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< Lula's Legacy Looms As Brazil's Voters Weigh Choice

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Heard on *Weekend Edition Sunday*

text size **A** **A** **A**

October 3, 2010 - REBECCA ROBERTS, host:

In Brazil, people are heading to the polls today to choose, among other offices, a new president. Brazil's current president, widely known as Lula, is barred from seeking a third consecutive term. Reporter Annie Murphy visited one of Brazil's most economically depressed regions, where President Lula was born, to find out what people there are looking for in their next leader.

ANNIE MURPHY: A town of tile and cement homes perched on a scrubby hill. Brejo de Madre de Deus, or just Brejo, and just a few years ago, kids here, like Mikaely Silva, were used to eating one thing at school.

Mr. MIKAELY SILVA: (Portuguese spoken)

MURPHY: Rice and beans - that was it - rice and beans almost every day. And because many kids came from families who couldn't afford much more, vegetables, fruit, dairy and meat were practically absent from their diet.

(Soundbite of kids playing)

MURPHY: Today, these middle-schoolers are leaning over bowls of homemade soup, full of carrot, onion, cabbage, squash and beef - much of it local. Just a decade ago, 17 million Brazilians were undernourished, but today that number has been cut by a third, thanks largely to President Lula's policies and small farmers like Cicero Suarez.

As of this year, all school lunch programs are required to buy 30 percent of their products from small local producers, which means Suarez has been busy on his farm. Banana trees flank the field, some passion fruit vines and a patch of yucca off to one side - all of it organic and, thanks to the government program, all of it headed to market.

Mr. CICERO SUAREZ (Farmer): (Portuguese spoken)

MURPHY: Suarez says that his life has changed a lot and the numbers are striking. Suarez now earns around \$500 a month. Just a few years ago, the average monthly wage for an area farmer was less than \$100.

Jose Joelson is the head of the small farmer's union here. He says selling to schools has made life a lot more stable.

Mr. JOSE JOELSON: (Through translator) When a farmer has a contract for six to eight months, he already knows how much he's going to sell his product for. He's not planting only to find out he can't sell his harvest.

MURPHY: About a fifth of Brazilians live in rural areas, and in terms of development, the countryside remains far behind the city. Economist Marcelo Neri.

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Mr. MARCELO NERI (Economist): At some point, someone said, oh, Brazil is like Bel-India. It's a mix of small and rich Belgium, a developed country, in the middle of a big and poor India. So, the two sides, this contradiction.

MURPHY: Which means many Brazilians, especially in places like Brejo aren't thinking about foreign investment when they go to the polls, or even about buying a car, but who will help them get the basics? Farmers union leader Jose Joelson.

Mr. JOELSON: (Portuguese spoken)

MURPHY: Joelson says people who live in rural areas should have access to Internet. Why not? They should have access to phone service, water, sanitation, public health. He'll be voting for President Lula's protege, Dilma Rouseff, who he thinks is most likely to help out people in forgotten rural areas.

Everyone in town knows Maria de Socorro as Aunt Coca. She runs a restaurant out of her house that fills up each day at noon. Today, customers get grilled steak with fresh cheese, tomato salad, black eyed peas and steamed pumpkin, and pitchers of bright pink guava juice. It's all homemade, cheap, organic, local and delicious. Aunt Coca thinks the new school lunch program is a big step for the whole community.

Ms. MARIA DE SOCORRO: (Through translator) Outstanding. There are things we've never seen before. In the school lunch program, we have strawberries, we have honey, all kinds of vegetables and top-quality meat. This is something from the first world.

MURPHY: And, like nearly everyone in town, she'll be voting for Dilma Rouseff in the hopes that Rouseff will help this local food movement and Brazil's rural northeast keep developing.

For NPR News, this is Annie Murphy in Brejo de Madre de Deus, Brazil.

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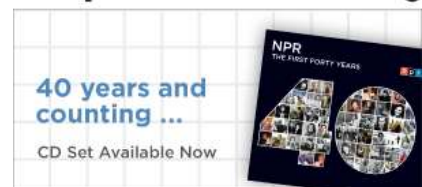
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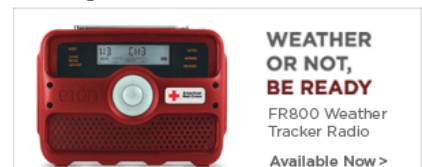
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Todd Clay (Cityguy) wrote:

@Orlando Costa I'm not sure if you're saying that Brazil is becoming a corporate state and losing it's socialism or if you're saying that's it's a travesty that it is becoming a socialist nation. The only thing I know for sure is that it is expensive from what I've seen as far as cost of living estimates.

domingo, 3 de outubro de 2010 15:18:17

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Orlando Costa (paulico1) wrote:

Sad to see what is happening in the country that I was born ,Brazil. Corruption , demagogy , populism took over transvestite as socialism.

Cost of living there is almost twice as much as in US .

Poor people were bought by handouts offered by political parties like PSDB,PMDB, PT ,etc California is trailing the same path as Brazil and soon will be part of Latin America. (Latifonia)

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