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# **FOOD TRADE BETWEEN BRAZIL AND SWITZERLAND: PATHWAYS TO SUPPORT FAMILY FARMING AND SUSTAINABILITY**

## **Context**

Food value chains in developing and emerging countries have changed substantially during globalization (Swinnen & Maertens, 2007). Increasing exports of agricultural commodities, the expansion of large-scale farming, and foreign investment in the agrifood sector have been drivers of economic development in several countries (Guinn & Hamrick, 2014). In this context, both positive and negative impacts have been demonstrated. In fact, the agri-economic growth in emerging economies has created opportunities for some, but has failed in terms of guaranteeing equality among food system actors (Guinn & Hamrick, 2014). More specifically, this is subject to opportunity of labour and income in rural areas, but also rural exodus, loss of ethnic-social-diversity, biodiversity, among others. Family farms or small-scale farmers in general, being left out of the commercialization and economic development, often belong to the losers of globalization and export-oriented agricultural developments.

In Switzerland, the dominant small family farms are heavily supported by governmental subsidies (Aerni 2009). Swiss consumers often refer to the logic that products from their country are the best (Lazzarini et al. 2017) and want to support local family farms. In this perception, there is some contradiction with the current practices of importing highly industrialized and large-scale products from the Brazilian agribusiness. The model of supporting sustainable practices inland and depending on large-scale-based commodity imports from abroad must be questioned. In contrary, importing countries should give some thought on how to encourage the inclusion of products from family farms into markets. This should be developed as an attempt to enrich local gastronomy and to stimulate sustainability on a local and a global level. In 2017 the Swiss people voted in favor for a new paragraph in the federal constitution on “Food Security” (art. 104a). This obliges the Swiss Government to create conditions for cross-border trade relations that contribute to the sustainable development of agriculture and food production. In fact, great emphasis was given to reposition family farming at the center of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national agendas during the International Year of Family Farming (FAO, 2014). During this meeting, demands were addressed to the identification of gaps and opportunities to promote a shift towards a more equal and balanced development. Family farmers are very diverse in the activities they develop (Graeub et al. 2018; Knickel et al. 2018) and play a significant role on fighting for eradication of hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting biodiversity, and achieving sustainable development (FAO, 2014). Thus, strengthening the role of family in domestic and international markets may be a key to reach more sustainable perspectives (JISKA et al. 2015). This contrasts with the position of restricting and driving agricultural production towards industrial large-scale monocultures. In countries from MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) some efforts have been developed to enable commercialization of products from family farming. The establishment of several food labels was an important outcome supported by Specialized Meetings about Family farming in MERCOSUR (REAF). Commercialization issues need to be tackled (Jiska et al. 2015; Knickel et al. 2018) and have been severe bottlenecks inhibiting the inclusion of family farmers in local food chains and long-distance trades. However, the Brazilian efforts to recognize and regulate products and to improve regional added-value processing and



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marketing infrastructure with suitable labels have led to expectations for the present time and the nearby future. There is no doubt that expectations are targeted to boundaries that go beyond MERCOSUR.

In this sense, how can food products or food ingredients from family farming practiced in South America reach new markets, such as Switzerland? How can the Swiss economy foster sustainability in developing countries such as Brazil by encouraging imports of family farming products?

## **Methods**

A new research partnership between academics from Brazil (Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados) and Switzerland (Zurich University of Applied Sciences) has been established in 2018 to assess potentials and strategies for sustainable food trade relations between the two countries. In a pre-study the team applied literature reviews, life cycle assessment and hot spot analysis to identify the major key points for sustainable food trade relation. Workshops developed in Brazil and Switzerland has taken place with academic experts, stakeholders from food value chains (producer, exporter and importer) as well as governmental representatives. This led to a holistic view about strategies and hurdles for sustainable trade relations between Brazil and Switzerland and shed light on the promotion of family farming. A study with Swiss consumers is planned to analyze the potential of family farming products and labels to enter the Swiss “sustainability” niche markets.

## **Results**

The first phase of the project resulted in the formulation of five pathways on how trade relations can support sustainable development in food exporting countries, such as Brazil:

- (i) Guaranteeing some percentage of the import to food products that come from family farming;
- (ii) Prioritizing food products that show sustainability and certification labels;
- (iii) Choosing reward incentives and special pricing of food products that come from conservationist agriculture;
- (iv) Prioritize trading of food that favors environmental services;
- (v) Promote food trading that drives social equality and allows greater integration among nations.

## **Conclusions**

a) It is possible that prioritizing imports of cheaper food products from South America and adopting protectionism in favor of Swiss or European food products from family farmers may have limited contribution to drive equality and social sustainability in developing countries. Instead, it may stimulate industrial large-scale farming and repress family farming in many regions.

b) The term “family farmers” should not be related to poverty. Instead, it should be seen as the solution for poverty.

c) Family farming helps to preserve the cultural patrimony, biodiversity and natural resources in developing countries.

e) Surveys are needed in order to allow the prediction of Swiss consumers’ intentions to acquire food products from South American family farmers



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