

Food Culture: Access, Diseases, and Nutriment
A Comparative Ethnography of Coastal Huanchaco and Mountainous Julcán

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Ethnographic Field School
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What: Weekly Market

Where: Trujillo

When: Sunday, June 10th, 2018 at 14:15

Significance: People from Julcán sell their goods in Trujillo, people from Huanchaco buy the goods from Trujillo, and people from Julcán buy their goods from Julcán.

The smells hit me first. They are pungent with subtle undertones of cooking meats, legumes, and fresh fruit. A concoction of sweet, salty, light, and heavy odors. People walk by, some with purpose and a determined stride while others walk leisurely, perhaps searching for nothing in particular. Nice! The sounds of bartering can be heard from two blocks away from the market. Pigskin hangs from the top of butcher booths while other booths use portable hot plates or grills to cook up plantains on a stick, deserts made from sweetened beans, or empanadas stuffed with chicken.

The market can be compared to a chef-d'oeuvre with splashes of color coating the metaphorical canvas that is the streets and sidewalks where the market temporarily rests every Sunday afternoon. Some vendors place their wares on tarps on the ground, and others have booths with sectioned areas for each type of product. Some of the vendors have placed white chalk labels on a black



Figure 1 - Spices and Grains

chalkboard with each item to describe what it is. The hustle and bustle of the market is a

weekly event where people from all over come to grocery shop for the week.

You'll need an introduction here (if you decide to keep the above as an abstract). You need your research question and how it changed from just geography to including disease as a theme at the beginning so the reader is informed as to what's coming.

Although I had initially planned to study how geography affects access to food on the coast and in the mountains, my research changed to investigate the information my informants presented to me. The methods used to gather data are unobtrusive observation (UO), participant observation (PO), interviews, questionnaires, informal discussions, and mapping. The following deductions resulted from the analysis of the research: 1) geography has minimal influence on the actual access to food with the exception of fish; 2) *bodegas* (corner stores) play less of a role than their frequency portrays; 3) individuals in Julcán desire ingredients rather than dishes; 4) food culture in Huanchaco reflects their touristic nature and global exposure; 5) social status and traditional methods of food preparation, location, and dish consumption, such as *cuy* (guinea pig), are not mutually exclusive but intertwined complexly; and 6) disease plays a salient role in food culture in both locations even if it is not always recognized. (See appendix for the questionnaire, interview guide, table, posters, and more pictures).

Site Description:

The research took place in two towns, one on the coast and one in the mountains, in Northern Peru. Peru borders Ecuador to the Northwest, Columbia to the Northeast, Brazil to the

East, Bolivia to the Southeast, Chile to the South, and the western border is the Pacific Ocean.

The two towns are Huanchaco and Julcán, with Julcán being the mountain town and Huanchaco being the coastal town.

Huanchaco is the larger of the two towns, and it is a twenty-minute car ride North of Trujillo (the third largest city in Peru). It is a fishing town recognized globally by surfers for its wonderful waves. Huanchaco is linked to Trujillo, through the job market and resources shared between them, and is a popular location for tourists because of the wonderful surfing conditions. As a result, Huanchaco plays host to tourists throughout the year, and its culinary atmosphere reflects the diversity of the people who visit and inhabit the town. Julcán is smaller than Huanchaco, but exact numbers are difficult to acquire due to the widespread nature of the province. The town is the capital of the Julcán province which is a major agricultural region of Peru, and the potato capital of the country. The steep slopes of the mountain dominate the fields, some terraced and some not, as well as grazing livestock. Julcán is not recognized as being a tourist destination. It was mentioned to me that Julcán is the poorest province in Peru, and since agriculture dominates it, the area draws far fewer tourists than the coastal regions. The following is a table created from the analysis of the interviews, questionnaires, and discussions. The foods listed are ones which my informants referenced most frequently throughout the research process. The table is a visual representation of the information discussed in the ethnography.

Table 1:

Key	
Yes = ✓	No = x

	Julcán	Huanchaco	

	Grown in Situ?	Eaten Frequently?	Grown in Situ?	Eaten Frequently?	Where is it Mostly Grown?
Carrots	✓	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Celery	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Arroz	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Yucca	x	x	✓	✓	Trujillo
Papas	✓	✓	x	✓	Julcán
Oca	✓	✓	x	x	Julcán
Sheep	✓	✓	x	x	Julcán
Quinoa	✓	x	x	x	Julcán
Peppers	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Corn	✓	✓	✓	✓	Julcán
Carne	✓	x	x	✓	Julcán
Goat	✓	✓	x	x	Julcán
Beans	✓	✓	✓	✓	Julcán Trujillo
Pollo	✓	✓	✓	✓	Julcán Trujillo Huanchaco
Cuy	✓	x	✓	x	Julcán Huanchaco
Green Onions	✓	✓	✓	✓	Julcán
Red Onions	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
River Fish	✓	x	x	x	Julcán
Salt Water Fish	x	x	✓	✓	Huanchaco
Garlic	✓	✓	x	✓	Julcán
Oil	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Sugar	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo

The research is a culmination of many hours of interviews, questionnaires, UO), participant PO, mapping, and informal discussions. I interviewed one man who owns a vegetarian café (henceforth referred to as Man 1) in Huanchaco and was able to collect data from a questionnaire and table he filled out for me. The table has columns for where the ingredients for the food is procured, where the food grows, and what ingredients make up the dish. In addition to the man, I interviewed a woman in Huanchaco who cooks for the restaurant *El Jardin* (henceforth referred to as Woman 3). I also walked up and down every street in the heart of Huanchaco to map all the bodegas in the town. I interviewed two women (henceforth referred to as Woman 1 and Woman 2) in Julcán who's family owns a restaurant and provided the field school participants with thrice daily meals. I also informally spoke with another woman who owns a produce shop. I conducted informal interviews with seven community members representing two different agricultural booths during the festival in Julcán. They provided me with many posters and pamphlets as well as firsthand knowledge about diseases affecting both the produce and livestock in Julcán as well as throughout Peru.

For the purpose of this ethnography, the following should be noted: *market* will be used in the traditional sense of the word in relation to the selling of produce, goods, and foods and *produce shop* will be used to define a market that is in a permanent location and is available on a more frequent basis. Markets are typically available once a week, but some are available daily in open areas without a permanent structure and frequently on the street. Produce shops are in a building with some extending their location outside of the building to sell on the sidewalk. They are usually not located in the street.

A portion of the research came from participant observation which consisted of spending time in restaurants, ordering food, and talking to the owners and servers of the restaurant. A significant amount of time was also spent going to markets, bodegas, and produce shop repeatedly in order to establish my presence as a part of the community and allow them to become accustomed to my presence. I returned to the same venues once every couple of days in Huanchaco and every day in Julcán with the hope community members would be willing to discuss the food they make, serve, or sell with me. The ratio of work to results may not seem equal considering I spent many hours getting to know people, visiting, or buying food, and in the end, not everyone was willing to talk to me, could because of the language barrier, or had enough time to talk. Although it may seem as if my time was squandered by investing it in addition to energy and money into places with seemingly no informational research return, this is not the case. The time and energy spent was an investment, and the time and energy one puts into the research is replicated in the final product in the form of information and experience.

Limitations, Challenges, and Biases:

During the courses of this ethnographic field school, numerous limitations and challenges presented themselves which in turn affected the research. The most pressing limitations were time, illness, festivals, and the language barrier between myself and the community members.

The first week of the field school was spent acclimating to the surroundings and learning about purpose and methods of researching ethnographies. I had hoped to choose my topic right after my arrival; however, choosing a topic did not come as easily as I thought and would have liked. It was only at the end of the first week my topic was chosen. After choosing a topic, the second week was spent formulating interview guides, creating a questionnaire, translating the forms from English, getting to know community members, and going to markets. In reality, out

of the full month, only about two weeks were spent collecting data, after the days spent being bound to the hostel or to bed were subtracted as a result of illness. Many hours were used getting to know the manager and workers at Moksha hostel which also houses a restaurant, only to have my informants fall ill during our interview time and they were unable to even respond to an electronic questionnaire due to the severe illness which befell them. Although more information is always beneficial in ethnographic research, the amount of information received is detail rich. The festivals that took place during the length of the field school were both a boon and a hindrance. They provided a clearer glimpse in the profound depths of the food culture pool by showing what is not eaten often; however, because of the short amount of time, it was difficult to distinguish between what was an everyday food or occurrence and what was more for the festival. What is more authentic? Furthermore, my inability to speak Spanish with any semblance of proficiency as well as the lack of people who speak English with proficiency proved to be a formidable obstacle.

All of the forms used to gather data had a Spanish translation, but I required a translator to be present during my interviews, if the community member did not speak English, in order to understand, clarify, and pose follow up questions. The translators were spread quite thin throughout the whole group which made scheduling and gathering data to be arduous.

Throughout the two and a half weeks researching, I tried to maintain a neutral position concerning the research to minimize biases created by my assumptions. Constant self-analysis was needed, as well as deep personal reflection, to confront my biases. Even with my frequent self-appraisals, I still assumed geography would play a more significant role in differentiating between the coast and mountains. I did not even consider disease to be a contributing factor, especially since in the beginning my focus was on geographies such as roads, the ocean, and the

proximity to larger cities. This assumption caused me to overlook what the research was telling me because it did not seem to fit the mold I had chosen. Even though I had told myself I would let the research responses guide me, I resisted for a couple of days. After I recognized the prevalence of disease as a major contributing factor to the food culture of Julcán, I reevaluated the direction of my research mid-way through and decided to actively include the importance of disease in my ethnography.

Literature Review:

The area of research surrounding culture and food is still relatively unexplored, and further research is necessary to understand more not only about the coast and mountains, but specific regions and towns as well as Peru as a nation. The implications for this brief ethnography as well as future research and ethnographies are substantial. This research could help to understand another aspect of Peruvian culture, help policymakers and community members to understand the broader picture surrounding food consumption as well as the positive and negative consequences, and encourage people to eat more locally produced, healthier foods rather than export or import less nutritious foods.

The concept of food culture in relation to access is studied throughout the world, but there is a dearth of information relating specifically to Peru. Research such as “nutrition science too often erases the cultural dimensions of food,” and with such eradication comes a loss in the understanding of cultural norms, symbolism, and overall significance (Murchison, pg. 53). Much of the research concerning food has to do with traditional medical systems which use medicinal plants than the consumption of everyday food. If they discuss Peruvian food consumption, they detail the migration of Peruvian food into other countries or high-end Peruvian cooking. Some examples of such research are “Traditional Medicinal Plant Use in Northern Peru...” (Bussmann

and Sharon, 2006), "Peru's image as a culinary destination" (Nelson, 2016), and "The Transnational Networks of Cultural Commodities: Peruvian Food in San Francisco" (Brain, 2014).

What seems to be missing is more information on where the food is coming from, how smaller communities are cooking and obtaining their food, and what the individuals who live in the mountains and on the coast have to do to get food. Scholars do not seem to emphasize the importance culture plays on what people eat, how they cook, how they choose what to eat, or what their beliefs are surrounding nutriment. The following quote from Daniel Philippon details the importance of culture on research relating to access, diseases, and nutriment.

The food that people produce and eat, therefore, is the most basic expression of both their culture and their relationship to the environment. What individuals and cultures consume is partly determined by the environments in which they live, of course, but food is also a matter of choice, an expression of cultural narratives and desires. Moreover, culture, environment and consumption are in a dynamic relationship, shifting and evolving at different points in time and place (Philippon, pg. 6, 2018).

It is my desire for this ethnography to serve as a call to action for more ethnographers to commence research on food culture throughout Peru.

Findings:

Bodegas. I conclude that bodegas play less of a role in the community than their visible presence portrays. There are three markets and thirty-two bodegas. The highest concentration of bodegas lies in the central-most part of town with a total of eighteen. Although they are found almost on every block with large signs advertising the products they sell such as Coca-Cola or *Circa de Ti* (ice-cream), their quantity does not accurately reflect their significance in Julcán or Huanchaco.

According to my data people in both Julcán and Huanchaco buy staples from bodegas if they forgot to get something at the market in Trujillo or if they ran out of a necessary item such as rice.

Food as a Symbol of Social Status. Food is a way for people to demonstrate social status. What one eats can show the social stratification within a community and where one eats is indicative of status as well. Women 1 and 2 stated that *cuy* (guinea pig) is a delicacy, so they do not serve it to the townspeople as much as they do the tourists or people who work in Julcán but those who live in Trujillo and come to Julcán for business. This may be because guinea pig is expensive and those who live in Julcán may not always be able to afford it. Their restaurant was a place where community members went to “celebrate” good news or “splurge” for a party. It is not an everyday eatery for community members. In Huanchaco, *La Otra Cosa* is a vegetarian restaurant owned by Man 1 and *El Jardín* the location of work for Woman 3; both are places where the community eats alongside tourists. Based on observation, people in Julcán eat less frequently at restaurants than people in Huanchaco, but the reasons for this have yet to become completely clear. However, money plays a role in one’s ability to eat outside the family home.

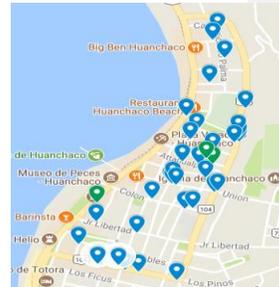


Figure 2 - Map of Bodegas and Markets (Blue = Bodega and Green = Market)

Role of Tradition. Traditional methods of food preparation seem to differ in these two communities. When asked about the traditional methods of cooking in both towns and if they are important in the food culture of each respective community, Man 1 simply stated “no”, when talking about his. He believes traditional methods of cooking are not important in Huanchaco, and Woman 3 holds the same opinion as Man 1. Woman 3 explained that the only time she, or the people she associates with, use the traditional methods are when they are cooking for a large number of people or if someone is too poor to afford gas. However, in Julcán the stigma surrounding wood as a means of cooking only for the poor or large quantities of food, such as for a festival, are not present. Women 1 and 2 stated they use “eucalyptus wood” for their daily cooking, and only use “gas in emergencies.” They repeatedly emphasized the use of eucalyptus wood rather than any wood or an unspecified wood which denotes the deep cultural significance of the specific wood. There are blatant associations between the use of gas and higher socioeconomic status in Huanchaco, but these associations do not seem to be present in Julcán.

Local vs. Global Perspectives and Desired Foods. As a coastal town, Huanchaco is recognized for the fresh seafood it produces. Julcán is known for the amount of chicken and rice they consume. When asked “what do people in Huanchaco eat typically? In your opinion, is the food in Huanchaco different or similar to the food in the mountains? Why or why not?”, Man 1 stated people eat “seafood in Huanchaco” and “pollo [*chicken*] in the mountains.” When asked the same question in Julcán (substituting Huanchaco for Julcán in the question), the responses were in line with what I observed people eating in Huanchaco: fish, potatoes, yucca, and rice.

One question I posed to the individuals I interviewed as well as those I chatted with on the streets was “are there foods you wish were sold in the markets or bodegas here in Huanchaco/Julcán? If yes, what are they and why are they not sold here?” In Huanchaco people

seemed to desire dishes from other countries, with one notable exception: woman 3 stated she wanted a soup titled *sopatiolla* consisting of “bread dumplings with garbanzo and olives and turkey.” All the ingredients to make the soup are available in Huanchaco, but she wanted the soup prepared and sold in the market. Man 1 stated he did not need anything in particular because what is sold in the markets in Trujillo is “okay here for me,” but then he later said he wanted dishes such as “crepes,” “falafel,” and “desayuno (breakfast)... from Holland”. The overall theme of their desired foods points towards a globalized food culture featuring prepared dishes rather than solely ingredients being a reflection of their wants. Perhaps this desire for dishes from other countries is a byproduct of increased tourism. The two women from the restaurant in Julcán, as well as the woman who owns the produce shop, stated they wanted specific items rather than dishes. Women 1 and 2 want “fish,” “rice,” “carrots,” “onions,” “celery,” “peppers,” “oil” and “sugar” in bulk. The fact the above items are all ingredients rather than already cooked dishes points to a more localized, grassroots food culture. Besides fresh “ceviche,” a dish made from seafood that is cooked in the acidity of lime juice, no one expressed a desire for specific dishes which directly contrasts the desires of coastal town Huanchaco. Perhaps what each town wants is what they cannot easily obtain, and the tourism in both locations seems to fuel the desire for food from other locations.

Disease. When I commenced my ethnographic research, I did not think about diseases or their effect on access. I thought geography would play a more significant role in the overall food culture of Julcán and Huanchaco. However, disease unwittingly plays a role in the overall access to food in Huanchaco because much of the food comes from Julcán. It was only in Julcán the topic of disease was brought up, and so because of the frequency in which the subject arose it requires its own discussion. People from Huanchaco buy meat and produce which originates

from Julcán, and consumers from Julcán buy from Trujillo. This constant two-way exchange fosters the spread of disease through both animal products and fresh produce. Community members in Julcán seem to be more aware of the presence of disease in general as well as how to avoid spreading diseases; this issue has not been eradicated. According to the seven community members, the most pressing diseases and issues surrounding food are...

1. *El Carbunco Sintomático* (Anthrax)
2. *Edema Maligno* (Malignant Edema)
3. *El Huanglongbing* (Citrus Greening)
4. *Moscas de la Fruta* (Fruit Flies)
5. *Plaga Roedores* (Rodent Plague)
6. *Cólera Porcino* (Swine Fever)

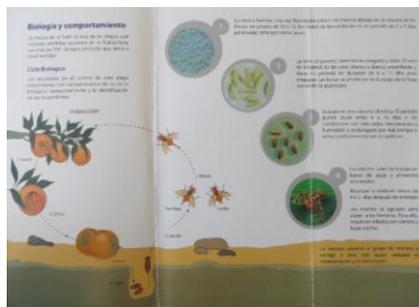


Figure 3 - Description and Process of Moscas de la Fruta

Transmission of some of these issues or diseases to humans, such as Anthrax, can occur. These diseases and plagues make it so that some of the produce has to be thrown out or animals put

down, and their meat disposed of properly. The abovementioned issues lead to a loss of income as a result of the inedible nature of the livestock, fruits, vegetables, and legumes. If the symptoms or signs are not caught before shipment or do not present themselves until after further contamination, then the disease or plague continues to spread. It can be logically inferred that the reason Julcán is more



Figure 4 - Rodent Plague

aware of such issues is that it is an agricultural province where food originated from, while Huanchaco and Trujillo are cities with much less agriculture.

However, the problem is not confined exclusively to one province or the other. The six abovementioned diseases, plagues, and pests affect the overall food culture of both towns by limiting the access they both have to health aliments.

Conclusion:

Geography seems to play much less of a role than I had initially thought it would when it comes to accessing nutriments. People in Julcán have access to the same foods as people in Trujillo, but they travel much longer to obtain these foods. Thus, they buy in bulk in Trujillo and drive three hours to go back up to Julcán. Bodegas do not seem to play a vital role in the food culture of either town, but that does not mean they are insignificant; they play a minor role. Diseases, plagues, and pests contribute significantly to the shaping of food culture by affecting what can be sold, bought, and eaten on both the coast and in the mountains. Because of the touristic nature of Huanchaco, the town is connected on a large scale to the rest of the globe than Julcán. Undercurrents of social hierarchy based on dish consumption or location of food consumption flow through the towns. Traditional modes of food preparation are more common in Julcán than Huanchaco but are still found in both locations.

My aim is that this ethnography will be a springboard for further research and will be read by community members and officials of both Julcán and Huanchaco and act as a catalyst for understanding the food culture found in both locations.

References:

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Appendix:

Table 1: The following is a table created from the analysis of the interviews, questionnaires, and discussions. The foods listed are ones which my informants referenced most frequently throughout the research process.

Key	
Yes = ✓	No = x

	Julcán		Huanchaco		Where is it Mostly Grown?
	Grown in Situ?	Eaten Frequently?	Grown in Situ?	Eaten Frequently?	
Carrots	✓	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Celery	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Arroz	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Yucca	x	x	✓	✓	Trujillo
Papas	✓	✓	x	✓	Julcán
Oca	✓	✓	x	x	Julcán
Sheep	✓	✓	x	x	Julcán
Quinoa	✓	x	x	x	Julcán
Peppers	x	✓	✓	✓	Trujillo
Corn	✓	✓	✓	✓	Julcán
Carne	✓	x	x	✓	Julcán
Goat	✓	✓	x	x	Julcán
Beans	✓	✓	✓	✓	Julcán Trujillo
Pollo	✓	✓	✓	✓	Julcán Trujillo Huanchaco
Cuy	✓	x	✓	x	Julcán Huanchaco



Figure 6 - River Fish



Figure 7 - Oca



Figure 8 - Produce at a Market

Campaña de Vacunación contra Carbuco sintomático y Edema maligno (Pierna negra)

- 1 El Carbuco sintomático es una enfermedad MORTAL que afecta a bovinos, ovinos y caprinos. Los animales enfermos cojean, presentan hinchazón en la zona afectada, que al palparla crepita como si se arrugara un papel.
- 2 Para proteger tus animales, hazlos vacunar por los vacunadores autorizados por el SENASA.
- 3 Moviliza y comercializa a tus animales siempre que hayan sido vacunados y portando el Certificado Sanitario de Tránsito Interno.
- 4 Si sospechas de esta enfermedad comunícate urgente con el personal del SENASA de tu localidad o al teléfono gratuito: 0800 - 10125.

¡JUNTOS LOGRAREMOS PREVENIR EL CARBUCO SINTOMÁTICO!

Campaña de vacunación:
 Del: _____ al: _____
 Oficina del SENASA: _____

Figure 9 - Description of Carbuco Sintomatico and Edema Maligno

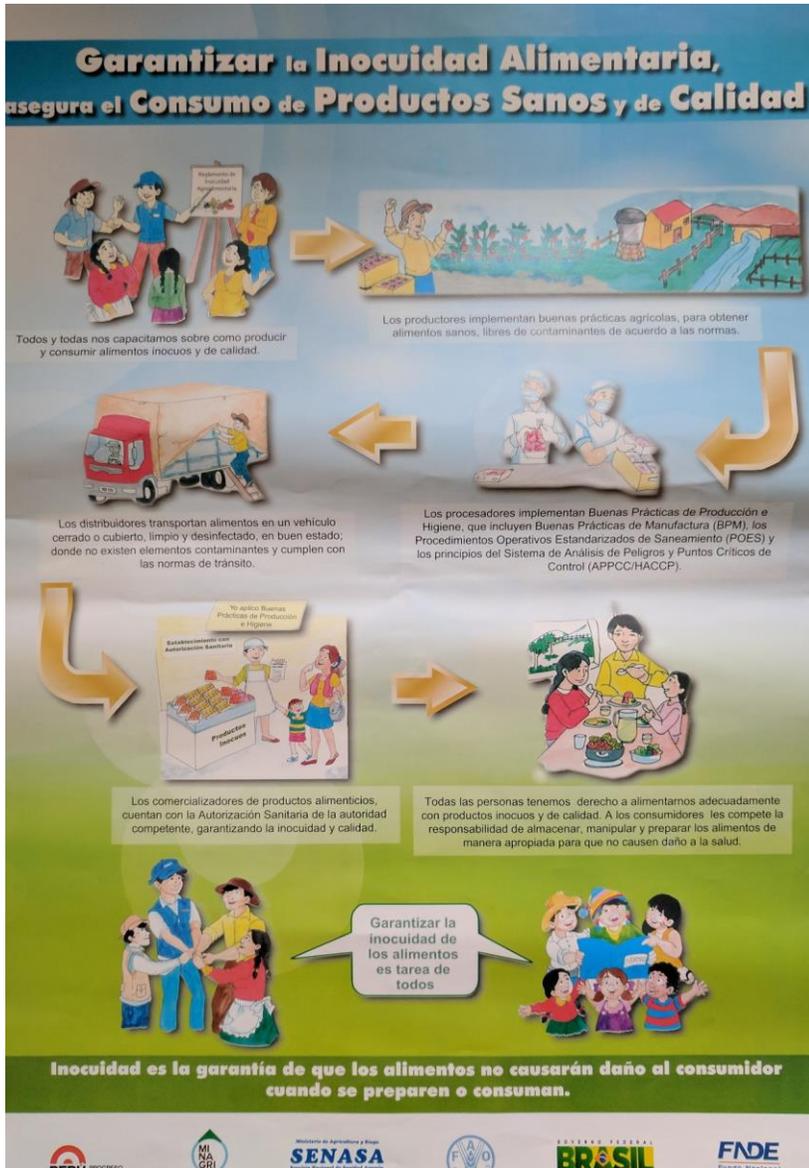


Figure 10 - Disease Prevention Poster *I would put these photos throughout your paper, not just at the end. Make sure to strategically place them, and say something like 'see Figure 10, etc....' as you are talking.*