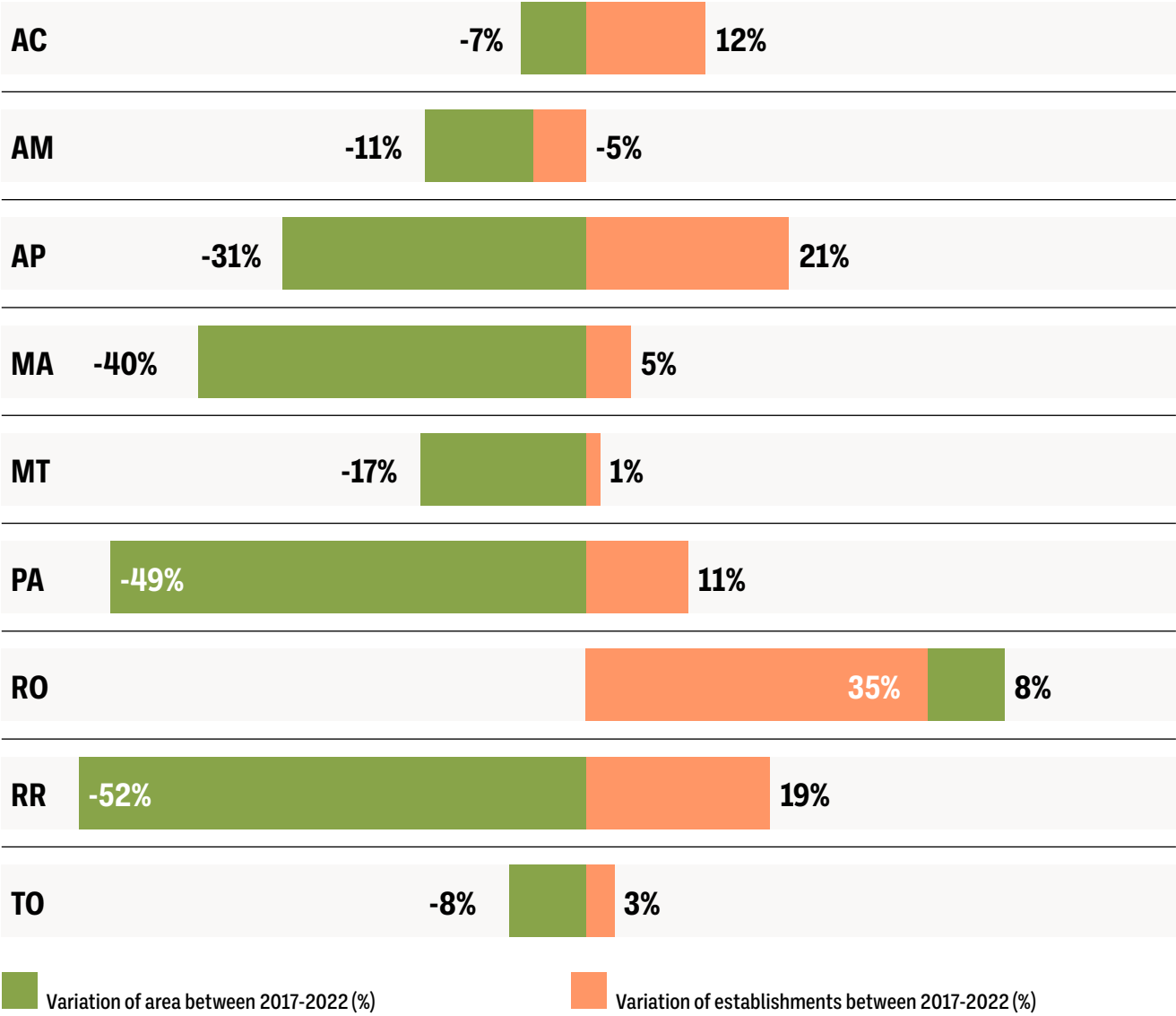


Source: Instituto Escolhas based on data from MapBiomass (Collection 10), 2025.

Despite the increase in area, the number of agricultural and livestock establishments has decreased. Between 2017 and 2022, establishments in Metropolitan Regions experienced the largest percentage reduction (-26%), compared to Brazil as a whole (-20%) and the entire Legal Amazon region (-25%). In the Metropolitan Regions, the number of establishments decreased from 142,434 in 2017 to 105,190 in 2022, despite an 8% increase in agricultural area between 2017 and 2022 (the last year for which establishment data are available), from 11,146,730 to 12,018,390 hectares. All Metropolitan Regions, except for Rondônia, followed the trend.

Graphic 6

VARIATION IN AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK AREA AND NUMBER OF ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE METROPOLITAN REGIONS OF THE LEGAL AMAZON BETWEEN 2017 AND 2022



Source: Instituto Escolhas based on MapBiomass (Collection 10), 2025, and IBGE-CNEFE data, 2022.



Soybean plantation
in Mato Grosso (MT).
Photo: MS Cattle

The scenario shows a boost in agricultural production, but with fewer establishments dedicated to this purpose. Given this trend of greater land concentration, what is the current status of food production in the Metropolitan Regions?

MORE SOYBEANS, BUT LESS CASSAVA

The IBGE-PAM data indicate strong growth of the cropland area across the Metropolitan Regions. Between 2017 and 2024, the area under temporary and permanent crops grew by 23% in Brazil, 40% in the Legal Amazon and 53% in the Metropolitan Regions. Which product was produced during this growth⁷?

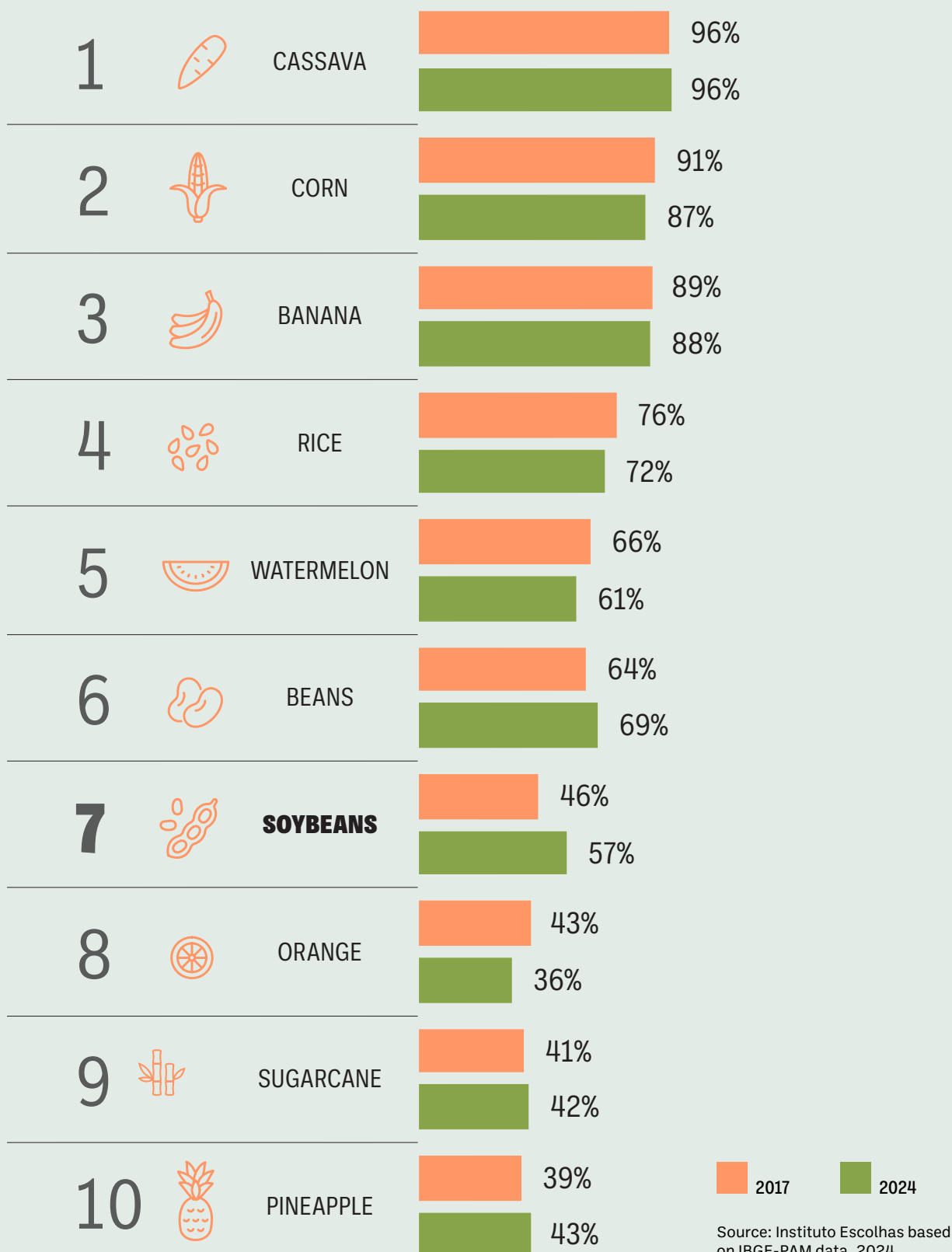
In 2017, 96% of the municipalities in the Metropolitan Regions planted cassava. Besides the root vegetable, five other crops prevailed (+50%) among the 138 municipalities of the Metropolitan Regions, as follows: corn (91%), banana (89%), rice (76%), watermelon (66%), and beans (64%). In 2024, a new crop joined the previous ones: soybeans. In 2017, soybeans were planted in 46% of municipalities in the Metropolitan Regions; in 2024, this figure increased to 57%⁸.

⁷ Analysis based on the 65 items listed in table 5.457 of IBGE-PAM (the following were excluded from the review: products discontinued since 1987 - alfalfa hay, liquid latex rubber, cashew nuts, and forage sugarcane - and the data for the items “Arabica coffee beans” and “Canephora coffee beans”, as they represent the sum of the item “total coffee beans”).

⁸ The Manaus Metropolitan Region (AM) had no record of soybean production in IBGE-PAM, 2024.

Graphic 7

THE TEN MOST COMMON CROPS IN THE 138 MUNICIPALITIES OF THE LEGAL AMAZON'S METROPOLITAN REGIONS (2017 AND 2024)





Municipal Market
in the city of
Manaus (Amazonas,
Brazil). Photo:
Fabio Rodrigues
Pozzebom/Agência
Brasil

In terms of the percentage of total planted area, soybeans were not a novelty: soybeans have been the main crop since 2017, accounting for 55% of all planted area in the Metropolitan Regions (966,480 hectares) that year. Even so, the increase in its planted area in 2024 is noteworthy (1,650,908 hectares), accounting for 62% of the total planted area in the Metropolitan Regions.

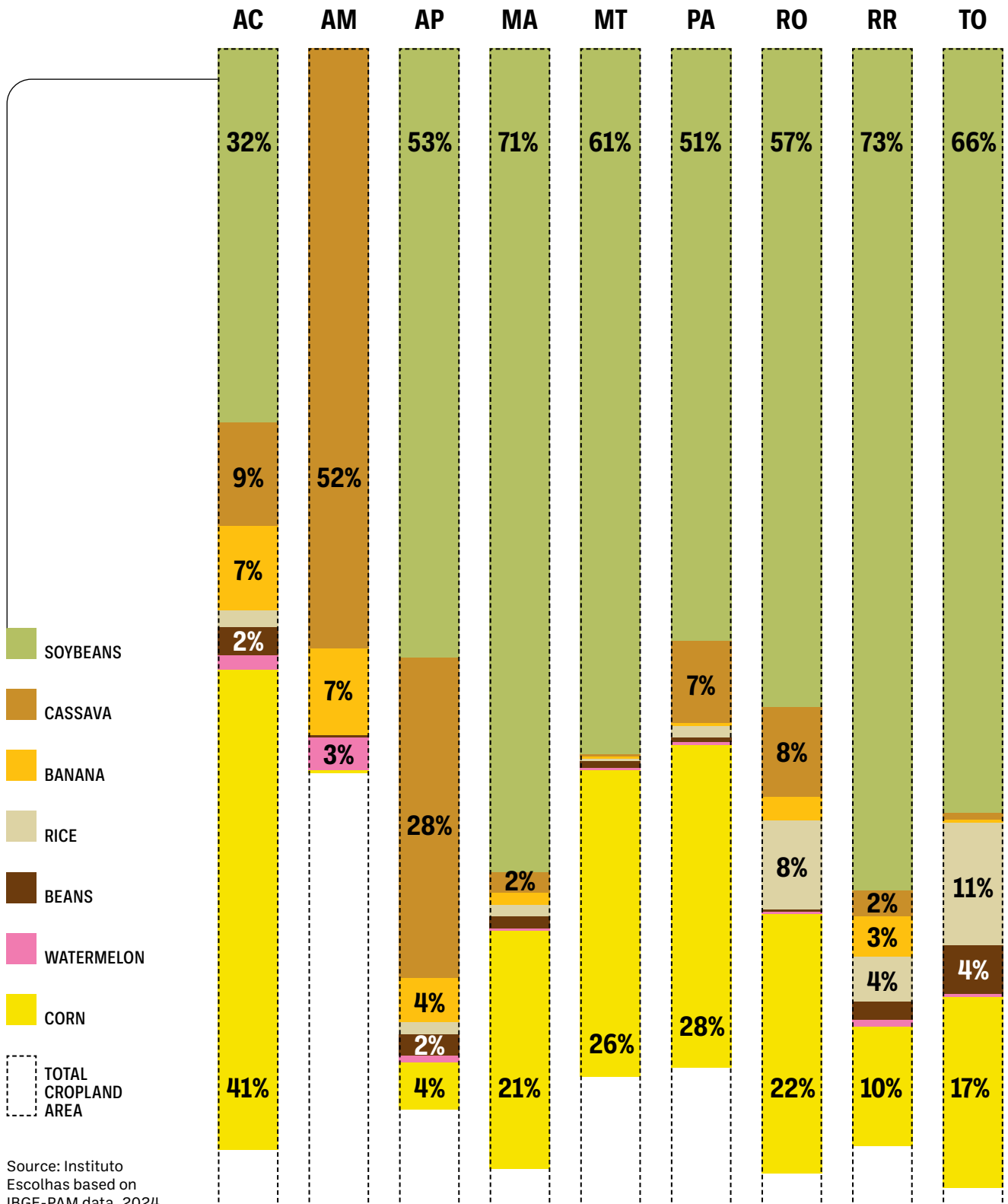
When looking at the percentage growth in soybean area, we notice a 36% increase across Brazil, 45% increase in the Legal Amazon region and 71% increase in the Metropolitan Regions of the Legal Amazon region. It is noteworthy that the majority of soybean produced in Brazil and in the Legal Amazon states is intended for export. In 2024, Brazil produced 144 million tons of soybeans and exported 98 million tons (68% of production). Within the Legal Amazon states, soybean production totaled 52 million tons, and its exports totaled 38 million tons (72%)⁹.

Another way to observe productive evolution is to compare it with products that are strategic to the regional food supply, such as cassava. In 2017, the root crop occupied 6% of the planted area in the Metropolitan Regions (98,620 hectares), which is ten times smaller than that of soybeans. In 2024, the occupied land fell to 3% (71,048 hectares), accounting for an area 23 times smaller than the soybean area.

⁹ Based on Agrostat/Siscomex data, the exports at the municipal level cannot be identified.

Graphic 8

OCCUPATION OF CROPLAND AREA IN THE METROPOLITAN REGIONS OF THE LEGAL AMAZON BY MAJOR CROPS IN 2024



Between 2017 and 2024, soybean (71%), corn (73%), and beans (49%) experienced an increase in planted area; while cassava (-28%), banana (-11%), rice (-1%), and watermelon (-51%) experienced reductions. How have these changes influenced access to food?

LEGAL AMAZON AND THE “BLACKOUT” ON FOOD DATA

Talking about access to food in the Legal Amazon means acknowledging the lack of available data across different databases. In the case of the National Supply Company (Conab – Companhia Nacional de Abastecimento), for example, which is responsible for data on the quantity of food traded in the Supply Centers (Ceasas), only five out of the 69 centers on the Conab platform are located in the region (Acre, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Pará, and Tocantins). Still, only one state (Acre) has information on the traded quantity in the platform. The states of Amazonas, Amapá, Rondônia, and Roraima do not even have information about distribution centers and warehouses¹⁰.

Despite the data blackout, some reviews are feasible, such as looking at the origin of the products being sold. In 2017, 12 million tons of fruits and vegetables were traded throughout Brazil via the “Ceasas” Supply Centers. Of that total, only 181,000 tons originated in the Amazon (1.5%). In 2024, the global number of fruits and vegetables traded decreased to 11 million tons in Brazil, as did the percentage of fruits and vegetables originating from the Legal Amazon: 161,000 tons (1.4%). For comparison, more imported fruits and vegetables were sold in Brazil than those of Amazonian origin (184,000 tons in 2017 and 178,000 tons in 2024).

The reduced volume of product sold is also significant. Between 2017 and 2024, Brazil saw a 5% decrease in fruit and vegetable sales, but the drop in sales of these foods originating from the Legal Amazon was much greater, i.e., 11%. The decline may reflect either a reduction in the circulation of regional products through Brazil’s Ceasas or a broader decrease in the commercialization of these products within and beyond the Legal Amazon.

10

Since 2005, MAPA and Conab have maintained the Brazilian Program for the Modernization of the Fruit and Vegetable Market – PROHORT, aiming at “developing and integrating statistical databases of Supply Centers” (Art. 1, 1st Paragraph, of MAPA Ordinance No. 171/2005). However, as mentioned before, the system still has limited data, which limits the ability to view the country’s overall supply scenario.

“FOOD SUPPLY” OUTSIDE THE PUBLIC BUDGET MENU

Another way to evaluate access to food is through public budget and the data published by the National Treasury Department. The Accounting and Fiscal Information System of the Brazilian Public Sector (Sincofi) provides the Annual Accounts Declaration (DCA) for budgetary expenditures of all federative units in a standardized form. Function “20 – Agriculture” includes the sub-function “605 – Supply”. The use of the sub-function operates as a marker of the topic’s relevance, even though we can assign the same purpose using other functions and sub-functions.

Between 2017 and 2024, states and municipalities of the Metropolitan Regions showed opposite trends when it comes to committed and settled expenses¹¹ related to food supply: while municipalities in the Metropolitan Regions accounted for an 84% increase in the sum of expenses for this sub-function, the states of the Legal Amazon had a 51% decrease.

In the case of municipalities of the Metropolitan Regions, growth was driven by the cities in Acre (144%), Amazonas (160%), Maranhão (28%), Mato Grosso (425%), Pará (116%), and Roraima (1996%). The budget reductions included the Metropolitan Regions of Amapá (-76%), Tocantins (-57%), and Rondônia (no expenditure recorded in 2024). Among the states, only Amapá recorded budget growth (99%). All other states experienced reductions (Acre: -82%, Roraima: -81%, Tocantins: -92%) or did not report expenditures for the “supply” sub-function (Amazonas, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Pará, and Rondônia). In 2017, states’ budget expenditures for food supplies totaled BRL 29 million, but by 2024, this figure had fallen to BRL 14 million¹².

The relevance of food supply can also be reviewed by the “share” that the sub-function represents in the highest level of aggregation of agricultural expenditures¹³. In the balance of accounts for the Metropolitan Regions, food supply accounted for 61% of agricultural expenditures in 2017. In 2024, the number fell to less than 41%. In the states’ overall balance of accounts, the percentage is negligible: in 2017, it accounted for 5% of expenses, and, in 2024, less than 2% of final agricultural expenses.

¹¹ The execution of expenses was considered up to the settlement stage. Although it is a stage prior to payment (paid expenses), in the committed and settled expenses stage, the right to receive payment already exists.

¹² The nominal values of the Annual Balance of Accounts (DCA) of the 138 municipalities of the Metropolitan Regions of the Legal Amazon and the nine states for 2017 and 2024 were deflated and updated to December 2025 in BRL currency by applying the IPCA index (IBGE).

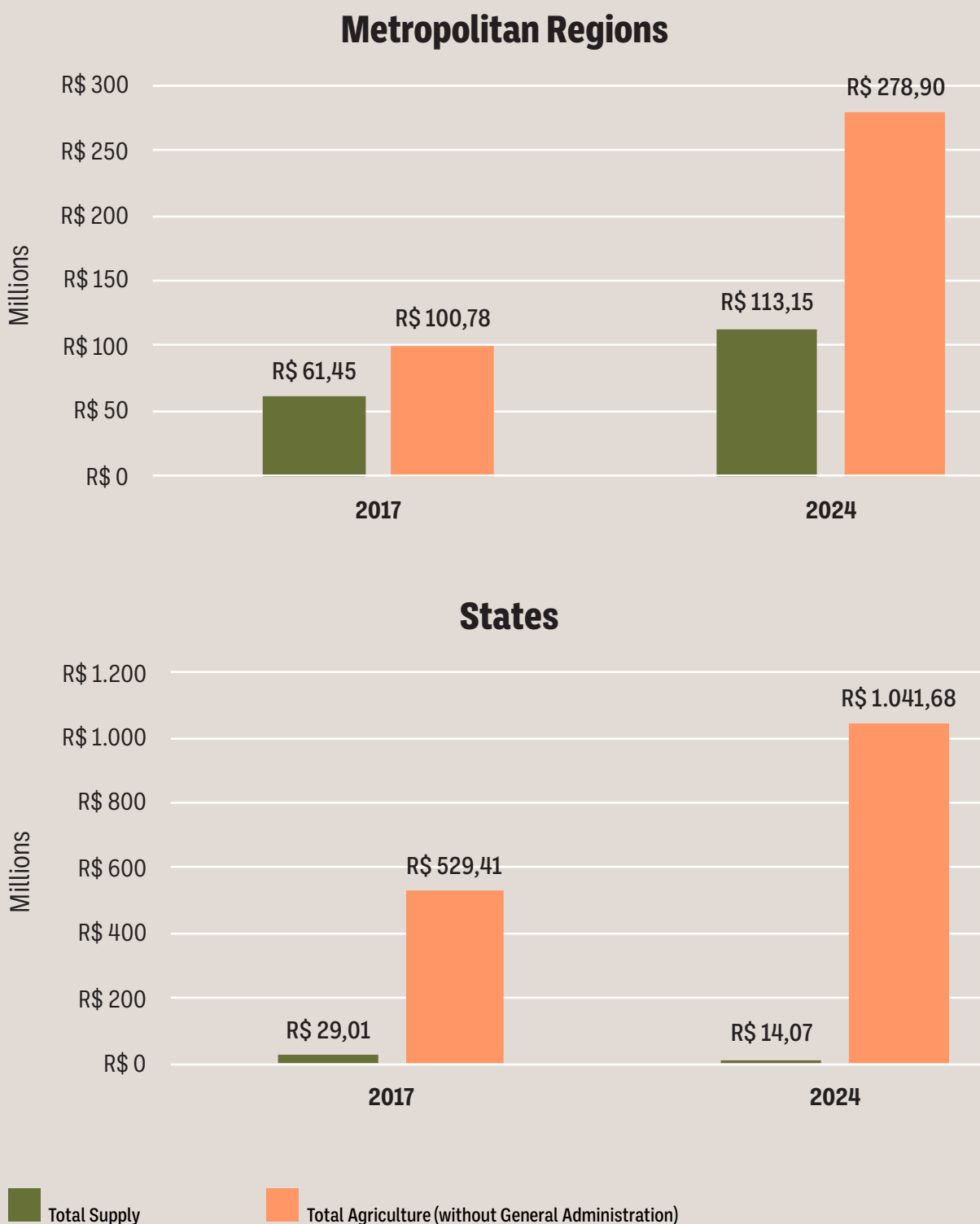
¹³ The following subfunctions are listed within function “20 – Agriculture”: 20.605 – Supply, 20.606 – Rural Extension, 20.607 – Irrigation, 20.608 – Promotion of Agricultural Production, 20.609 – Agricultural Protection, 20.122 – General Administration, and FU20 – Other Subfunctions. Although important for enabling mission-related activities (such as contract management, administrative support, and payroll), the subfunction “20.122 – General Administration” was excluded from the review as it is not directly associated with the function’s core activity.



Activity at the açaí
and fish market at
Ver-o-Peso in Belém
(Pará, Brazil). Photo:
Marcelo Camargo/
Agência Brasil.

Graphic 9

BUDGETARY EXPENDITURES ON FOOD SUPPLY AND AGRICULTURE IN 2017 AND 2024



Source: Instituto Escolhas based on Sincofi/Serpro/Brazilian Ministry of Finance data (DCA 2017-2024), total committed and settled expenses (total value of the Supply subfunction and total value of the Agriculture function, excluding expenses under 20.122 – General Administration heading), adjusted to inflation in December 2025 by the IPCA index.



Flour for sale at
Mercado 2000 in
Santarém (Pará,
Brazil). Photo: Rafa
Neddermeyer/
Agência Brasil.

RIISING “BASIC FOOD BASKET” PRICES IN LEGAL AMAZON CAPITALS

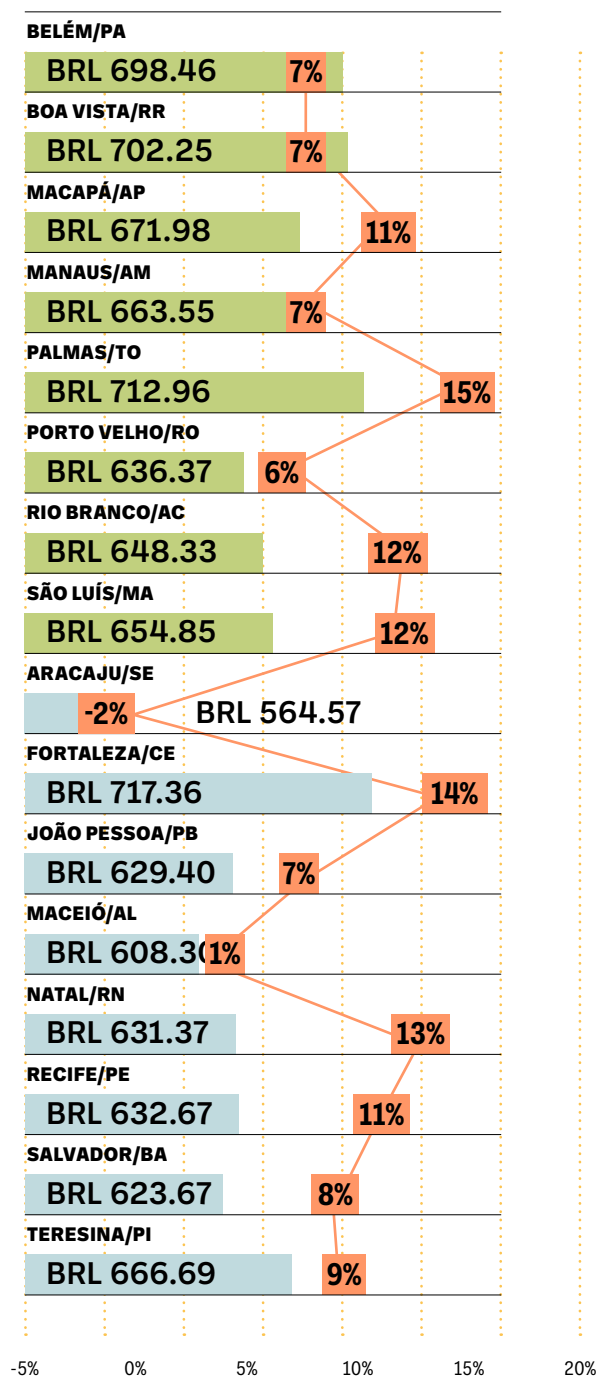
Finally, food access can also be analyzed through prices. In 2016, the Dieese (Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies) started monitoring the monthly basic food basket expenditure across all Brazilian capitals, interrupted the survey for the region in 2017, and only resumed price collection in these cities from April 2025 onwards, with the support of the National Supply Company (Conab).

In its survey, Dieese divides Brazil into three regions (each with different goods and quantities). Except for Cuiabá (MT), which is in region 3, all other capitals are in region 2. According to available data (2016-2025), the main message is that the basic food basket is more expensive across all capitals of the Legal Amazon, with percentage increases ranging from 19% in Cuiabá (MT) to 6% in Porto Velho (RO).

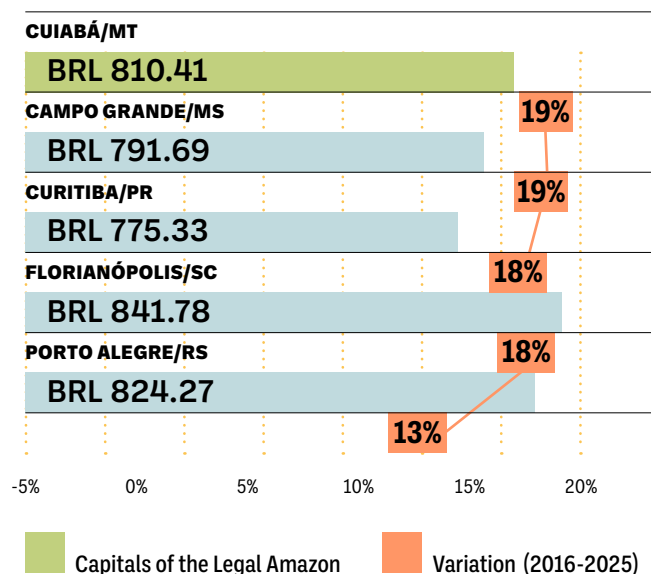
Graphic 10

AVERAGE MONTHLY EXPENDITURE ON THE BASIC FOOD BASKET IN REGIONS 2 AND 3 CAPITALS (2025) - IN BRL - AND VARIATION IN AVERAGE MONTHLY EXPENDITURE (2016-2025)

Region 02



Region 03



In the chart for region 02, we can notice a relatively higher average expenditure on the basic food basket in the administrative region's capitals compared to the other capitals in the group. Among the capitals of the Legal Amazon, Palmas (TO) has the highest average value (BRL 712.96), and Porto Velho (RO) has the lowest (BRL 636.37), which, in turn, is higher than six of the eight capitals within the same region, but outside the Legal Amazon. In region 03, Cuiabá (MT) has the 3rd-highest expenditure (BRL 810.41) and led the percentage increase in spending between 2016 and 2025, as did Campo Grande (MS), with a 19% increase.

Source: Instituto Escolhas, based on Dieese data, 2026, with monthly values (Apr./Dec.) indexed to the IPCA to December/2025, and subsequently averaged (Apr./Dec. 2016 and Apr./Dec. 2025).

Note: Due to regional differences in goods and quantities (as well as the population weight of each city), comparisons among all the capitals of Brazil should be made with caution, as these comparisons must be qualified.



Supply operations
at Mercado 2000
in Santarém (Pará,
Brazil). Photo: Rafa
Neddermeyer/
Agência Brasil.

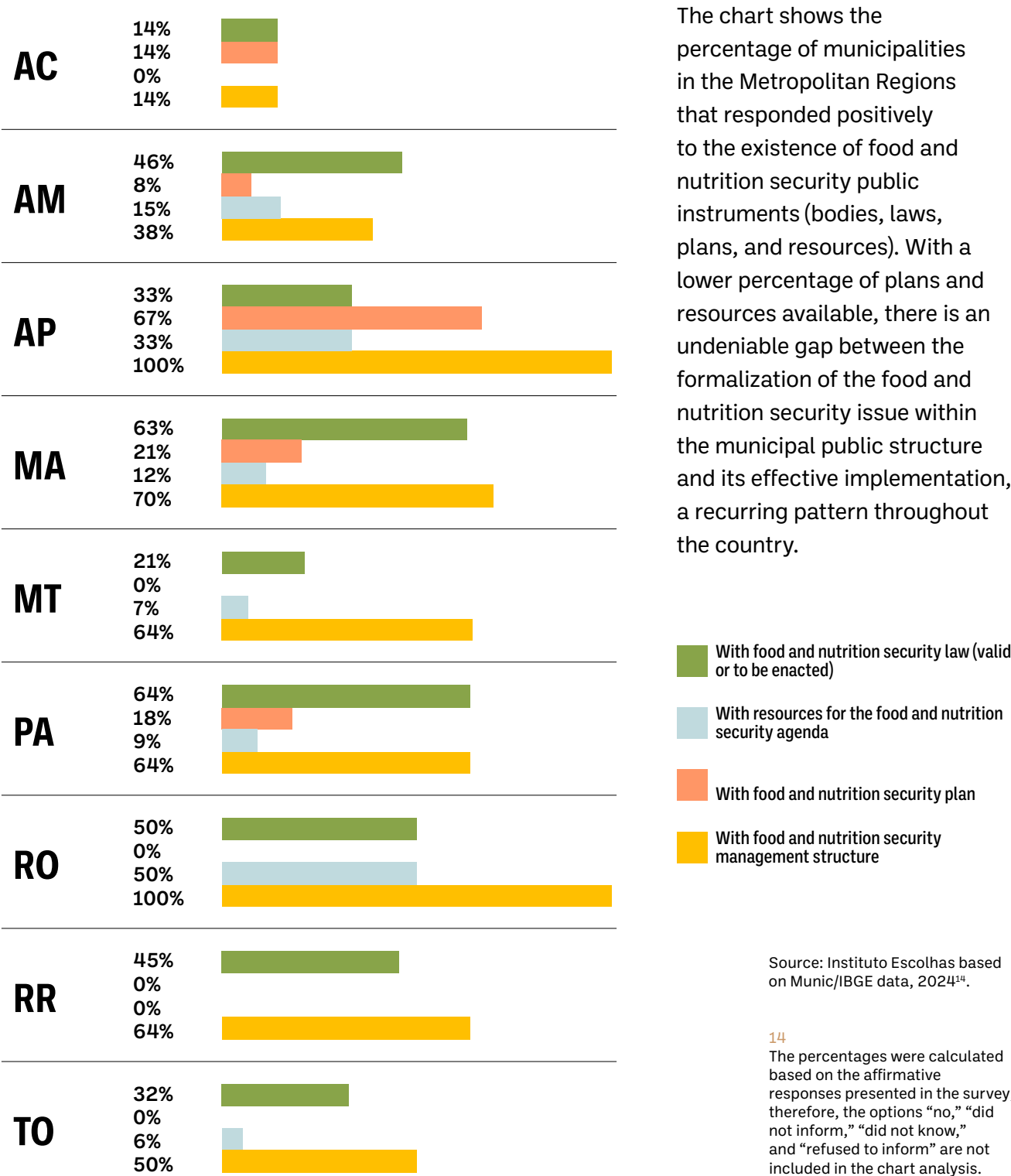
THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AS AN ALLY OF THE FOOD AGENDA

With changes in the production, distribution, and pricing of food, the government is liable for improving access to food for its population. This commitment needs to be endorsed in robust administrative structures and regulatory frameworks, as well as stable public policies for Food and Nutritional Security (FNS).

According to data from the 2024 Munic/IBGE survey, 59% of municipalities in the Metropolitan Regions of the Legal Amazon have some administrative structure for food and nutrition security (with a subordinate or exclusive department). In terms of the legal framework, the percentage decreases slightly. Still, it remains high, with 45% of municipalities already having a food and nutrition security law in effect or in the process of enactment. Now, when it comes to municipal plans and budget resources for food and nutrition security, the percentages decrease to 11% and 9%, respectively.

Graphic 11

PERCENTAGE OF MUNICIPALITIES IN THE METROPOLITAN REGIONS OF THE LEGAL AMAZON ACCORDING TO THE EXISTENCE OF MANAGEMENT INSTRUMENTS FOR THE FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AGENDA IN 2024





Traditional dish in
Belém (Pará, Brazil).
Photo: Fernando
Frazão/Agência
Brasil.

FOOD SYSTEM IN METROPOLITAN REGIONS: FROM PAPER TO PRACTICE

Federal Law No. 13089/15 created the Metropolitan Governance Statute, but by the implementation of Metropolitan Regions remains a national challenge. In the Legal Amazon region, where urban centers are nestled within the forest, the challenge is even greater. Ultimately, the region faces the contradiction of being one of the most biodiverse areas in the world while simultaneously depending on food imports from other parts of Brazil¹⁵. Therefore, the food agenda should be included in the list of “public functions of common interest (FPIC, according to the Brazilian acronym)”¹⁶, as stated in the statute, besides being a commitment of all federative entities, namely:



For the municipalities, the topic must be clearly visible in their public instruments, such as the City Master Plan. Furthermore, food and nutrition security plans need to become a reality, as they are currently present in only 11% of municipalities within the Metropolitan Regions. One concrete way to foster the agenda is through the municipalities’ adherence to the National Food and Nutritional Security System (Sisan), which requires the publication of the plan 12 months after the execution of the adherence agreement;



For the states, they must requalify the food supply centers and warehouses under state coordination, in line with the actions outlined in the National Food Supply Plan. Besides increasing the transparency of food marketing flows that occur in Ceasas (currently only available for Acre), the issue must have budgetary priority proportional to the supply problems faced by the region, as the matter cannot be handled solely by the fragmented actions of the municipalities;



For the Federal Government, they must expand the scope of food systems in national urban policy. This action means supporting the development of regional diagnoses and projects, financing supply infrastructure, supporting urban and peri-urban agriculture, strengthening short food supply chains, and providing mechanisms to integrate food and nutrition security into the planning instruments of Metropolitan Regions.

¹⁵

The study “The challenges and potential of urban and peri-urban agriculture in Belém” by the Instituto Escolhas showed that 80% of the food sold at Ceasa Belém came from other states. See: <https://agriculturaembelem.escolhas.org/>

¹⁶

Art.2, II: “public policy or action included therein whose implementation by a Municipality, in isolation, is unfeasible or causes an impact on neighboring Municipalities”.

Study developed by the Instituto Escolhas

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