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# The perception of family farmers of *Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* (PAA) on the meaning of being part of PAA and their understanding of concepts related to food, nutrition and health

Percepção de agricultores familiares do Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos (PAA) sobre o significado de fazer parte do PAA e a sua compreensão sobre conceitos relacionados à alimentação, nutrição e saúde

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## Abstract

Family agriculture has a recognized economic, environmental and social potential, which in recent years has been prestigious and strengthened by government programs that encourage the production and processing of their products, thus Food and Nutrition Security actions can be implemented, increasing the availability of food and the variability of nutrients to the population, favoring their marketing at local and regional levels, contributing to healthy eating habits and thus improving the quality of food. The *Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* (PAA) [Food Acquisition Program] was established by the article 19 of Law nº 10.696 in 2003 as one of the actions of the *Programa Fome Zero* [Zero Hungry Program] your main goal is the strengthening of family agriculture. The objective of this study was to identify the perceptions of farmers on the meaning of being part of the PAA and their understanding of concepts related to food, nutrition and health through a qualitative research. The results of this study were greater access to information such as health, food, forms of production and management, economics, rights and duties, among others; improved income and family investments; improved self-esteem/self-worth and stimulate the interaction of family farmers. In this context, it is necessary that the PAA increasingly become an empowering tool of agriculture family in the health care and Food and

Nutrition Security permanently as proposed in his law of creation.

**Keywords:** Public Policies; Family Agriculture; Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos; Food and Nutrition Security.

## Resumo

A agricultura familiar possui um reconhecido potencial econômico, ambiental e social que nos últimos anos tem sido prestigiado e fortalecido por programas governamentais que incentivam a produção e o beneficiamento de seus produtos, sendo assim, ações de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional (SAN) podem ser implementadas, aumentando a disponibilidade de alimentos e a variabilidade de nutrientes à população, favorecendo a comercialização deles em nível local e regional, além de contribuir para hábitos alimentares saudáveis e, consequentemente, melhorar a qualidade da alimentação. O Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos (PAA) foi instituído pelo artigo 19 da Lei nº 10.696 em 2003, como uma das ações do *Programa Fome Zero*, seu objetivo principal é o fortalecimento da agricultura familiar. O objetivo deste trabalho foi identificar as percepções dos agricultores sobre o significado de fazer parte do PAA e a sua compreensão sobre conceitos relacionados à alimentação, nutrição e saúde, por meio de uma pesquisa qualitativa. Os resultados do estudo foram maior acesso a informações como saúde, alimentação, formas de produção e manejo, economia, direitos e deveres, entre outras; melhora de renda e investimentos familiares; melhora da autoestima/valorização pessoal e estímulo à interação dos agricultores familiares. Nesse contexto, faz-se necessário que o PAA se torne cada vez mais um instrumento fortalecedor da agricultura familiar, das ações de saúde e de SAN e nutricional de forma permanente como proposto em sua lei de criação.

**Palavras-chave:** Políticas Públicas; Agricultura Familiar; Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos; Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional.

## Introduction

Family agriculture has a recognized economic, environmental and social potential, which has been, in recent years, celebrated and strengthened by government programs that stimulate and encourage the production and processing of its products (Silva, 2010). Thus, this model of agriculture began to be seen as an alternative for sustainable development, requiring specific public policies to strengthen them.

The marketing of production in the context of family farming has been a concern, considering that, although the credit for the production has grown significantly in recent years, the sale of its products and acceptance thereof on the market becomes the main challenge for a fairer development when compared to agribusiness (Silva, 2010; Grisa, 2011).

From family agriculture, Food and Nutritional Security (FNS) actions can be implemented, increasing the availability of food and nutrient variability to the population, facilitating marketing at the local and regional levels, in addition to contributing to healthy eating habits, consequently improving the quality of food (Maluf, 2007).

The Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos [Food Acquisition Program] (PAA) was established by article 19 of law No. 10,696 of July 2, 2003, as one of the actions of the Fome Zero [Zero Hunger] program (Brazil, 2003), being updated by law No. 12,512, October 14, 2011, with regulation via Decree no. 7,775, July 4, 2012. It has as its main objective the strengthening of family agriculture. PAA also have as goals to: generate income and sustain prices for family agriculture; strengthen the associations and cooperatives of farmers; ensure access to a diversified alimentation to the population in situation of food and nutritional insecurity (or in conditions of social vulnerability); enhance production and food culture of the populations; promote the establishment of families in the rural area; boost the local economy (as it increases the food supply in the local market and generates a larger number of jobs); promote formation of strategic food stocks; improve the quality of the products of family agriculture;

encourage the agroecological management of productive systems and/or organic agriculture; and promote the rescue and preservation of biodiversity (Conab, 2003; Neto, 2012).

Since its inception, a new theme won space on public policy agenda of rural development in Brazil: “the construction of institutional markets”. Rural social movements and civil society organizations started to run the program, to claim its magnification repeatedly, and to demand improvements of its mechanisms and the construction of new initiatives. Several public managers also committed themselves to the implementation of the program and to the construction of public spaces of participation that contributed to monitor and improve its mechanisms. Concerning research rural studies on the PAA, institutional markets began to have increased visibility due to the relevance of their achievements in the last decade (Grisa; Schneider, 2015).

The Program went on to draw attention also to international agencies and other countries, going beyond the Brazilian scenario, gaining thus important national and international projection, serving as example to be “replicated” or “exported” to other countries. This happened in Africa (Purchase from Africans for Africa) in 2010, covering five countries of the sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, measures were taken for the development of similar programs in Latin America. Recent reports organized by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also highlight the innovations of the PAA to build markets aimed at the strengthening of family agriculture and to food and nutritional security (Arias et al., 2013; Sanchez, Veloso; Ramirez, 2014; Grisa, Schneider, 2014; Grisa, Schneider, 2015).

In the program, the purchase of foods occur without competitive bidding and the amounts paid are compatible with those of regional markets. This is an important institutional innovation, since it privileges family farming over producers of higher food production scales. The products should be directed to social assistance institutions, or to a public power supply equipment, in the case of this study a Food Bank (*Banco de Alimentos* - BA).

Food banks aim to intermediate the receiving donations of food for consumption, destined to

social assistance institutions, and also the process of commercialization of food among family farmers (beneficiary suppliers) and beneficiary consumers (in vulnerability) through the PAA. The food is received (via donations from supermarkets, food industries or purchased through the PAA, National Supply Company (CONAB) and other), selected, divided, processed or not, packaged, and distributed for free to social assistance entities (Brasil, 2003; Santos, 2010).

Therefore, the PAA favors the family farmer through the acquisition of part of his/hers food production with fairer prices and with the guarantee of payment, as well as contributing to improvement of the feeding of individuals in a situation of food insecurity or social vulnerability. This program is a tool that can enable both FNS policies, as policies that contribute to the development of family farming (Mattei, 2007).

In this context, the aim of this study was to identify the farmers’ perceptions about what it means to be part of the PAA and their understanding of concepts related to food, nutrition and health, by means of a qualitative research.

## Methodology

This was a cross-sectional and descriptive study carried out in the year of 2014, with farmers included in the PAA-BA, in the municipality of Ubá, rural zone of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

The estimated population of the municipality in 2013 was 108,493 inhabitants. In 2010, from the total of 101,519 inhabitants, 96.2% resided in urban areas, while the remaining in the rural area (IBGE, 2010).

Family farmers of both genders, aged above 19 years, including adults and older adults, participated in this study. The inclusion criterion was the insertion of the farmer in the PAA-BA of the municipality of Ubá, Minas Gerais, Brazil. We chose to work with the representative sample of family farmers (n = 58) inserted in the program.

The calculation of the sample considered the total number of farmers recorded in the PAA, in 2013 (population: 168 family farmers), 5% of

tolerated error and 95% confidence interval, thus obtaining a sample size of 52 family farmers. We increased 10% of this value predicting losses, thus resulting in: 58 family farmers ( $n = 58$ ). Moreover, the conservative prevalence was of 30%. Through sortition of the number of registration of family farmers in the PAA, we initially obtained 58 family farmers (Callegari-Jacques, 2003). These were contacted personally receiving all the necessary information about the research, present in the informed consent form. There was no rejection to participate, and neither withdrawals throughout the study.

The research met the ethical requirements, regulatory standards and guidelines for research with human beings proposed in resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS) (CNS, 2012). The project was submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Viçosa, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The study began after the consent forms were duly signed by the participants. In addition to a letter of consent from the Food Bank signed by its legal responsible.

The instrument used for the collection of information during the interviews with the farmers was a semi-structured type questionnaire (Richardson, 2007). This type of questionnaire combined closed and open questions, in which the interviewee could talk freely about the issue at hand without being limited by the question. The information was registered by taking notes of the statements, since, during the pilot study we observed embarrassment and intimidation from farmers when, in some questions (open), it was necessary to record their answers. Therefore, to avoid discomfort and insecurity, complying with the ethics in research with humans, the research followed with reliable register of the statements by taking notes.

For analysis of the qualitative material, we used Content Analysis in the Thematic Analysis mode. Data treatment was performed by descriptive statistical analysis by means of frequency calculation.

The guiding question of this survey was "Talk a little of what it means to you to be part of the Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos". The aim of this question was to list the main meanings of PAA in the lives of these family farmers, inserted in the

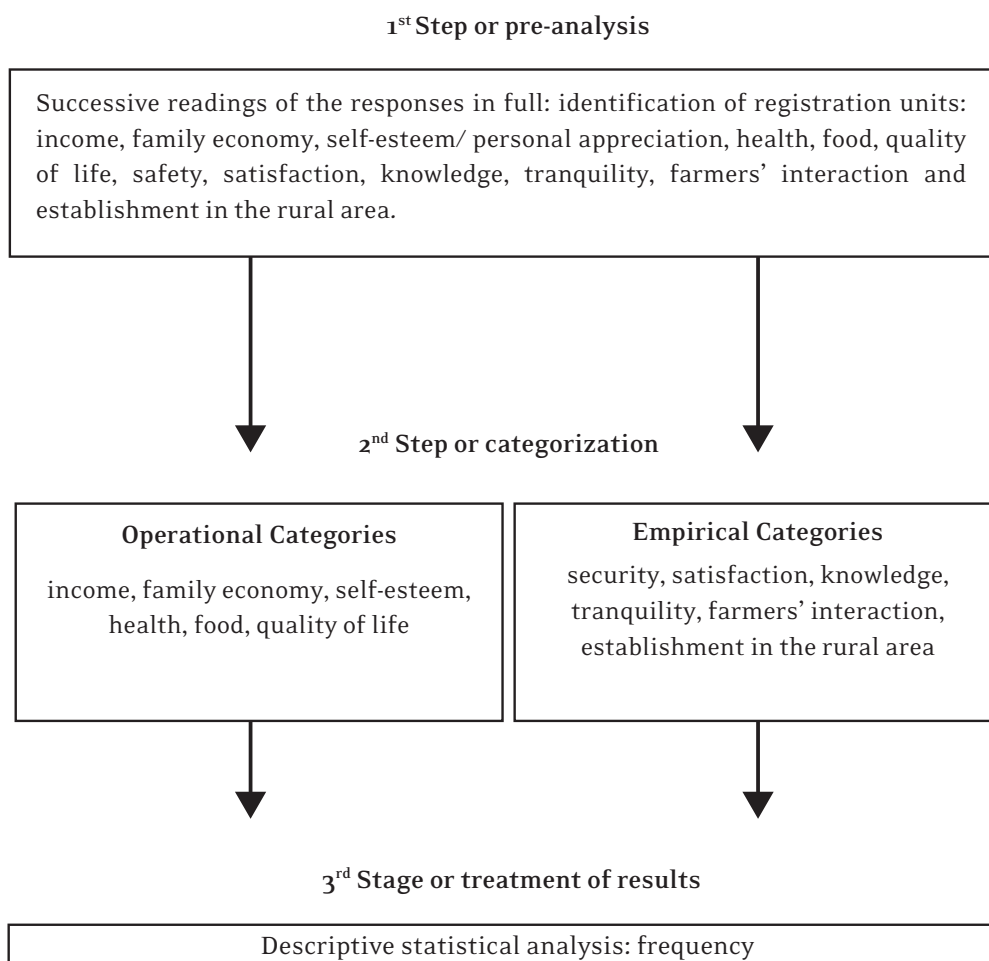
program, which has as leading goals to: generate income; promote the production of food for self-consumption; sell the surplus to local markets at a fair price, thus sustaining family farming and local marketing; boost the local economy (as it increases the food supply in the local market and generates a larger number of jobs); encourage the agroecological management of productive systems and/or organic agriculture; enhance production and food culture of the populations; improve the quality of the products of family agriculture; ensure access to a diversified alimentation to the population in situation of food and nutritional insecurity; promote the establishment of families in the rural area; strengthen the associations and cooperatives of farmers; as well as promote the rescue and preservation of biodiversity.

Through the responses of family farmers, we made successive readings for qualitative analysis (Minayo, 1992), by means of thematic analysis (Bardin, 1994), with the purpose of exploiting the material to determine the meanings or record units (or keywords), relating to the subject under question. In the case of the guiding question, after the exploration of the content, the following records were identified: income, family economy/family investment, self-esteem/personal appreciation, health, food, quality of life, safety, satisfaction, knowledge, tranquility, farmers' interaction and establishment in the rural area.

The next step consisted in the classification operation of the registration units identified, or categorization process. In this process, we listed two categories: operational categories, defined by the researcher, and empirical categories, born naturally from the conversation between respondent and researcher. Still using as example the guiding question, the operational categories were: income, family economy, self-esteem/personal appreciation, health, food and quality of life. Consequently, the remaining registration units constituted the empirical category. The steps outlined above are represented in Figure 1.

In addition to the guiding question, the research tool also featured other open questions that have followed the same steps of content analysis. These questions are presented below in Box 1.

**Figure 1 – Steps of the Content Analysis in the Thematic Analysis mode**



**Box 1 – Theme of the open questions to family farmers, participating on the PAA, Ubá, Minas Gerais, Brazil, 2014**

Themes of the questions
1 – Can alimentation influence health;
2 – Time and production of food;
3 – Receive information on health;
4 – Problems with the PAA-BA;
5 – Interest in diversifying for the PAA;
6 – Consumes the food delivered to the BA;
7 – Can the consumption of these foods help health;
8 – Do you know the nutritional value of the food you produce;
9 – Changed food consumption when inserting PAA-BA;
10 – Changed the produced food to deliver it to the PAA-BA;
11 – Changed the way of producing and/or handling the food when you were inserted to the PAA.

Source: Research data



## Results and Discussion

For the family farmer, to participate in the PAA means, in order of importance: income with a frequency of 94.83%, within the operational category; and safety with frequency of 70.69%, in the empirical category. Then the family economy of the operational category had 65.52% of frequency, in which farmers mentioned that the investments were made in and with the family with the income from the PAA, according to Box 2.

In general, most family farmers (60.34%) seemed satisfied with their insertion in the PAA, since the program generated a form of marketing with greater security, with payment of 70.69% for the sale of their products. Still regarding the frequency of family economy of 65.52%, farmers reported investments in agriculture, health and food. These, in turn, can promote security, tranquility, self-esteem and quality of life of this public and their families, as well as serve as a stimulus for interaction between family farmers that gained knowledge and are motivated to establish themselves in the rural area.

In Table 1, regarding the question *can food influence health*, all reported yes. However, 37.9% justified that food but can influence health positively and negatively. This fact can be explained because the program encourages diversification of food production with quality and in sufficient quantities to meet the demand of self-consumption and of the food bank. With that, the farmers and their families are consuming more varied food and may also contribute to the FNS.

Regarding the period of production of foods, most reported to produce throughout the entire year. The production and management practices appropriate to the cultures may result in production throughout the entire year, which in turn, can meet the demands of self-consumption and of the food bank.

Most farmers reported receiving information about health, and 25.9% received it through the food bank and other institutions and services, among them, Family Health Strategy units, the Ru-

ral Union, and the Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Company of the State of Minas Gerais (EMATER).

The question related to whether or not there were problems in the PAA-BA resulted in 77.6% of responses in the “no problems” category, representing the majority. This fact can demonstrate satisfaction with the program. Those who reported some problem cited: the payment delay in the first deliveries due to bureaucracies in the transfer of funds to the organs responsible for the management of the program; and the value of the payment of the quota that the PAA limits for each family farmer per year. According to Cerqueira, Rocha and Coelho (2006) and Ghizelini (2006), the main difficulties of the PAA concern the need for the farmer to belong to an association, the required documentation and bureaucracy of access, the need for standardization and quality of food, the lack of harmony between the timing of the program and the regional production, the seasonality of production and the lack of technical support.

Of the total sample, 50% of farmers wish to diversify their production, mostly to trade with the PAA, as other markets are not as attractive and are not as safe as the program. This may be due to the prices charged by the PAA, in relation to values that farmers receive from other types of marketing of foods. Studies with family farmers inserted in the PAA in two municipalities of the southern region of Brazil reported that farmers increased their production areas and the diversification of their food to market with the PAA, since they felt the amounts paid by it were fair (Vogo; Souza, 2009; Santos, 2010). In the study by Hespanhol (2013), marketing with the PAA is an important alternative to increase the monthly monetary income of households. We also verified that there was productive diversification and stimulation in marketing with PAA, and that 60% of farmers have expanded their crop area and diversified their production, with the cultivation of new products for the PAA, and 40% did not expand and have not declared intention to do this, because its cultivation area was small, 15% by not having economic conditions, 15%, the remainder, and 10% for fear of discontinuity of the program (Hespanhol, 2013).

**Box 2 – Meaning of what it is for the family farmer to be part of the PAA, Ubá, Minas Gerais, Brazil 2014**

	Registration Units	n	%
Operational Categories	Income	55	94.83
	Family economy	38	65.52
	Self-esteem	22	37.93
	Health	20	34.48
	Food	16	27.59
	Quality of life	14	24.14
Empirical Categories	Safety	41	70.69
	Satisfaction	35	60.34
	Knowledge	28	48.27
	Tranquility	21	36.20
	Farmers' interaction	21	36.20
	Establishment in the rural area	7	12.07

Source: Research data

**Table 1 – Distribution of frequencies of answers to the questions on health-food, nutritional value and the PAA, of family farmers inserted in the PAA in Ubá, Minas Gerais, Brazil, 2014**

Questions	n	%
<b>Can alimentation influence health</b>		
No	0	0
Yes – positively	21	36.2
Yes – negatively	15	25.9
Positively and negatively	22	37.9
<b>Time and production of food</b>		
All year	51	87.9
Summer	0	0
Winter	7	12.1
<b>Receive information on health</b>		
No	23	39.7
Yes, in the food bank	9	15.5
Yes, outside the food bank	11	19
Both	15	25.9
<b>Problems with the PAA-BA</b>		
No	45	77.6
Yes – bureaucracies	7	12.1
Yes – lack of continuity of the program/quota limit	6	10.3
<b>Interest in diversifying for the PAA</b>		
No	23	39.7
Yes – difficulty – high cost	6	10.3
Yes – guaranteed/safe market	29	50
<b>Consumes the food delivered to the BA</b>		
No	1	1.7
Yes – economy	9	15.5
Yes – health/quality	45	77.6
Both	3	5.2

continues...



Tabela 1 – Continuation

Questions	n	%
Can the consumption of these foods help health		
No	0	0
Yes – good origin	21	36.2
Yes – good for health	23	39.7
Both	14	24.1
Do you know the nutritional value of the food you produce		
No	10	17.2
Yes – composition/compounds	12	20.7
Yes – benefits	17	29.3
Both	19	32.8
Changed food consumption when inserting PAA-BA		
No	32	55.2
Yes – because gained new knowledge	18	31
Yes – due to requirements from the food bank	4	6.9
Yes – because improved financial income	4	6.9
Changed the produced food to deliver it to the PAA-BA		
No	37	63.8
Yes – due to the high cost of production	5	8.6
Yes – to meet requirements	11	19
Yes – due to problems with health	5	8.6

Source: Research data

Most farmers and their families (77.6%) consume the foods produced to deliver the PAA-BA, justifying the consumption due to quality. Thus, family farming is related both to food safety and economy, and this, in turn, is linked to the subsistence of the family in Table 1.

Regarding the question “can the consumption of these produced foods help in health”, all reported yes, with 39.7% of farmers justifying that they are good for health. Thus, the quality of food supplied to the PAA must be inextricably linked to the production and consumption of healthy foods for family farmers, their families and social assistance institutions.

As for the knowledge about the *nutritional value of foods*, most (32.8%) reported that they knew, conceptualizing the nutritional value by means of simple information such as the identification of some nutrients from the foods they produce, relating them to health benefits.

As for the consumption of food and family farmers, most (55.2%) reported not having changed after insertion in the PAA-BA. Of the 31% who reported change, the justification was that they gained new knowledge after insertion into the program. This may be due to the fact the family farmer have to participate in trainings, meetings, lectures and other activities promoted by the food bank during their stay in the program.

Regarding the question “if there was a change in the food produced”, 63.8% reported not having changed. Of those who reported change, the most important reason was to meet requirements and/or adjustment to the food bank, Box 3.

Before the questioning of if *there was a change in the form of production and/or handling of food after insertion in the PAA*, the highest frequency response (51.72%) was higher requirement/adjustment to the food bank.

**Box 3 – Frequency of answers and justifications of farmers when asked “if there was a change in the form of food production and/or handling” after their insertion in the PAA, Ubá, Minas Gerais, Brazil, 2014**

Answers	Justification/Registration units	n	%
Yes	Greater requirement/adjustment to the food bank	30	51.72
	Gained knowledge	19	32.76
	Income guarantee	3	5.17
	Due to health problems	1	1.72
	Responsibility with FNS	4	6.90
No	Just another marketing option	1	1.72
	Was already adjusted to the demands of the food bank	13	22.41

Source: Research data

## Conclusion

The study showed that, from the perspective of family farmers, some of the main goals of the program are being achieved, since satisfaction with the PAA due to improved income and family economy raises the possibility of investments in properties, agriculture, health and family alimentation in general. In addition, according to the farmers, the PAA provides security about payment for the marketing of their food, tranquility, improved self-esteem and quality of life, serving as a stimulus for farmers' interaction and their establishment in the rural area.

The practice of diversification in food production stimulated by the food bank generates higher quality foods and in sufficient quantities to meet the demand of consumption and marketing of surplus and may thus contribute to the FNS and to the health of farmers, their families and beneficiaries cared for by social assistance institutions.

The PAA had and has important contributions in the Brazilian countryside: rural participation in the development of the country, in the understanding of the role of the State and civil society, in the repertoire of collective action of social movements, in the formulation of projects, research and rural studies.

In conclusion: more research involving family farmers should be carried out in order to highlight their desires, needs and rights as citizens in search of a more just and egalitarian society. It is necessary

that the PAA increasingly becomes a strengthening instrument of family agriculture, actions of health and food and nutrition security on a permanent basis, as proposed in the law that created it, i.e., programs that aim to food and nutritional security must contain a holistic approach with transformative potential in the health, social and economic spheres, targeting rural and urban populations as actors of interrelated and integrated actions that will no longer be paternalistic and fulfil its role to transform the mentality of individuals regarding practices of food production, marketing and consumption.

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#### Authors' contribution

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