

## Cuba's Abundant Land and Food Shortages

Miguel Arias Sanchez  
Havana Times, July 16, 2019

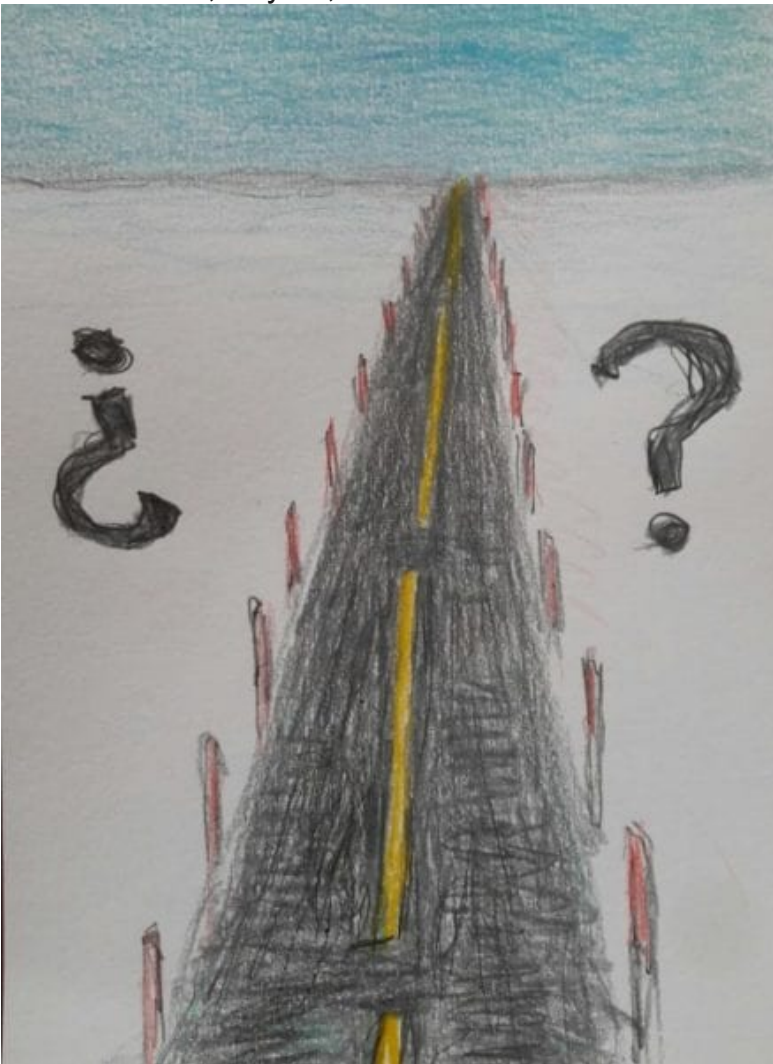


Illustration by Carlos

HAVANA TIMES – Cuba is an underdeveloped or developing country, whatever one wants to call it. It is not a country that has large industries, it depends on revenue from tourism, tobacco, rum and sugar. And that it is not enough to cover our needs and resolve our problems.

However, there is something blessed in this nation that has not been given the importance it deserves, and it is the land.

From a very young age I always heard my father say: “this land is blessed, drop a sweet potato in it and immediately a plant is born, it is a very fertile land and anything that is sowed brings a harvest, and very good quality.”

But despite all this, we Cubans do not value in all its magnitude the benefits it can bring for our diet – and life in general – that we can obtain from its cultivation.

During the Special Period crisis in the 1990s and the lack of food of all kinds, which created a very difficult situation in the country, came ideas to alleviate the serious problem with our own effort.

So, we began to sow in every space that was possible; also the famous organopónicos (urban intensive agriculture) were created, which still exist today in many municipalities and which greatly help in the acquisition of some vegetables and condiments. Back then in the 90s every yard, garden or barren field in the cities became cultivated.

But that was dismissed as soon as the situation “improved” a little bit with the help of Venezuela.

This makes no sense in an eminently agricultural and poor country, where many products are imported to meet the needs of the population that could be produced right here.

I have seen documentaries from Japan, where the inhabitants sow on the roofs of the buildings which become large intensive gardens for the consumption of the residents. I have also been told that in Australia they sow on the walls, and there is an important development of permaculture, another way of relating to the earth, taking care of it and taking advantage of its benefits. These are not poor countries like Cuba.

Therefore we, with serious economic problems, have given ourselves the luxury for years of turning our back to the earth. It is enough to travel to the provinces to notice the amount of uncultivated land, abandoned or delivered to the marabou bush weed.

In these difficult times, which may become even more difficult, where food is expensive or scarce, it would be very good idea and above all very healthy one, to think seriously about how to obtain these products at home. Besides guaranteeing the food of all, it would alleviate the tensions and stress that Cubans suffer every day trying to put something on the table.