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INFORMAL DYNAMICS OF FAMILY AGRIBUSINESS IN A TERRITORY: THE CASE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF SANTA CRUZ DO SUL — RS/BRAZIL

DINÂMICA INFORMAL DO AGRONEGÓCIO FAMILIAR EM UM TERRITÓRIO: O CASO DO MUNICÍPIO DE SANTA CRUZ DO SUL - RS / BRASIL

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Abstract

This article aims at analyzing the concrete and contextual conditions that lead family farmers to invest in informal agribusiness processes. One of the alternatives that has been used throughout history is the processing of raw materials (especially food), based on the know-how passed from generation to generation among family farmers. For this research to be empirically conducted, the territory of Santa Cruz do Sul was used. This research used the theoretical assumptions rooted in the bases of historical dialectical materialism as a method. Thus, it points out conflicts and contradictions in informal food processing activities as a relevant sociocultural and economic reference for the territory. Additionally, it analyzes sanitary requirements and the traditions of food production, processing, consumption, and commercialization. It was possible to verify that the informality of family agribusinesses is not simply a transitory situation — what provides sustainability, autonomy, and viability is the system of production and processing of raw materials and diversified commercialization, which includes production and reproduction strategies of the families. In the context of this research, informality is presented as resistance. It is manifested as a reflection factor in relation to the transformations brought about by the global mechanisms of domination.

Keywords: Informal family agribusiness. Family farming. Rural fairs. Agribusiness laws.

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar as condições concretas e contextuais que levam os agricultores familiares a investirem nos processos informais do agronegócio. Uma das alternativas que vem sendo utilizada ao longo da história é o processamento de matérias-primas (principalmente alimentos), a partir do know-how passado de geração em geração entre os agricultores familiares. Para que esta pesquisa fosse conduzida empiricamente, foi utilizado o território de Santa Cruz do

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Sul. Esta pesquisa teve como método os pressupostos teóricos enraizados nas bases do materialismo histórico dialético. Assim, aponta conflitos e contradições nas atividades informais de processamento de alimentos como relevante referencial sociocultural e econômico para o território. Além disso, analisa os requisitos sanitários e as tradições de produção, processamento, consumo e comercialização de alimentos. Foi possível verificar que a informalidade do agronegócio familiar não é simplesmente uma situação transitória - o que proporciona sustentabilidade, autonomia e viabilidade é o sistema de produção e beneficiamento de matérias-primas e comercialização diversificada, que inclui estratégias de produção e reprodução das famílias. No contexto desta pesquisa, a informalidade se apresenta como resistência. Manifesta-se como fator de reflexão em relação às transformações ocasionadas pelos mecanismos globais de dominação.

Palavras-chave: Agronegócio familiar informal. Agricultura familiar. Feiras rurais. Leis do agronegócio.

Introduction

This research aimed at analyzing the dynamics of informality of family agribusiness in the context of a territory. In this research, family farming is understood as a social category of production, included and acknowledged by society for its material and immaterial contributions.

It is essential to find an understanding of how social actors are mobilized in a territory and how they build their life strategies and the different ways they face daily difficulties. In particular, family farming has been seen in many studies as an element of analysis due to the consequences of the processes of capitalist restructuring and the market globalization, as well as the strong economic and social vulnerability to which it has been subjected.

The priority of this research is the option for informality, and this is justified by an attempt to understand this very significant universe — after all, more than 60% of the agribusinesses existing in the rural territory of Santa Cruz do Sul/RS are informal and, in a way, invisible to the eyes of capital. Therefore, this research aimed to understand the social, economic and cultural strategies, the meanings, the motivations, the concrete and contextual conditions that influence family farmers to venture into informality in their agribusiness processes. Informal Rural Family Agribusinesses (IRFAs) are understood in this research as those managed by a family group, but which do not comply with all formal obligations required by competent agencies.

In this sense, the territorial division of this research was carried out based on the experiences of Informal Rural Family Agribusinesses (IRFAs) existing in the territory of Santa Cruz do Sul, which is located in the Central Eastern region of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

Analyses of the quality of food have become increasingly frequent in the national and international scenarios, because food has a direct relationship with the well-being and health of people, in addition to having a direct relationship with the development of territories. Thus, it is necessary to understand how some public institutions and advisory entities operate, as well as the conflicts and contradictions that arise in the relationship with family agribusinesses.

In recent decades, especially after the 1990s, these activities have become of greater socioeconomic importance for families and also for local economies, especially due to the decentralized way in which they are organized. According to Kalnin (2004), it was in the 1990s that projects to promote family farming began to focus on the implementation of agribusinesses as a possible alternative for income and employment, and for improving the living conditions of farmers.

In this context, family agribusinesses have faced some limitations and contradictions related to production, access to markets and legislation, due to all related requirements. The main limitations faced refer to the complex and intense bureaucracy to adapt to sanitary, environmental and productive standards.

The development of territories encompasses a group of actions and tends to stress economic themes, with the intention of developing activities associated with industrial and services processes, with an emphasis on urban dynamics and on giving great importance to the capacity to produce standardized goods and services at reduced costs, using competitiveness principles and models with homogenizing characteristics.

In the rural context, this logic has been introduced since the 1950s, with the implementation of the conservative modernization model. According to Delgado (2012), one of the actions of the

liberal project to strengthen agribusiness was the incentive through public policies for export-oriented agriculture, aiming to obtain growing surpluses in the trade balance. Thus, different spaces and strategies are experienced for the development of rural communities, for agribusiness focused on the production of commodities on a large scale, and for family farming aimed at food production, referenced to small scales, diversification of production, and short marketing chains.

Analysis of the development of a given territory also requires an understanding of sovereignty and food security strategies, promoting alternatives that can provide quality life and income generation, respecting the specificities and heterogeneities of territories and social players, as highlighted by Abrandh (2013) on the need to mobilize different sectors of society to promote Food and Nutritional Security. Understanding the territory in its social and historical process, and with the relativization of the conventional scientific idea and the rationality of laws, has been a contradictory theme and practice for several players involved in these development processes. It is in this context that reflection on feeding and the quality of food that reaches consumers can be found, in a perspective of recreated human connection between farmers, consumers and institutions.

Methodological procedures

This research aimed at deepening the reflection based on data obtained directly from Informal Family Agribusinesses, social organizations, and institutions, to analyze the historical logics and the issues that are involved in this practice of resistance pervaded by little-debated contradictions.

As a method of analysis, the theoretical assumptions rooted in the bases of historical dialectical materialism were used as a reference for the interpretation of the historical production processes of family farming and its social conflicts.

The approach of these agribusinesses was based on the definition of the research project. The first step was the observation of activities at rural fairs to understand the dynamics of commercialization. The second step was talking to the sellers informally. This was the most delicate phase, because the subject of informality leads to certain discomfort. Arrangements and interviews took place at random with farmers. Information was collected during visits to properties and conversations at fairs.

The interviews occurred by means of a semi-structured questionnaire with open and closed-ended questions, so that it was possible to better understand the reality and detect the limits, contradictions and reasons that justify the permanence of these agribusinesses in informality. Nine farmers were interviewed.

In relation to private entities and public institutions, the criterion of choice was to prioritize those that have a closer relationship with farmers and rural fairs. There was no intention to identify the “guilty ones” in this process — the main objective was related to the confused and contradictory claims that lead institutions to “pressure” the IRFAs towards formalization.

Family farming and food production

The concepts and characterization that are part of the reflection of this research aim at contributing to the understanding of the context of food production, its contradictions, and the power relations that are involved in different scenarios, with a focus on family farming and its informal processing activities.

At the same pace as the modernization of agriculture was intensifying, the practice of agriculture was extrapolating its natural productive capacities, with the artificialization of the environment and the simplification of production systems. According to Santos (2003, p. 93), “[...] the territory is used based on its additions of science and technique, and these characteristics define it as a new geographical environment”. In this context, many production systems inherent to family farming have been disrupted, and components of natural resources have been degraded and partially compromised the local economies and expertise.

Thus, food processing plays an important role for self-consumption and for these local markets, based on the possibility of expanding food conservation. Goodman (2003) points out that there is a tendency to oppose the current model of mass production and consumption and the long food chains, typical of the globalized economy.

In agriculture, the practice of informality has a wide range of experiences that have been empirically constituted outside the formal processes of countryside-city relations. It was in the mid-

1970s that the term “informal sector” came to be seen more analytically. According to Theodoro (2000), the International Labour Organization (ILO) started to treat the “informal sector” concept as a new explanatory tool for a secular practice, which consisted of low-productivity economic activities, which were developed without complying with legal norms, and that used marginal spaces of the market.

These practices make up a legacy of knowledge identified by many authors as know-how. Brandão (2015, p. 16) identifies it as traditional knowledge, constituting a broad indicator of the level of cultural evolution of man with the environment, and the generation of knowledge happens through this interaction based on successive and dynamic processes. In this sense, informal agribusiness is related to traditional knowledge and brings to light the possibility and the need to seek an egalitarian dialogue between social players.

Family agribusiness: a strategy of resistance

Family farmers often resort to product processing practices in order to add value to their production. According to the database of the Family Agribusiness State Program (PEAF), 1,439 family agribusinesses were enrolled in Rio Grande do Sul in 2013. Usually, these processing activities end up having a relation with entities and institutions for bureaucratic support or technical assistance. Gazolla (2009) comments about the lack of motivation that farmers’ organizations have in relation to formal institutions, considering that many of these organizations prefer to remain informal, whereas formal institutions aim to integrate these organizations into formal standards for food processing.

In this research, agribusinesses that do not fully comply with legal requirements are identified as informal. It is known that other terms are used to characterize these agribusinesses, such as “illegal”, “clandestine”, among others. According to Wilkinson and Mior (1999), it is necessary to draw a distinction between informal and illegal, because their products are not prohibited. It is an activity whose production processes do not fully comply with current standards. Understanding the informality of these activities, based on the limitations and contradictions that exist between farmers, organizations, and formal institutions, is relevant for understanding the future trends and possibilities of family farming in the perspective of regional development.

According to Schneider (2010, p. 121), the transformation in the production units is related to the strategies that interfere in increasing or decreasing the dependence on the markets.

In this sense, food processing in small agribusinesses has become an important strategy for family farming, as is the case with the IRFAs in the municipality of Santa Cruz do Sul. According to Gazolla (2009), small agribusinesses are of increasing importance in some regions where family farming predominates. However, family agribusinesses have encountered legal barriers, as pointed out by Guimarães (2001), when considering that sanitary regulations present several obstacles, something that can be observed given the high percentage of informality in this area.

According to data from Emater/RS (2019), there are more than 3,500 family agribusinesses registered with PEAF/RS, and just over 1,500 of these agribusinesses are formalized. This demonstrates how important it is to analyze this scenario, its meanings, its contradictions and motivations.

Family farming is directly related to the context of government public policies, with the creation and implementation of SUASA (Unified Animal Health Care System), especially after the regulation of the law through Decree no. 5,741, from March 2006, and in Rio Grande do Sul with the passing of Law no. 13,825, from November 8, 2011, created by SUSAF (State Unified System of Family, Artisanal and Small Agribusiness Health), regulated in 2012. These two systems, SUASA and SUSAF, establish the statutory basis for the municipalities that want to implement the sanitary equivalence of the municipal inspection services (SIM), enabling the commercialization of the products beyond the municipal borders.

Thus, these systems are introduced as scientific models “legitimized by society”, without presenting an alternative of coexistence for situations that are not mentioned in these traditional models. For Setton (2002, p. 69), “coexistence can occur in a hybrid and diversified field of identity codes and archetypes, consolidating itself in a modern socialization process based on various reference standards”.

Therefore, this research sought theoretical elements on the subject of food to support the reflection on the contradictions existing in the models underway in society and empirical situations

referenced in concrete practices experienced by family farmers in the territory of Santa Cruz do Sul/RS.

Informal Dynamics of IRFAs in the Territory of Santa Cruz do Sul

The municipality of Santa Cruz do Sul is located in the center of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, 155 km from Porto Alegre. According to data from IBGE (2017), the area of the municipality's territory is 733.409 km². The population estimate for 2019 was that it should exceed 130 thousand people. According to information from the Office of Agriculture, the municipality has 2 formalized associations and 6 agribusinesses that sell their products at fairs in the municipality. Additionally, there are 7 more certified agribusinesses in the municipality that do not sell their products at fairs.

Currently, the municipality has approximately 22 informal agribusinesses that sell their products at fairs, and another 4 that do not sell anything at fairs. Considering only the agribusinesses and associations that have some kind of link with the municipality, it is clear that out of a total of 41 agribusinesses, more than half are not formalized.

Santa Cruz do Sul/RS, in this research, is characterized as a territory for having entanglements pervaded by power relations built over time. According to Santos (2004, p. 47), "the territory is the ground plus the population, that is, an identity, the fact and the feeling of belonging to what belongs to us. The territory is the basis of work, residence, material and spiritual exchanges and life, on which it influences".

The analysis of informal agribusinesses in this territory is an attempt to understand these farmers who opt for the informality of their food processing activities and who are not "recognized" for not submitting to laws that do not suit them. According to Weisheimer (2013), invisibility, from a social point of view, refers to circumstances in which certain subjects are imperceptible or invisible in the social relations of their territory, as a social action that does not see another, their social existence and what is related to that existence. Thus, it is evident that there is an impasse to be solved and that transforms into several elements and contradictions that were analyzed based on the field research.

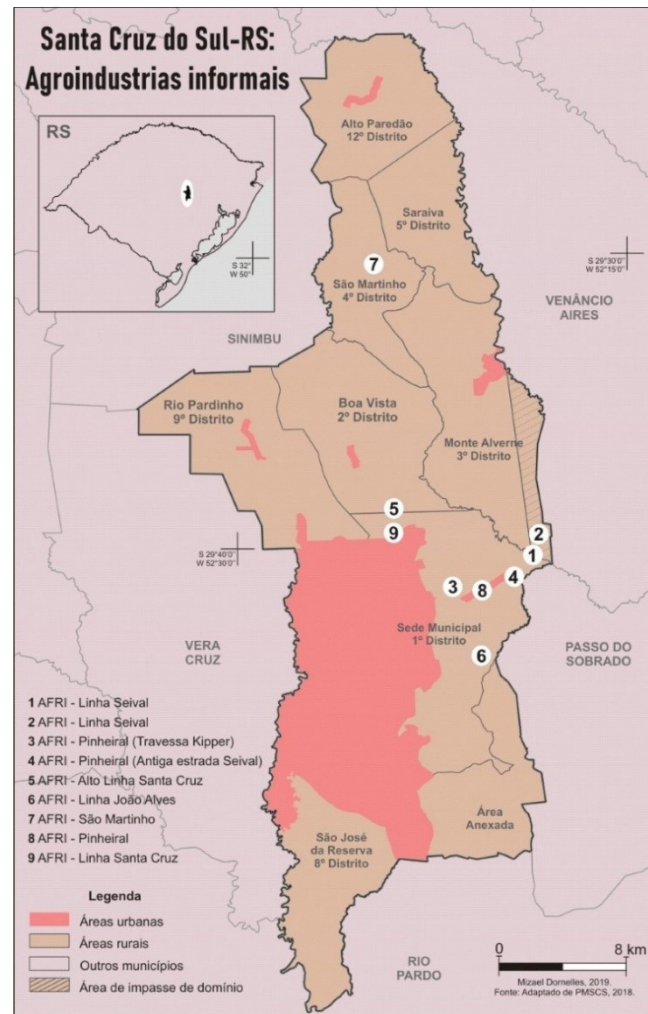
Thus, the informality of food processing will be analyzed based on interviews with informal family farmers.

To protect the identity, the numbered acronyms **IRFA** and **E** will be used to identify the farmers and representatives of the institutions interviewed, respectively.

Results and discussion

In addition to the economic aspects of IRFAs, these experiences represent an exercise in autonomous management with participation in the local economy and contribute to the development of the territory. According to Schumpeter (1997), the meaning of the economic process as the operation of its mechanism or organism at a given stage of development can have different reasons, but the meaning is always the satisfaction of needs.

Thus, the satisfaction of needs in this type of economic activity transcends market aspects. Sociocultural aspects are manifested from the relationships of belonging and protagonism established in this space.

Image 1: Identification of informal agribusinesses researched

Source: Municipal Government of Santa Cruz do Sul, 2015. Preparation/adaptation: WEBER (2019).

In the agribusinesses visited, the interviews revealed that there is strong influence and participation of the family in the maintenance process of these agribusinesses and that the management is carried out in a shared fashion. These characteristics are confirmed by MIOR (2005), when stating that rural family businesses produce, process and/or transform part of their agricultural and/or livestock production, seeking, above all, the production of value that happens in commercialization.

There is a predominance of women in the processing activities analyzed in this research, and control is carried out by older people who have expertise (know-how) as family inheritance. The age of the nine people who participated in the interviews range from 47 to 70 years, with the majority being older than 60. Some are already retired, and others are very close to retirement. However, the option to stay in rural areas has a lot to do with the way and quality of life, as stated by Winckler, Boufleuer, Ferreti and De Sá (2016, p. 191) when considering that the lifestyle habits and culture of their region influence the features of elderly people in the rural environment and that the quieter activities of daily life can be important elements for healthy aging, compared to urban activities.

According to IBGE (2017 Agricultural Census), the percentage of producers over 65 years of age has increased from 18% to 23% in the last 11 years. Thus, the rural population is aging, and the number of people employed in rural establishments is decreasing.

The prospect or the need to formalize rural family agribusinesses decreases the likelihood of continuing this activity, according to the respondents. Abramovay (1998) believes that succession in family farming involves more than the continuity of properties — rural succession involves the destiny of several regions, due to the strong social and cultural role played by family farming.

Another issue that draws attention is education: seven out of the nine people interviewed completed basic education, and two completed higher education (the other remains in the property for family reasons). Thus, low education and advanced age are significant limits for a possible or necessary change in the way of life and/or work option.

Socioeconomic characteristics of informal family agribusinesses

The family units that were analyzed in this research are made up of small properties that do not exceed one rural fiscal module, according to Law no. 8,629/1993, Art. 4, items II and III. The workforce is mainly family-based, and the activities are quite diverse, typical of regional culture.

The definition of the food processing activity was one of the first difficulties found in the interviews. The strategy focuses on products that are part of the production system. According to Bianchini (2015), in family farming, food processing is used to further constitute a mix of products that are part of a portfolio and circulate in local and regional markets, and it is a matter of complementarity between one activity and another.

The interviewees affirm that there was an incentive from the institutions for diversified production and for food processing. Interviewee **IRFA 3**'s impression is that at the beginning it happened nicely, but as it became an interesting business, inspection showed up, pressing for the formalization of agribusinesses and the choice of one product for processing.

This fact reinforces that viability is not only connected to one or two products. The Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS, 2014) reinforced the idea that family farming is like "a form of production in which the interaction between management and work prevails; it is family farmers who manage the production process, emphasizing diversification and using family labor". In this context, there is a certain contradiction related to support and advisory entities and institutions: on the one hand, there is the promotion of diversification and food processing; on the other hand, there is the pressure for formalization that occurs as a certain induction to the specialization of production.

In the agribusinesses that are part of this research, the working time of the processing activities ranges between 12 and 40 years. Changing this logic without plausible justification has no understanding or agreement from these farmers.

In all cases of the people interviewed, the activities were learned or have the influence from family members, and the concern with keeping some processing principles is evident, such as, for example, avoiding the use of preservatives in order to consume and offer products that have the natural flavor and aroma of the raw materials. According to Interviewee **IRFA 6**, "keeping the taste of fruits in processed products has some secrets. Sometimes, to keep the strong flavor of the fruit, the peel of the fruit is used, or part of the peel, depending on the fruit". The search for information is also highlighted by Interviewee **IRFA 6**: "we want to do new things and try new processes". Therefore, there is a connection between empirical knowledge (know-how) and scientific knowledge. The main issue is the sanitary quality of the products, and this is perfectly compatible and acceptable to the interviewed farmers.

In this sense, the Report of the Subcommittee on Family Agribusinesses of the Committee on Agriculture, Livestock and Cooperatives of the State Legislature (RDI 87/2017) points out the concern with the current legislation related to agribusiness. Based on this Report, it is possible to see crucial issues for family agribusinesses in a perspective of territorial development, pervaded by different interests and contradictions.

Among the interviewees, eight have specific infrastructures, and only one performs the processing inside the main residence. The structures in the properties are quite diverse, because the material resources and existing structures are normally used, and adaptations are made according to operational convenience and the types of products. Interviewee **IRFA 7** points out that it is not feasible to follow all the rules and states: "the way they want, there is no way for me to legalize (formalize) all products".

Thus, it is clear that formalization does not only have to do with physical structure; it also affects sociocultural and economic issues. There are laws and models for each type of processing, but for these farmers these models are not always suited to the realities of the properties. "We are tired of hearing them say that what we are doing is wrong", says Interviewee **IRFA 7**.

This type of alert should serve to sensitize the parties involved in processing and inspection activities (the Government), because these agribusinesses are part of the economies of the territories. According to Schneider and Grisa (2008), production for consumption includes the food

needs of the families; however, some foods that are not produced by a family are sought outside the property.

Regarding the gross revenue of agribusinesses, this research reveals that it is quite varied and also depends on the type of product that is processed and the origin of the raw material, depending on the relationship with the production costs. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account that commercialization at a fair involves other products from the production system, and that they also undergo processing in the property. For an analysis of gross revenue, immersion in the production system would be necessary, with a specific methodology that could correctly handle information on the parts and the whole of production and processing.

It should be noted that the gross revenue does not include products that are consumed by the families — self-consumption. As mentioned by Schneider and Grisa (2008), with the production of food for self-consumption, a family saves money, as it does not have to spend it buying food — equivalent in currency — in supermarkets.

Regarding structures and equipment, the capital used for food processing of the IRFAs in this study comes from themselves in most agribusinesses. Opinions against financing are strong, as not incurring debts is a clear intention.

This indicates that the proposed simplifications, as in the Family Agribusiness Program, did not provide a break from the recommended model, in the sense of “treating the different as different”. Regarding the destination of the products, the data in this research show that more than 90% of what is processed goes to retail, at fairs, local stores or to specific customers upon request. Respondents claim that they have a loyal clientele. Interviewee **IRFA 4** says that “at the fair, one has the right customers for certain products; some of them have been regular customers for more than 20 years”. This relationship of proximity — eye to eye — has an important meaning for both producers and consumers.

Regarding the volume of production and processing, the farmers in this research claim that they have not had significant variations over the years and that there is no interest in increasing it. This matter appears as a contradiction because, in a way, the formalization “forces” the increase in production, and this influences the production logic built by the family.

Table: Factors that restrict the increase in production

Factors that restrict the increase in production*	Number of IRFAs
Investment capital	4
Labor force	1
Saturated market	1
Laws make it difficult	8
Others: land for farming; advanced age.	2

Source: Research data, 2018/19. WEBER (2019).

* Each farmer could choose up to two factors.

It is possible to see that the legislation is considered a major limiting factor, as Interviewee **IRFA 4** says: “the legislation is what concerns me the most. For me to become legal, I need a structure that I don't have; if I plant more, I'll have to have someone to do it for me”. In this case, the farmer combines two factors: the lack of adequate structure and limitation of labor force in the property. “I see that soon the laws will make continuity difficult, so I don't want to invest”, says Interviewee **IRFA 7**.

The choice for this way of life transcends the economic issue of capital accumulation — it has much more to do with a way of life that enables these farmers to have a quality lifestyle, with autonomy, control of their business, and food security of their families and consumers.

Commercialization processes and strategies of informal family agribusinesses

What this research aims to emphasize is that informality is a conscious choice to enable agricultural production to remain active. In the case of fair sellers, commercialization occurs from one to three days a week, in one or more rural fairs, located in different points of the urban space.

“Produce to survive” can be a good summary of what this type of farmer wants, that is, to keep his way of producing, processing, and commercializing, as Interviewee **IRFA 8** points out when saying that he intends to continue processing in his own way, unless prevented by health

surveillance. For these farmers, formalization is not feasible. This does not mean that formalization is of no use to anyone. For many farmers, informality represents transience.

In general, the prices charged for the products are lower than the prices of similar conventional products, for the farmers who are part of this research.

The interviewed farmers expressed discomfort in relation to quality comparison, as they consider their products superior and incomparable. One of the justifications for this is the non-use of various artificial chemical inputs permitted and ruled by legislation, used by conventional companies.

Regarding the use of labels on products, the interviewees affirm that the choice of not labeling them is also considered an advantage, because they know that consumers look for unique products at fairs. Interviewee **E1** says that, in general, consumers associate labeled products as being industrial, and products without labels as being handmade.

The absence of labels, for these farmers, is not related to an intention of omitting information about the composition of the products, but, interestingly, it has to do with a marketing issue with regard to making their products unique.

Perspectives for informal family agribusinesses

According to the interviews conducted in this research, the perspective for the continuity of the processing activity for these IRFAs is quite “nebulous”, as a result of the conflicts and contradictions that are present in this context of disputes and interests. Interviewee **IRFA 9** says that there are few prospects for the coming years: “because if I have to become an agribusiness (formalized), it’s no use. It’s no use, I cannot use my product”. Interviewee **IRFA 7** states that it is not just a matter of choice when he says that “it’s not that I don’t want to; what I said to the Office of Agriculture was: I want you to show me an agribusiness that has become legal in the last three years and that is doing well”. Among the nine farmers interviewed, only one considers the possibility of perhaps undergoing the formalization process.

It is clear that this is not just a violation of current legislation. Formalization is seen as a contradiction, because it does not take into account the reality of these farmers. In addition, they point out that the procedures are not always standardized — in some cases they are contradictory due to interpretations of the law, and others, due to lack of common sense.

Interviewee **IRFA 7** says that he will cancel the processing activity, if there is a requirement for formalization: “Not so much because of the bureaucracy, but because of the inconvenience; for example, if you legalize it today, tomorrow inspection will show up and say: this is wrong, you will have to do it differently... that kind of thing”.

Regarding the meaning of formalizing agribusinesses, Interviewee **IRFA 1** summarizes it: “it is a process that is tiresome from the very beginning due to bureaucracy”. Farmers never deny the importance of having some regulation. Interviewee **IRFA 8** analyzes how long the fairs exist and how problems related to any public health risks are nonexistent. Thus, informality is not only fear of what is “new”, but a choice of resistance.

The farmers’ thoughts on the laws for agribusinesses vary widely. Interviewee **IRFA 1** says that there is a lot of bureaucracy and few incentives, many demands and few solutions. Interviewee **IRFA 2** says that the legislation for family agribusiness is inadequate and more focused on inspecting and punishing than providing support. Pereira and Botelho (2017) point out some contradictions between the norms and the reality of citizens when considering that there is a prompt to believe that the lack of effectiveness of the norm is due to the conduct of the recipients. However, it is essential that it is adjusted to the recipients’ socioeconomic reality, so that it is acknowledged and met.

This research showed that family farmers are not well aware of the legislation for agribusiness, even though they are directly covered by it. According to Pereira and Botelho (2017, p. 117), “thus, the legitimacy of the norms is increasingly questioned, that is, the fundamentals of the norms, their interpretation and application are more important than the procedure of creation”.

Based on the comments of the farmers, the approach of the institutions is always aimed at “encouraging” formalization, and concrete support for informal agribusiness is very limited. Interviewee **IRFA 1**’s opinion is that the Government “only knows how to say what should be done”.

Emater officially carries out rural and social extension work in the municipalities, so it is perfectly understandable that the company should direct its actions to support the formalization of agribusinesses. However, advice for informal agribusinesses is not ruled out, as **E1** comments, “we

know many producers, we've visited many properties that process informally". E1 considers that the topic of formality and informality is quite complex: "...when you enter the production line of a formal agribusiness, there is a need to have longer shelf life, so the use of some preservatives is required, and so on". It also adds the importance of the biological and nutritional quality of products without preservatives and the importance of promoting short chains that sell fresh products that do not need to remain on shelves.

Thus, the discussion on the quality of processed foods should be reconsidered and, perhaps, undergo a new analysis and conceptualization.

According to E2, the benefits of the Government are aimed at those who are formalized or intend to become formalized, and informality suggests clandestine commerce, with direct sale to consumers.

The farmers who participated in this research have no intention of hiding their processing activities: their products are marketed by the farmers themselves in rural fairs, which are public spaces. Based on what E2 says, it is possible to realize that while there is talk about clandestinity, there is acknowledgement of the difficulties related to formalization, "it's limiting, it's problematic because there is this idea that Brazilian legislation is made to prevent small businesses from becoming solid, it is made for the big businesses, and the small ones are required the same as the big ones". In the case of processing of products of animal origin, the laws are much stricter due to the greater probability of contamination of products.

Therefore, E1 says that, if the biological and nutritional quality of the processed products is a central issue, it is necessary to define how to measure such quality, because quality of a product can be easily ascertained through laboratory analysis. Interviewee IRFA 4 comments on the quality of the products with a relevant consideration: "look, to put it bluntly, so far there have been no complaints from anyone regarding damaged products or something like that". Thus, what leads consumers to buy certain products in these conditions has a direct relationship with quality.

It is possible to see that prices at the fairs fluctuate when compared to conventional products, and, according to the interviewees, prices are important, but it is the quality (taste, flavor, aroma, and absence of preservatives) of the products that guarantees consumer loyalty. And in these cases, the service life of products is not a major factor as in conventional markets.

For Interviewee IRFA 6, quality of life is essential: "I want my quality of life, that's why I make the best products". He comments that they started to produce everything they are able to produce, and to avoid buying and consuming conventional industrialized products as much as possible. Interviewee IRFA 7 considers that the quality of his products is good because he never uses preservatives. In these cases, based on this farmer's perception, the quality of the products is a contradiction in relation to what is required by the legislation. According to Scarabelot and Schneider (2012), new criteria and requirements are coming in relation to the quality of food:

[...] a contemporary analysis of consumption requires considering the profile of a society that emerges with new demands. Today consumers begin to exercise their citizenship and reflexivity by establishing criteria and demands in relation to the consumption of food in which quality is defined based on knowledge and proximity and not just on normative or legal criteria (SCARABELOT; SCHNEIDER, 2012. p. 111).

This shows that there is consumer concern and that the guarantee of healthy food is not only due to compliance with the standards. The relationship of trust with consumers — eye to eye — is considered a relevant aspect.

Based on these arguments, it is possible to detect some apprehension regarding the concrete possibility that everything that has been built (know-how) over decades can become unfeasible from one moment to the next.

Chart 1 presents a brief summary of the main contradictions between what is presented by institutions/entities, as external propositions, and what farmers (IRFAs) envision as strategies for survival and resistance.

Chart 1: Contradictions in relation to food processing activities

Matters involved	External propositions	Informal agribusinesses
Formalization	Incentive (pressure)	No interest (unfeasible)
Increased production	Incentive	No interest and no conditions
Increased processing	Incentive	No interest and no conditions
Market scope	Incentive	No interest
Diversification	Incentive (rhetoric)	Keep or increase
Sustainability	Incentive (rhetoric)	Typical of family farming
Production system	Little knowledge	Typical of family farming
Revenue	Incentive to increase	Satisfaction in relation to the situation
Quality	Confusing concepts	Satisfaction

Source: Research data, 2018/19. WEBER (2019).

The trend is relatively clear: either one becomes formalized and continues to trade at fairs or commercialization ceases.

These questions intended to know and understand the apprehension of the owners of the IRFAs about the quality of their products have elements that make it possible to understand more clearly the dilemmas, doubts and contradictions. It should be noted that the interviews never attempted to blame people or institutions. There is an understanding of the role of institutions in relation to “obeying the law”, but the statements refer to not understanding the law and the way its enforcement is being proposed or imposed.

In a way, these informal experiences in food production and processing are also resilient, sustainable, safe food systems, with a reasonable diversity of healthy foods for families, belonging to a practice that minimizes waste and environmental problems.

At the global level, there is also a growing concern with food security and environmental issues. As an example, there is Slow Food, a non-governmental organization that, in addition to having noble goals, is also a movement that opposes the tendency of food standardization in the world and defends the need for consumers to be well informed, becoming co-producers. According to this movement, the food we eat must taste good; it must be grown in a clean way, without harming our health, the environment or the animals; and producers must earn what is fair for their work. Taking this global tendency as a reference, it is perfectly possible to say that informal family agribusinesses are much more in line with this tendency than conventional agribusiness models.

To this end, they need to be seen and understood as a social and historical product of a territory, with the particularities and specificities of a context that goes beyond the economic and financial analysis inherent to medium and large economic enterprises.

Final considerations

Informality in this research is not just resistance to a model or to legislation; there is a cultural background involved in these informal food processing processes. In the context of informality, there are several contradictions that imply power relations. The complexity is much greater than what it sounds in the debates, because this is a type of family farmer who produces and processes food, has a harmonious relationship with the environment and with biodiversity, keeps systemic production, has a high degree of resilience, is part of the territory’s economy, and, fundamentally, preserves his culture based on traditional knowledge producing knowledge.

This type of family farmer referred to in this research has a direct relationship with several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in terms of food security, environmental preservation, health and well-being, sustainable consumption and production, among others. Making this way of producing and processing food unfeasible goes against what is envisioned for people, for the planet, and for prosperity.

In this research, it was possible to see that the informality of family agribusinesses is not simply a transitory situation, as pointed out in some studies. What reinforces this statement is that the time of operation of processing activities ranges from 12 to 40 years. Therefore, there is family history and a relationship built with consumers that has been kept over the years. It is possible to see that these informal practices persist even with the presence of obstacles and are an alternative

and a concrete possibility of achieving better economic and social conditions for the farmers' families.

Feasibility, in the case of IRFAs, is in the composition of raw materials and products that are part of sustainable productive arrangements. What provides sustainability, autonomy and viability is the production system and the way of producing. The management of this system, even though it is more complex, is kept under the control by the families, and the strategies adopted have to do with the management of the productive system and with the reproduction strategies of the families. In a way, these informal food processing experiences are characterized by inclusive production systems on a small scale, considering that all respondents have primary production and processing activities that involve family members.

It is known that the rural development project adopted over decades in Brazil has as its main objective the expansion of agribusiness. However, this option has led to increasing social and environmental costs. On the other hand, the advancement of social movements in the countryside has made the need to create a development strategy that prioritizes opportunities for social development and is not restricted to a strictly economic and sectoral perspective increasingly evident.

This article presents signs that production in family farming and food processing is not a transition towards consumerism, individualism, and the domination of natural resources — on the contrary, this way of life is based on human solidarity, environmental sensitivity, and quality life. It seems to us that this must be the path to be followed as a future perspective of sustainable human development and it should be believed that it is possible to make utopias possible.

Attention needs to be drawn to the need for adequate public policies to address these specificities, since, in general numerical terms, the informal food processing sector is more significant in virtually all municipalities of the State.

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