
Family farming resilience in a context of corporate expansion: the case of Santa Catarina, Brazil

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Abstract

Currently, the capital concentration in Global Food System is progressing, and very few corporations control different agriculture value chains. However, the concentration and centralisation processes face barriers in the food system, unlike other economic sectors.

The main reasons for the relative unsuccess of corporations to advance in the food system is their failure to control nature and, consequently, to control some particularities of agricultural production. From the demand side has come up sustainability and quality concerns which hinder the trajectory of modernization of agriculture. One of the consequences is that, despite the advances of agri-industrial complex on the peasants and family farmers, - either surrounding them or squeezing them -, they still resist, and even advance. Due to their capacity to deal with the nature complexity, their strong connections with their communities (embeddedness and resilience) and their capacity to build a strong relationship between public and social actors, family farming is essential to rural development. Family farmers are still are "predominant actors in the global agricultural system" - they are owners of 98% of agricultural properties, 53% of the agricultural land and 53% of the food production in the world.

The family farming presence brings us a question: Is family farming able to remain resisting and even expand despite the advance of corporations? To meet this question, this paper analysed the family farming in the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina. The state stands out due to the presence of peasants and family farmers occupying 92% of the rural properties, 58% of the agricultural land, and reaching 68% of the income. The methodology is a discussion based on literature review and secondary data.

The main results observed in Santa Catarina is that the advance of corporates generates diffuse effects on family agriculture. On the one hand, some of the family farmers do keep going, and the most vulnerable are excluded. On the other hand, part of the farmers is not only able to resist, but also deepens local markets and create new alternative markets (related to ethics, healthy food, sustainability and quality). Therefore, if markets are being deepened and created, it is possible to consider that an evidence that the family household presence remains a viable alternative within agriculture. Additionally, if the family farmers new markets are related to sustainability, social inclusion and economic development, it indicates that family farmers should be a key element to build a new food equation and a sustainable food regime.

Keywords: Family farming, food system, Brazil

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