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# **A strategy to streamline agrifood production and marketing arrangements: The case of production with attributes for direct sale in Tupanciretã-RS**

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## **Abstract**

One of the main dilemmas faced by family farming is the control over the process in which it performs its economic/productive activities. One of the ways in which alternative food systems can be built, as well as their combined effect, to facilitate a sustainable transition, lies in new arrangements that combine production and consumption. Therefore, the business model adopted by small farmers who integrate processing and marketing in agricultural activities is one of the solutions to the difficulties faced. The article advances in this scenario. Using a qualitative approach, we sought to verify these initiatives adopted by family farmers in Tupanciretã-RS, who are located in a productivist context, coordinated by agents linked to global value chains, privileged by high productive factors, thus producing one of the largest soybean plantations in Rio Grande do Sul state, identified as the capital of soybeans. However, a series of economic/productive activities operated by farming families make heterogeneous a context marked by socioeconomic homogeneity in the municipality. Thus, one of the guidelines that family farmers adopt to increase added value is domestic production and market orientation. In its economic-productive strategies, the agro-industrialization of products into final foods employs peculiar techniques inherent to the traditions and heritage of the farmers who produce them. This translates into the adopted method, condensed into a food with attributes linked to colonial, homemade, and artisanal aspects, which is dissociated from the imperative specialized and intensified production mode that is practiced in the agricultural sector of the municipality.

**Keywords:** Family Farming. Short Circuits of Commercialization. Local Products.

### **Uma estratégia para dinamizar arranjos de produção e comercialização agroalimentar: O caso da produção com atributos à venda direta em Tupanciretã – RS**

#### **Resumo**

Um dos principais dilemas enfrentados pela agricultura familiar está no controle sobre o processo em que esta desempenha suas atividades econômicas/produativas. Uma das formas que permitem a construção de sistemas alimentares alternativos e seu efeito combinado, para facilitar uma transição sustentável, reside em novos arranjos que combinam a produção e o consumo. Nesse sentido, o modelo de negócio adotado pelos pequenos agricultores que integram o processamento e comercialização nas atividades agrícolas é uma das soluções para as dificuldades enfrentadas. O artigo avança neste cenário. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, buscou-se verificar estas iniciativas adotadas pelos agricultores familiares em Tupanciretã-RS, que estão situados em um contexto produtivista, coordenado por agentes vinculados às cadeias de valor global, privilegiados por altos fatores produtivos, produzindo, desse modo, uma das maiores lavouras de soja do Rio Grande do Sul, identificada como a capital da soja. Entretanto, uma série de atividades econômicas/produativas operadas pelas famílias agricultoras heterogeneizam um contexto marcado pela homogeneidade socioeconômica no município. Com isso, uma das diretrizes que os agricultores familiares adotam para aumentar o valor agregado encontra-se na produção interna e na orientação de mercado. Em suas estratégias econômico-produativas, a agroindustrialização dos produtos em alimentos finais emprega técnicas peculiares inerentes às tradições e heranças dos agricultores que os produzem. Isso se traduz no método adotado, condensado em um alimento com atributos vinculados à aspectos coloniais, caseiros e artesanais, o qual se desassocia do imperativo modo de produção especializado e intensificado que é praticado no setor agrícola do município.

**Palavras-chave:** Agricultura Familiar, Circuitos Curtos de Comercialização. Produtos Locais.

### **Una estrategia para racionalizar los arreglos de producción y comercialización agroalimentaria: el caso de la producción con atributos para la venta directa en Tupanciretã-RS**

#### **Resumen**

Uno de los principales dilemas que enfrenta la agricultura familiar es el control sobre el proceso en el que realiza sus actividades económico-productivas. Una de las formas en que se pueden construir sistemas alimentarios alternativos y su efecto combinado, para facilitar una transición sostenible, radica en nuevos arreglos que combinen producción y consumo. En ese sentido, el modelo de negocios adoptado por los pequeños agricultores que integran el procesamiento y la comercialización en las actividades agrícolas es una de las soluciones a las dificultades enfrentadas. El artículo avanza en este escenario. Con un enfoque cualitativo, buscamos verificar estas iniciativas adoptadas por agricultores familiares en Tupanciretã-RS, que se ubican en un contexto productivista, coordinado por agentes vinculados a cadenas globales de valor, privilegiados por altos factores productivos, produciendo así una de las mayores soja. plantaciones en Rio Grande do Sul, identificada como la capital de la soja. Sin embargo, una serie de actividades económico-productivas operadas por familias campesinas heterogeneizan un contexto marcado por la homogeneidad socioeconómica del municipio. Así, uno de los lineamientos que adoptan los agricultores familiares para incrementar el valor agregado es la producción interna y la orientación al mercado. En sus estrategias económico-productivas, la agroindustrialización de productos en alimentos finales emplea técnicas peculiares inherentes a las tradiciones y herencia de los agricultores que los producen. Esto se traduce en el método adoptado, condensado en un alimento con atributos ligados a aspectos coloniales, caseros y artesanales, que se desvincula del imperativo modo de producción especializado e intensificado que se practica en el sector agrícola del municipio.

**Palabras clave:** Agricultura Familiar, Circuitos Cortos de Comercialización. Productos locales.

## 1 Introduction

The food system crisis and the need to develop a different socioeconomic model that involves production, processing, trade, distribution, consumption and elimination of food are findings that arise at different levels of society. The intensive and globalized model in food production and distribution stimulated the development of the agri-food system rooted in profound economic, social, technological, and spatial changes, restricted to the control of major global players. Furthermore, the operation in this model has been increasingly unable to meet the requirements of the tripod of sustainable development (environmental, economic, and social sustainability), generating externalities that threaten the limits of the planetary ecosystem.

However, new scenarios have emerged in recent years, especially from the construction of grassroots initiatives, in the search to develop new ways to reincorporate food production, distribution, and consumption practices, through relocation and inclusion of attributes of quality processes linked to cultural and environmental aspects – organic, local / regional, artisanal, traditional, colonial, homemade, from land reform, for example – in food, within the framework of more sustainable agricultural systems. Furthermore, under the umbrella labeled Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), which are organizational schemes that connect food producers and consumers through Short Commercialization Circuits (CCC), normally managed on a local scale, focusing on the revaluation of local and traditional foods and sustainable production (for people and the environment), such alternatives are seen as a different way of producing, distributing, choosing, valuing, and consuming.

Therefore, these short commercialization circuits are manifested from the interaction of consumers who buy products directly from the producer, in which proximity and trust are mediated social relationships that keep the consumer connected with the values of those who produced the product, respecting its cultural, spatial, social, and environmental dimensions. Furthermore, these initiatives, with the aim of remedying the effects of the dominant agri-food sector, are sometimes oriented towards rebalancing the appropriation of value along global value chains and embedded power relations. And, among the forms of family farming, food processing, especially agro-industrialization in the family unit, is an opportunity for farmers to circumvent these models and obtain greater monetary values, adding value and eliminating vertical links in other sales channels (ROSSI, BUI & MARSDEN, 2019; ROVER & DAROLT, 2021; MIRANDA et al., 2021).

Therefore, considering this productive component, it is important to share experience that portrays this productive base and its ability to become involved as a viable alternative in a context that co-evolves with the conventional agri-food system, seeking to challenge its socio-spatial arrangements oriented towards productivity, creating local economic spaces. Considering this scenario, this study is presented from the context of a municipality belonging to Rio Grande do Sul state that is entitled the capital of soybeans, as the agricultural production in this territory is specialized in agricultural commodities, being fostered by large-scale and

mechanized agriculture. Linked to the global agri-food economy, comprised of food empires (PLOEG, 2008), this portion of the municipality's agriculture can be considered by the extension of agribusiness.

On the other side of the spectrum of agricultural practice in the municipality of Tupanciretã-RS, located in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul State, in southern Brazil, the rural area is composed of (many) farming families and, among them, a number of land reform settlements that currently practice small-scale agriculture in diversified activities, such as dairy cattle, animal husbandry, agricultural production, fruit and vegetables production, and agro-industrialization of products developed in the family nucleus. Therefore, the study aims to advance knowledge about farming families who process food and sell their products through short commercialization circuits related to RAAs in a socioeconomic context that predominates the world of agribusiness with its references and logics.

## 2 Methodological Procedures

The article was prepared based on the first author's master's research (Turchetti, 2021), which discusses the dynamics of alternative food networks that aspire to the actions of family agribusinesses in a socioeconomic context that predominates the world of agribusiness with its references and logics.

The research was performed based on a systematic review and questioning of the national and international bibliography on global commodity chains and alternative food networks. It was identified, in the context of the municipality of Tupanciretã, an area strongly influenced by the dynamics of the export commodity production, especially soy, the existence of experiences regarding the formation of alternative networks of farming families and supported by public agents. This existence of short production and commercialization circuits in the context of the “soybean capital” caught our attention and made us question how such experiences would be possible in an adverse context, considering the problem as a “sociological enigma” (Lemieux, 2015).

Based on this problem, the existing official data on the municipality was sought, especially from the IBGE Agricultural and Population Censuses, regarding the agrarian structure, general agricultural production, and more specific data on diversified production establishments. Accompanied by data on access to public policies and rural credit. This data made it possible to draw an overview of the municipality, what it produces, how much it produces, the number and characteristics of producers, among other aspects.

Then, original data on the experiences of alternative food networks in the municipality was produced. Based on a semi-structured interview script, two municipal managers were initially interviewed. Based on their reports and information, it was possible to identify what was done, how and who were some of the actors in the local alternative food networks. In a second step, the families that formed an agribusiness association were contacted, starting with a family indicated by a manager and then requesting new indications from families that made up the network. In total, five families in the agro-industry (chicken, colonial salami, crackers and homemade breads, molasses *rapaduras*, cassava and fruit pulps) were interviewed and it was possible, based on the interviews, to carry out an analysis of



the innovative practices that family farmers introduce on their properties, describing the agro-industrialization processes they carry out to make their family units outside the conventional production chains possible.

### 3 The Socioeconomic Trajectory of the Municipality of Tupanciretã-RS

It is important to highlight that the municipality of Tupanciretã is located in the geographic region of the Middle Plateau, which is located between the mountain ranges of Serra Geral and the Plateau of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (southern Brazil) and 370 km northwest of the city of Porto Alegre (State capital). Bordering Argentina and Uruguay. It is also an important region that includes one of the largest agricultural centers in Brazil. In addition, Tupanciretã-RS had 22,281 inhabitants in 2010, with 19.12% of these individuals residing in the rural area and 80.88% in the urban area, occupying a surface of 2,251,863 km<sup>2</sup>, which results in a population density of 9.89 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (IBGE, 2010), in which the agricultural sector absorbs the largest number of employed individuals in the municipality, 31.16% (2010).

The city from Rio Grande do Sul has gone through different economic cycles, among which we highlight the beef jerky in the early days of the region occupation, cattle in much of the 20th century, and in recent decades the production of agricultural commodities, especially soybeans, corn, and wheat, prevails (MOREIRA & MEDEIROS, 2017; BALEM & ALVES, 2021). The dynamics that influenced such changes are numerous, as well as accompanying the diffusion of technical progress spread in Brazil, also seen in the Middle Plateau region. In the context of the agri-food system, this means distinguishing three major moments that derive from inhomogeneous processes. The first moment refers to agricultural modernization, which had been marked by changes in the technical base, starting in the 1960s, and which resulted in lower production of artisanal products, labor specialization, and agrarian concentration. At the same time, the second moment was marked by the transformation of agricultural production, which approached the industrial model, with the introduction of inputs – seeds, fertilizers, agrochemicals, and machines – and the supply of raw materials by other sectors, such as fuel, packaging, etc. Finally, the third moment refers to the agro-industrial facilities from the 1980s onwards, which marked the insertion of agriculture in the financial dynamics, with the influence of international capital, through upstream and downstream subsidies (NIEDERLE & WESZ JR., 2018).

This process implied the adoption of new technologies and industrial inputs to increase yields, gaining a competitive advantage with the use of improved seeds, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers. Thus, this open vision, oriented towards progress, flourished in the municipality, and, at the turn of the century, socio-productive forces promoted political confrontation favorable to the opening of biotechnologies (pro-transgenic), legitimized in the speeches of the Clube de Amigos da Terra de Tupanciretã-RS, adverse to the then campaign against transgenics by the Rio Grande do Sul State government (PICOLOTTO, 2022).

In view of this, the new geopolitical prospects that were designed after the mid-twentieth century defined the processes of expansion of monopoly capitalism in Brazil through the subjection of agriculture to industry, revolutionizing ways of life and forms of production (NAVARRO, 2001). Therefore, it is important to add that the

State fostered the idea of promoting progress by placing rural space in the development model. As Neves (1987) explains when talking about how it will be integrated into the market economy, “this new model is based on the intensive use of production factors and increase in agricultural productivity, incorporation of new agricultural technologies, credit policies, and minimum prices” (NEVES, 1987, p. 345).

At the same time, however, such changes in the production model – thanks to scientific progress in chemistry, biology, and biotechnology – have generated a deeper systemic transformation. Throughout the end of the last century, changes in the economic order in the country, conservative modernization of agriculture resulting from the military rule period, also triggered a set of social events. And, with the historical structural inequality deepening, especially due to the selective character that benefited only the medium and large rural producers dedicated to the production of monocultures for export, the latifundium prevailed. In this context, the overwhelming majority of the population did not have their own land and was forced to work on a salaried basis.

In addition, large landowners had access to credit, the best land, while the land that was difficult to manage was divided into small properties among large families who exploited them for subsistence. From these dynamics, the struggle for land emerged as an alternative of social mobilization for the rural population that envisioned a piece of land, as well as organizing together with social movements, which was seen as a possibility to build future projects, in which the renovated areas could become places of life, work, and agricultural production (BARCELLOS, 2010).

Therefore, the agrarian matter of the place, as well as that of Brazil, postulates historical, political, social, and productive conflicts. On the one hand, there are land deals with high investment inserted in global chains and the expulsion of people from the land. On the other hand, there are agrarian resistance movements resorting to support alliances to resist in their ways of life. In view of this, making Brazil one of the countries with the greatest inequality in the distribution of land tenure in the world (MATTEI, 2014), and in the case of Tupanciretã-RS, Barcellos (2010) substantiates the existing differences:

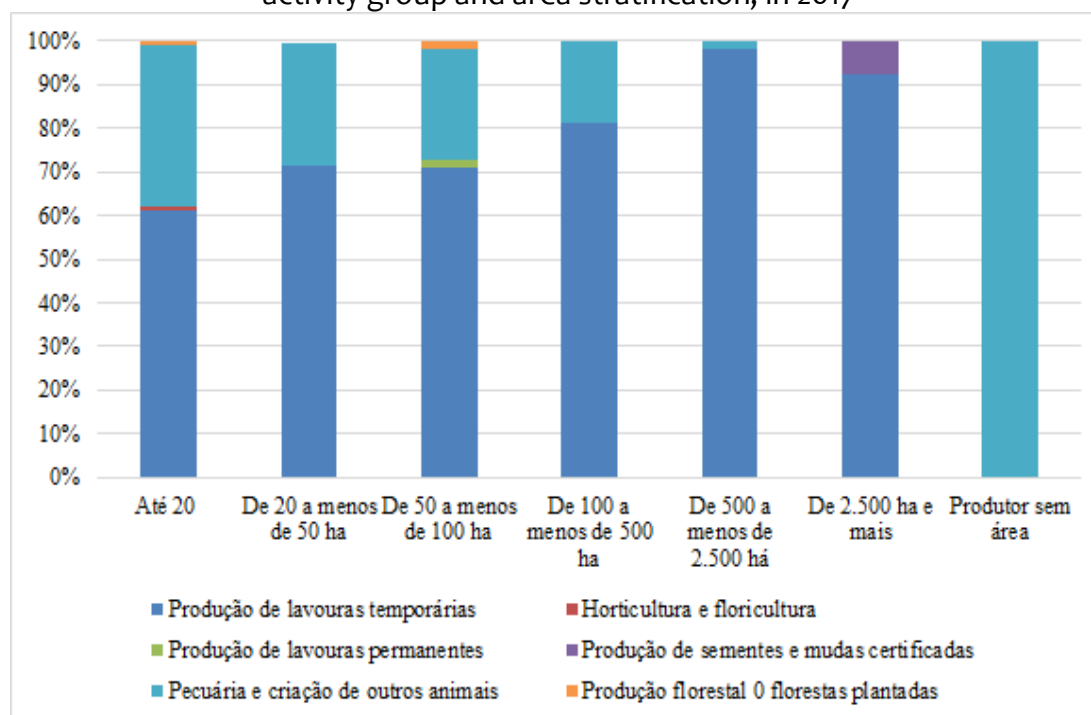
Tupanciretã-RS stands out in RS for having one of the largest soybean productions in the state, as well as a large number of Land Reform settlements (seventeen settlements) and small properties that are responsible for the diversification of local agricultural production, in which they plant soy, corn, beans, cassava, rice, among other agricultural products, and that agricultural activities, such as dairy farming, fish farming, and swine farming, have also been intensified over the years (Barcellos, 2010, p. 68).

Thus, seeking to better understand the social processes and agricultural systems of ways of life in Land Reform Settlements in the municipality, Barcellos (2010) shows how his field research provides subsidies to understand the importance of the agriculture style practiced in these communities. This is because “approximately 5,000 people live in rural areas, of which 706 families (2,600 inhabitants) live in rural settlements. This data shows that 57.63% of the municipality rural population resides in Land Reform settlements” (BARCELLOS, 2010, p. 68).

In this bias, Graph 1 presents the panorama of agriculture in the municipality of Tupanciretã-RS. In 2017, in the rural sector of the municipality, the land was very

concentrated, and the average area of agricultural establishments was significantly larger than medium properties, that is, about 174 hectares of average size (the fiscal module adopted by the municipality is 35 hectares), which is still very large compared to the average for the State of Rio Grande do Sul (59 hectares). In general terms, these phenomena, at the municipal level, although they are supporting the history of the municipality, strive to produce quality food in their family agro-industries, which are an example of this, as well as in the valorization of their performance to make the multiple activities practiced by the most visible category on the ground, in which the family farmer is limited to productive factors.

Graph 1 - Distribution of agricultural establishments in Tupanciretã-RS, by economic activity group and area stratification, in 2017



Source: Agricultural Census, IBGE (2017).

From the municipality's agricultural area point of view, 75% of agricultural units have an area of up to 50 hectares. This percentage of units, whose understanding is very important in the representation of units, represents only 7% of the total agricultural area of the municipality. In the vast majority (54%) of the agricultural surface of the municipality, which currently has the greatest visibility in local agriculture, are agricultural units that have more than 1,000 hectares, represented by 4% of agricultural units (IBGE, 2017).

According to the above, the land reality of the municipality is contrasting. The municipality of Tupanciretã-RS has 1,180 agricultural units and, from Graph 1, we can observe that properties of up to 100 hectares have more than two economic activities, with temporary farming being the most representative, being more than 60% of the unit economic activity, followed by livestock. It is also worth mentioning that, although with less representation, horticulture, forestry production, and permanent farming are economic activities carried out by family farming in the municipality.



In the case of livestock production, the expressive presence in the stratum of establishment up to 20 hectares is represented by small dairy production properties. In 2017, 72% of the municipality's dairy farming was the economic activity practiced in these establishments, accounting for 50.4% of the total volume produced in the municipality. Thus, concomitant economic activities, with the price of milk generally around 0.90 cents per liter, are alternatives both for the survival and for the development of the family productive base, that has little land and is limited to expectations of economic return of agricultural activity.

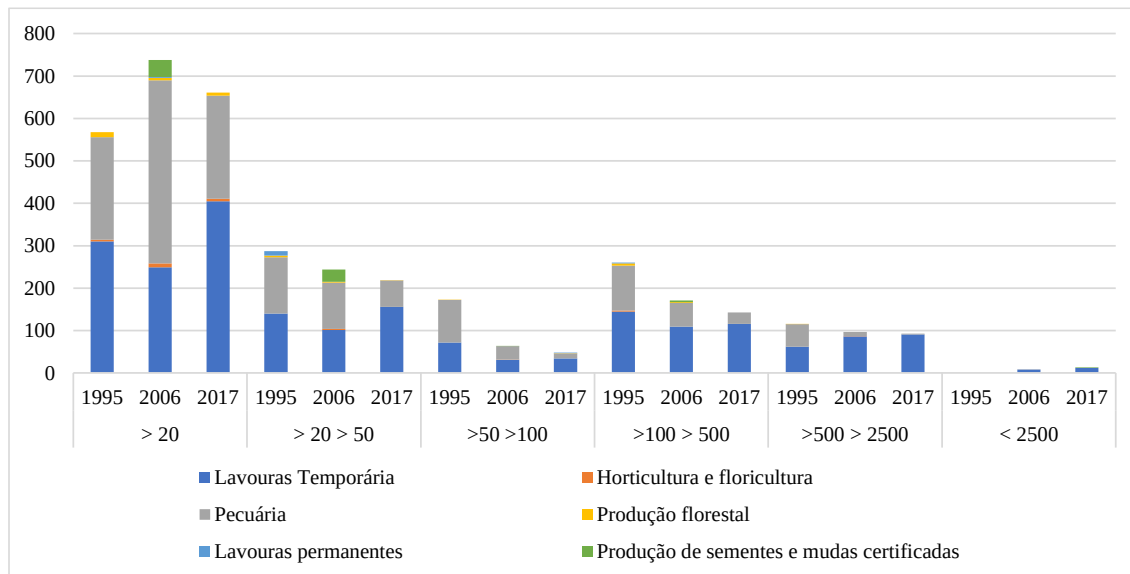
Therefore, family farmers combine their herds with other economic activities (tillage, fruit and vegetable production, and nurseries). Thus, this is a strategy commonly adopted by family farmers (up to 100 hectares) who seek to circumvent the high level of capital they require, in order to develop multiple activities, because this is often the only viability they have in agriculture. In properties of more than 100 hectares, up to 2,500 hectares (21.36% of units), the main activity is temporary farming, reaching more than 95% of units with 500 to 2,500 hectares. In properties with more than 2,500 hectares, in addition to temporary farming, there is also the production of seeds, generating added value to the agricultural units.

In other words, the structure of land use in the municipality is linked to its productive economic matrix, which operates both on the productive side and in the spheres underlying the paradoxical result of the agricultural sector. Consequently, some areas suffer more, as the process is not unique. However, currently, the dispute over access to land is one of the main factors that fuels the expansion of the agricultural frontier, fostered by the continuous improvement of innovations and the expansion of productivity (NEVES, 2019). That is, in addition to the labor factor, machines, equipment, technology, and human capital are the elements responsible for the accumulation of capital in modern agriculture (MATTEI, 2014).

Therefore, in fact, the introduction of subsidies (state and private) for agricultural practices promoted a significant increase in the technical indicators of agricultural modernization, an increase in production, its diversification, and a significant change in the technical standard of the rural sector (DELGADO, 2001), which fostered the formation of an agricultural economy guided by an essentially capitalist mode of operation (BUAINAIN et al., 2013).

This process required the farm to expand into new frontiers. In addition, agricultural areas throughout Brazil have constantly been expanding, generally in the use of forest and native grassland lands in recent decades (SAUER & LEITE, 2012). Thus, the strong expansion of agricultural production in the municipality is accompanied by a reduction (45% of agricultural units with livestock farming) of the main agro-export heritages, cattle, as shown in Graph 2.

Graph 2 – Evolution of the agrarian structure and land use in Tupanciretã-RS, according to the group of total area and economic activity from 1995 to 2017, in numbers of units



Source: Agricultural Census, IBGE (1995, 2006 and 2017).

Graph 2 shows the division by number of agricultural units, according to the size of the property in hectares and the land use on these properties in the years 1995, 2006, and 2017. According to it, the number of temporary crops on properties up to 20 hectares, rose from 310 (in 1995) to 405 units (in 2017), despite a drop in 2006. In the case of hortifruti, in 2006 there were 9 units, which decreased to 6 in 2017. Livestock grew in 2006, but in 2017 there was a drop of 189 units. Forest production and permanent crops decreased in 2017, by 7 and 0, respectively. Properties from 20 to 50 hectares increased the number of units for temporary crops, from 140 to 156. Hortifruti had 3 units in 2006 and, in 2017, none practiced the activity. Livestock and forestry production decreased, respectively, by 133 and 4 (in 2006), and 62 and 1, in 2017. In relation to agricultural units of 50 to 100 hectares and 100 to 500 hectares, temporary farming reduced by about 47% and 20%, respectively, from 1995 to 2017, whereas in properties over 500 hectares, there was an increase of more than 29 establishments up to 2,500 hectares, from 1995 to 2017, and over 2,500 hectares had no establishment in 1995, increasing to 12 in 2017. In general, livestock lost space for temporary farming in family and non-family strata.

In this context, the diffusion of technical progress in the municipality accompanied by a new wave of technological incorporation, which changed the way of doing agriculture, began to have space in the municipality. And, in effect, this advance is produced by a combination of economic, technological, biological, and chemical factors. Among the associated technologies, the following stand out: Direct sowing, genetically modified seeds (GMO and others), mechanization, irrigation, pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides) and, more recently, the use of precision software (agriculture 4.0 and 5.0).

In this context, it is evident that, in a short period of 25 years, the transformations of rural<sup>1</sup> were being conditioned and fed back by the productivist notion of the conventional food system paradigm. The data that follow in the productive sphere (expansion of temporary farming in 177% of the area – hectares) reflect the mode of transformation that is required in the other various spheres, that is, in the operations of the production chain that make up the agricultural activity that are intimately connected (WESZ JR, 2016). In this way, this fact was possible due to the underutilization of pastoral areas resulting from the extensive form of exploitation that held more than half of the surface of the municipality, about 52.9%, giving up their area for modern agricultural production (IBGE, 2017).

Furthermore, the intensification of temporary crops currently corresponds to 71% of Tupanciretã's agriculture carried out in this modality. The expansion of the agricultural frontier by advancing natural and planted pasture areas was absorbed by the concentration of production in a single crop, soybean. Until the beginning of 1995, this crop shared the productive space with other alternatives, whether agricultural or livestock. However, what is recent is its predominance in Tupanciretã's productive space and, consequently, in the supply, hence the title attributed to the municipality – capital of soybeans (MOREIRA & MEDEIROS, 2017). That is, soy becomes a monoculture in this scenario of predominance, while other economic alternatives try to be inserted in a countermovement. This phenomenon, in turn, was called, by Balem and Alves (2021), the "soyidification" of society.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, it is important to highlight that since the 1990s we have witnessed, in a global context, an accelerated industrialization of the agri-food sector, both in the production process (mechanization, intensification) and in processing (agro-industrial complexes). The logic of market integration guided by the opening of trade thus promoted a diversification of products placed on the market, as well as the globalization of the economy. The institutionalization of value chains as a development tool is configured, therefore, in the articulation at the macroeconomic level, in the form of investments and international trade. From the food point of view, the model refers to commodification and industrialization, which translates into a regulatory and standardized pattern of actors committed to industrialized and ultra-processed products and to the consolidation and concentration of commercial activities related to food (DAROLT & ROVER, 2021).

The effects of these transformations based on the production of monocultures have thus contributed to the prominent imbalance of small production by large production, both in the market and in agriculture, which guarantee the direction and leadership to the restricted corporate sector of large local actors. Furthermore, this model has shown a marked inability to meet the sustainability tripod requirements, generating serious environmental, social, and economic

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<sup>1</sup> According to census data, more than half of the agricultural fleet is concentrated in establishments with more than 100 hectares: 63% are tractors; 59% of seeders; 57% of sprayers; and, 73% of the automotive ones. There was a 66% growth in the irrigated area in temporary crops, in which the main method used is central pivot sprinkler irrigation (CENSO AGROPECUÁRIO, 2006 and 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The definition stems from the technical and economic expertise, infrastructure to support the production of inputs, technical assistance, services, machinery, agricultural credit and established markets focused primarily on soybeans (BALEM & ALVES, 2021).

externalities that have had an impact on human, social, and ecosystem life (BRUNORI, ROSSI & GUIDI, 2012; NIEDERLE & WESZ). JR, 2018; MEDAETS, FORNAZIER & THOME, 2020).

However, in the other agricultural spectrum of the territory – represented by less visible, less disseminated, only emerging actors, who are mainly organized on a territorial scale, through association, which are opposed to the global governance of the corporate food regime –, a composite scenario by a mosaic of small properties with a few hectares – practicing a diversified production based on a set of practices to cover the needs of the family linked to the economic sphere, aimed at meeting the needs of the local population and neighboring cities –, favor short commercialization circuits (producers' fairs, home delivery, producers' stores, colonial houses, direct sales on the property, institutional sales for school meals, among other forms of direct sales) to the detriment of the standardized food of industrial agriculture characterized by Ploeg (2008) as “food empires.” In this context, Moreira and Medeiros understand the place as:

the occupation of previously idle or underused land, through rural settlements through the expropriation of former large estates, enabled the introduction and development of family farming in the municipality via peasantry and the consequent diversification of agricultural production built on the knowledge of the members (2017, p. 126).

At the local level, small-scale guidelines include the production of vegetables such as pumpkins, cassava, citrus fruits, etc. of family agro-industries (IBGE, 2017). In short, within an orientation framework for maximizing its autonomy, small-scale agricultural production follows directions of production diversification. Thus, implementing a set of activities that interact with the urban environment, family farmers, through direct sales, seek autonomy, even if relative, that is, the production of food to market outside the domain of global value chains, for through horizontal networks they establish with consumers. Thus, reinforcing the local economic network and strengthening urban-rural links that shape rural development processes in relation to the global market and its logic, as stated by Ploeg (2008).

In the social and economic context, the territory of Tupanciretã-RS was consolidated around large-scale production, which allowed this municipality to be identified strongly as an important grain producer. Initially, the territory was organized around the cattle farm, where beef was the symbol in this construction of territorial identity. And, from the agricultural modernization and the globalization that represented the most serious ruptures of the economic domain exercised by the great properties, being significant in the territory - in terms of the use of the agricultural surface – gave place to a transition of a municipality dominated by the livestock production for the production of monocultures. On the other hand, the horizon of action of family farming was identified, along the trajectory of the municipality, by the explosive number of family establishments with a territorial participation and involvement in the form of relationships with the other subjects of the community, through the short commercialization circuits of agro-industrialized products in the family unit, which responds to economic needs (selling surplus products from own production), but also to identity (the need to find contacts, a similar support network).

#### 4 Short Commercialization Circuits

The family production mode, which involves the struggle for autonomy, the intensification of work and the construction of its own resource base, encompassing both material and symbolic dimensions, builds resilience capacities in the face of industrial agriculture, of large-scale production, dependence on inputs and technology, and the globalization of decision-making. The capacity for resilience consists of diversified production systems and the relationships established between production, actors, and territories, that is, the local dimension of agricultural activity (PLOEG, 2008).

Furthermore, re-establishing the connection between people and food, as well as defending local food production, manifests, above all, from the lower degree of dependence on the market point of view, especially on external inputs and commercial relations. Which, simultaneously implemented, in order to strengthen their way of life and production that no longer correspond to the paradigms of modernization, industrialization, and globalization, are circumstances to follow in order to propose the transition to a more just and sustainable food system. That is, the shared project feeds on – and reinforces – each other's results.

These scenarios have emerged in recent years, especially from the construction of grassroots initiatives, in the search to develop new ways to reincorporate food production, distribution, and consumption practices, through relocation and inclusion of attributes of quality processes linked to cultural and environmental aspects – organic, local / regional, artisanal, traditional, colonial, homemade, from land reform, for example – in food, within the framework of more sustainable agricultural systems. Furthermore, under the umbrella labeled Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), which are organizational schemes that connect food producers and consumers through Short Commercialization Circuits (CCC), normally managed on a local scale, focusing on the revaluation of local and traditional foods and sustainable production (for people and the environment).

Furthermore, the RAAs bring into play several elements of reconnection between agriculture, food, health, the environment, local economies and territories, while providing an opportunity to restore the local rural fabric, building an alternative to the productivist paradigm and its predatory relationships (BRUNORI, ROSSI & GUIDI, 2012; NIEDERLE & WESZ JR, 2018; DAROL & ROVER, 2021; PICOLOTTO & BREMM, 2016). Thus, these new production and supply arrangements have a key point: The (partial) elimination of intermediaries, that is, a horizontal relationship between products and consumers.

In this sense, such arrangements also provide, through a set of territorial/spatial and sociocultural elements, “the spatial proximity between producers and consumers; the relational and informational distance between them, making it possible to know the place, the production method, the traditions, and the food culture behind the food” (DAROLT & ROVER, 2021, p. 27). This is reflected in a renewed relationship between producers and consumers who assume different forms of marketing, such as direct sales to consumers; producer fairs (agroecological and family farming); weekly baskets; specialized stores (colonial, natural, organic, artisanal products, etc.); institutional sales (Food Acquisition Program – PAA and



National School Feeding Program – PNAE); and sales to small markets, restaurants or minimal processing units (DAROLT & ROVER, 2021).

Therefore, these short commercialization circuits are manifested from the interaction of consumers who buy products directly from the producer, in which proximity and trust are mediated social relationships that keep the consumer connected with the values of those who produced the product, respecting its cultural, spatial, social, and environmental dimensions. Furthermore, this direct selling practice, founded on the renewal of links between urban and rural spaces, ensures more equitable relationships between participants, as well as offers an opportunity for family farmers to operate outside global value chains. Especially guiding their production to alternative markets, in addition to the reproduction of the family nucleus, in which the workforce of family members in the use of small-scale means of production is linked by the consumption of food on a local scale (DAROLT & ROVER, 2021; MIRANDA et al., 2021; PLOEG, 2008).

## **5 Family agro-industries in Tupanciretã-RS: from production with attributes to direct sales**

Family agricultural production, responsible for most of the production of food consumed in Brazil, has proven to play an important role in reconnecting food production and consumption, especially by adding value to agricultural production and transforming these into products and services that circulate at the local level. This picture is presented in the municipality, from the characteristics that safeguard the satisfaction of their needs, which go beyond the economic nature. Strategies are put into practice by the potential for autonomy, which is increasingly restricted in the conventional system of production and marketing in which farmers are inserted. Therefore, this viable outlet for family agricultural production is operated in different ways, being based on the understanding of the transformations that occur around food. With this, the focus is on the production of quality food and added value, establishing a mediation and a direct relationship with consumers, through short commercialization circuits.

This path of relationships at the local level is presented as a more formal path for the entry of new forces into the local agricultural and food system, for family farmers in the municipality. And, based on their involvement in forms of commercialization that are linked to the use of direct sales channels and institutional sales, the reconstruction of this relationship with the territory is adopted by small producers, whose economic contribution, through gains arising from differentiated products, allows us to trace alternative market paths that no longer depend exclusively on the conventional agri-food system for the existence and reproduction of the family unit, as we will see below (PLOEG, 2008; DAROLT & ROVER, 2021).

Firstly, it is worth mentioning that there are two central elements, based on this case: Family agro-industries, which operate on a smaller scale than the average for their municipality (174 hectares); and food processing that, somehow, emerged as an alternative income for families who went through moments of limitations within the conventional system, also understood as a possibility of retaining income with the agro-industry.

Rural family agro-industries work in the beef and pork processing, in the manufacture of sausages and meat derivatives, manufacture of bread and derivatives, poultry production of colonial chicken, production of sugar cane for distillates, *rapadura* and molasses, processing of fruit pulp and tuber and cassava. In an initiative to expand the added value of products, with ten to one year of operation, avoiding the appropriation of such value by agents of the conventional production chain, artisanal production differentiated by the use of peculiar techniques used by the family in primary production – either of animal or vegetable origin, in final foods – is a strategy implemented by family farmers. That is, by adopting this process of agro-industrialization, in the inclusion of artisanal and traditional production, an alternative of insertion in the market is configured, which allows the small rural agro-industrial establishment to approach production in a niche market segment. Therefore, these are innovations that guide the units to find new spaces for consolidation (GUIMARÃES, 2011; SCHINEIDER et al., 2018).

In view of this, the representation of agricultural life presented by the case of Tupanciretã-RS provides an image of a life that revolves around food production, which is determined by individual choices and motivated by the desire to live a certain type of life that affects the production. At the same time, family agro-industry is also conditioned by the family heritage of its members. Another layer that contributes to a satisfactory experience in the choice of work in the family agro-industry is materialized in the act of creation, that is, it is the process of producing a food that is then offered to the public for consumption. As such, mastering the artisanal process is often experienced with pride by farmers, as well as providing a sense of fulfillment. Therefore, the positive feedback from consumers who appreciate the product and keep buying it is the reference point for the construction of agro-industries, so that the activity of agro-industries seems to be driven by a mixture of desires and ambitions, many of which occur parallel to the guidelines of the activity as a business.

In different ways, it is thus possible to consider – based on the interviewees – that the satisfactory exchange, resulting from the contact between farmers and their customers, can be seen as one of the ways of reconnecting producers and consumers, operating through new forms of supply. Thus, this attempt makes it possible to restore a missing link in the conventional agri-food system, in which production is shifted to other spaces of consumption. In this bias, alternative production and commercialization networks to conventional ones promote a shared vision, as their operations imply a coordination that is capable of considering and valuing different roles played in the agrifood system by the different actors that animate it. And, in addition to the reconnection between production and consumption, with greater autonomy and fair prices for producers and consumers, this direct exchange promotes the dynamization of local markets with territorial identity (ROVER & DAROLT, 2021).

The experiences of agro-industries in the municipality selling their products through direct sales is, therefore, a reality and a strategy implemented by family farmers. And, even if there are different references, scopes, productive orientations, and beliefs, the common pattern results from the interaction between production, processing, and commercialization, through direct relationships and/or institutional purchases of food consumed by people from nearby communities. In other cases, the creation of agribusiness is a resizing strategy incorporated by family farmers.

Thus, for the interviewees, quality guides their production. Which, in other places, is also seen as an element that signals the destination of mass production, which opposes the mechanisms undertaken in processes of individualization and fragmentation that, in turn, characterizes the productive process linked to food and preservation of the actors of the global production chains (NIEDERLE & WESZ JR, 2018; PICOLOTTO & BREMM, 2016). And, for small family agribusinesses located in the rural area of the municipality, through the use of raw material combined with a set of other factors, such as supply by local actors, these aspects are essential in the processing of their production.

On the other hand, public policies are necessary interventions to encourage new alternatives for family farmers. In the case of family agribusinesses in Tupanciretã-RS, subsidies from public programs were measures to support the entry of agribusiness, especially through incentives at first. In this context, it is important to highlight that, historically, in Brazil, the political and institutional space is permeable to pressures and demands from different actors, from which public policies support the position of certain actors (categories) in public arenas (relationships of power, reconstitution of coalitions and hierarchies), which are always games susceptible to power relations. In the municipal context, the public policy mapping suffers from this systemic effect<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, one of the agricultural policy instruments that addresses the peculiarities and benefits of family farming operates in parallel with the subsidies held by large-scale agriculture, for which most of the budget is allocated, materializes in the financing of costs and investment of basic productive activity, exclusively in the extension of cultivated land. This translates into the fact that large properties retain most of public spending on agriculture, indicating a style of State intervention that feeds the agro-export model. While, for small family farmers operating in a regionalized system, subsidies do not represent a sufficient measure of protection, being, therefore, limited because they are significantly smaller than the first pillar (SENCÉBÉ, PINTON & CAZELLA, 2020; GRISA et al., 2021).

However, this does not change the fact that family farmers have contact with public funding. In institutional spaces there are ways to maintain their presence in the local landscape. In this sense, the interviewees affirm that the attention given to their needs by the rural extension service of the municipality gave them the option of following a different path. Family farmers also perceive this demonstration of interest in promoting family agro-industries through local and state government. However, this ability was not always available to understand the specifics of small-scale food production, which operate in short circuits and are inserted in the territorial dynamics of production and marketing. This attitude stems from a whole set of regulatory, political, and relational arrangements that seem contrary to family agro-industry and its category (SENCÉBÉ, PINTON & CAZELLA, 2020). Thus, the imposition of a series of bureaucratic and organizational obstacles limit the room for maneuver at the beginning of the activity.

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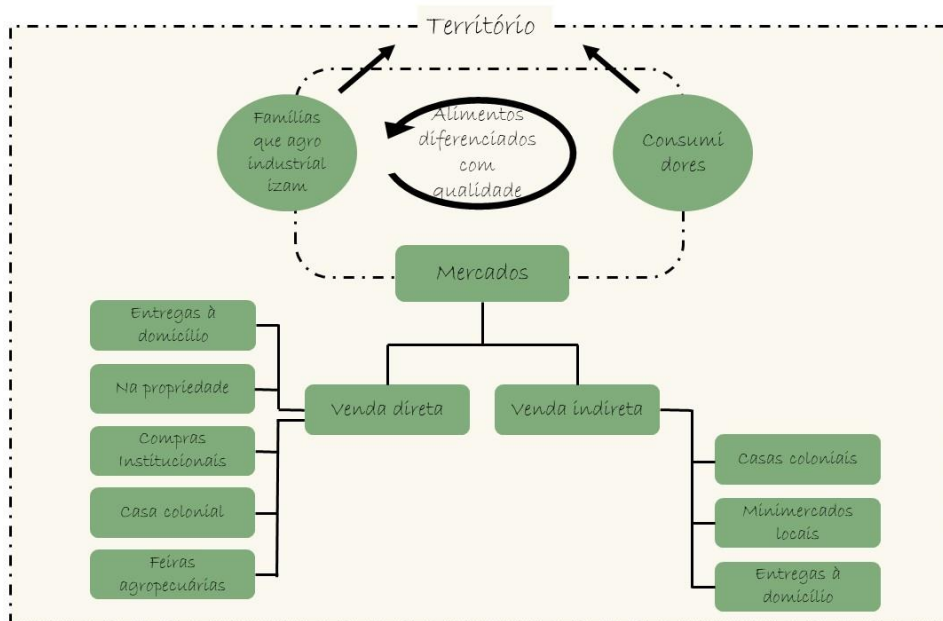
<sup>3</sup> Of the amount of credit contracted (agricultural/livestock/costing/investment) by the municipality, 3.80%, 3.61%, 3.03%, 3.42%, 3.36%, 3.45%, 2, 87%, and 3.58% of the crop plan resources in general terms, in the years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 were contracted by the categories of family farming, respectively (Rural Credit Data Matrix, 2020)

In this regard, it is known that this set of rules issued by the municipal public entity had concrete propositions, so that it marks and guides the operations of small agribusinesses. That is, this element of support for family agro-industries, in addition to promoting their development in a political/regulatory environment that imposes requirements that can only be carried out by big players, makes incentives, through municipal and state policy and recognition of the category by the public entity, have a positive impact, implying an adequate “framework” of intervention, expressed by its organization and its objectives. Therefore, clarifying the scenario through its reach in the condensed agricultural sector of the municipality.

Within the repertoire that guides the reproductive strategies of family farmers, practices that interact in a reticular structure of relationships are implemented – whose nodes interact in order to reduce dependencies and increase autonomy.

This synergy is adopted by family farmers who seek greater commercial flow for their products, through participation in the web of short circuits, and the commercial strategy of family agribusinesses that conditions this autonomy. The commercial orientation of the family agro-industries of Tupanciretã-RS are pronounced in the opportunities provided by the short commercialization circuits, within the context in which the farmers are inserted. Using a commercialization channel or other combinations that add to sales promotion, as seen in Figure 1, some forms of commercialization that are most used by families:

Figure 1 - Commercialization methods used by families



Source: Adaptation by Rover and Darolt, 2021.

Therefore, we can interpret that agribusinesses maintain the direct sales channel associated with other types, eliminating any intermediary that provides greater autonomy, maintaining a focus on production and commercialization. The commercial base adopted by family agro-industries is equally diversified, there is a base that comes from the sale of products on the property and another portion that derives from online sales (via WhatsApp application), being directly delivered to the

consumer's home on a weekly basis, as well as it also offers its products at agricultural fairs, and a part is obtained from sales to small retailers in and around the municipality, in addition to institutional purchases.

Also, in many cases, the connection with consumers provides an autonomy that is threatened by the conventional system. Thus, family agribusinesses avoid being absorbed by situations that may undermine their autonomy, defining short circuits as achievable objectives to resiliently increase their economic/productive activities while focusing on protecting the well-being of their families, in the face of disadvantages of conventional markets linked to uncertainty (MALUF, 2004).

Therefore, the creation of Casa Colônia stands out, which is a small business that sells products linked to the production of family agriculture, being an important element that comprises the strategies of the owners of family agro-industries, since the exhibition of products in this place was a way found to redefine commercial practices and scale the scope of colonial products from family agribusinesses. In addition to maintaining a customer base that appreciates and values the products, it also has the effect of disseminating knowledge about the product in the community, attracting the interest of a greater number of consumers and, thus, this new arrangement becomes an instrument promotion of family agro-industries in the municipality of Tupanciretã-RS, derived from the appreciation shown by the public – consumers in the community.

Selling directly to the public through short circuits, that is, with little or no intermediation operated by third parties, offers new opportunities for farmers. Families seek this alternative path due to liquidity problems (prices paid) caused by price mechanisms (pressure due to falling or growing demand), which are a feature of the conventional food channel. Another common example is the marketing of its products through made-to-order orders that are delivered by the owner to the buyer's homes, in person, although they can be picked up in the agro-industry, which occurs infrequently.

The commercialization carried out in agricultural fairs, although it has not been practiced due to sanitary restrictions, it is important to emphasize that they are markets where family farmers expose their products, together with other producers, in a place destined to the exhibition of products from family agriculture. Thus, the purpose of the event revolves around the exposure of technologies to a certain audience. These markets are normally organized by public administrations in partnership with private companies related to agriculture, held annually in several municipalities. Therefore, this route is a way to be in direct contact with customers from different contexts and obtain the premium price. Unlike traditional fairs, where traders have their properties located around cities, agricultural fairs are held over longer distances, making it viable due to the number of potential consumers. Considering this, family farmers see these alternative commercial arrangements as possible, which, in addition to the added value, add a layer of meaning to their activity, as they feel the reward derived from valuing people for their efforts.

This process brings a series of benefits to family agribusinesses in the municipality, promoting the products of family agriculture. And, in addition to strengthening the link between agro-industries and society, it prints farmers in a greater social role, which is increasingly recognized by larger segments of the population and by their representative institutions. This attributes to them the



potential to be an active part of the local agricultural metabolism (MALUF, 2004). Finally, there are also other synergies practiced with other food sales channels: Operations mediated by public institutions, which encompass a public policy around the access of family farmers to public food procurement markets. This path empowers local and regional supply chains and food systems (MARQUES & LE MOAL, 2014).

In Brazil, from the beginning of the 1990s, an emerging framework of policies aimed at family farming and food security culminated in the country's exit from the hunger map thanks to the Zero Hunger Program launched in 2003, with the purpose of facing the problem of food insecurity and rural development (SENCÉBÉ, PINTON & CAZELLA, 2020). Along the same lines, there was the Food Acquisition Program (PAA), as part of this government action, which provides for the public purchase of food to form strategic stocks and supply families in difficulty, through family farming. Later, in 2009, the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) was introduced. This program provides food supplies to students enrolled in public schools, at all basic levels. The executing agency for this program are the education departments of state municipalities, which must purchase at least 30% of the food they consume from family farmers, sent to schools by the National Education Development Fund (FNDE) (MARQUES & LE MOAL, 2014).

The participation of agro-industries in this program occurs only at the state level. However, in this short-circuit modality that is associated with issues of food sovereignty and protection of family farming, some agribusinesses face difficulties in accessing this system at the municipal level. Although public food purchases contribute to the income generation, production and supply of healthy, safe, diversified, and accessible food, directly interfering with poverty, hunger, health and well-being of the population, for the agro-industries that seek this route – which for some it is the key to their possibilities of resilience and dynamism – this has been a difficult dimension to explore. These limitations stem from the demarcation of revenue per family farmer and from bureaucratic orders, involving suppliers (family farmers) and executing entities.

Furthermore, the existence of these market opportunities are instruments that allowed the consolidation of family agro-industries in the municipality of Tupanciretã-RS in the socio-productive context. Thus, these relationships in which municipalities can manage the construction of a fair local food system, in addition to the benefit of small farmers and incentives, are examples of rural urban reconnection, keeping the promise of promoting territorialized rural development. The role of public institutions as promoters of a process of restructuring the food system could, in this sense, be more easily ceded to family agro-industries in carrying out their promotional activities. Thus, serving the purpose of increasing the visibility of the category and making the voices of family farmers heard by the community.

In general terms, the premise raised by the farmer, in the potential of the family farming world, adopting this AAR approach, can define the bases for the consolidation of a fairer and stronger food system. However, the activation of the alliance between the implementation of a local agri-food system, through the purchasing power of local administrations, could introduce local foods as requirements in their food service contracts, to provide public properties (schools, hospitals and group homes). This, in turn, reduces the chances of disseminating other

forms of compromise conception that circulate along the lines of promoting a grassroots transformation (ROVER & DAROLT, 2021).

Therefore, the intrinsic characteristics of food, in the face of the rapid changes brought about by local labels (sustainable, healthy, organic, artisanal, etc.), would be central elements for family farming. This relates to the way food is produced and the connection that is established with consumers. For this reason, food has a value that crosses monetary figures. These social innovation initiatives thus exercise a variety of grassroots innovations, that is, they are a way of addressing the problems of agricultural production, access and consumption of food. That is, this type of social innovation revolves around new forms of collaboration, forms capable of considering and valuing different roles and possibilities for revitalizing marginalized values and relationships (ROVER & DAROLT, 2021).

In this context, the commercial strategies of family farmers who agro-industrialize their production are combined in a set of initiatives, since they usually choose to serve a mixed combination of channels, such as adhering to short circuits and/or institutional purchases delivering directly to the customer and/or in access points to your products. They develop these different forms according to the conditions, depending on the type of product, location and their strategic orientations as services, which are the Colonial Houses and Colonial Products Tents, where products from other agro-industries in the municipality can also be found.

Some producers, for example, prefer deliveries to central points (bakeries, fruit trees, colonial houses) instead of home deliveries, because making deliveries in different places and times requires logistical effort, which is necessary to supply their various direct channels, requiring a new operation in addition to the activity process. Furthermore, the logistical conditions and the additional cost represent one of the main weaknesses of family farmers in my study, because, acting directly, sales involve a multiplication of logistical operations that left the agro-industry operations with a lack of people for the product delivery.

Therefore, a form of cooperation between farming families, which aims to reduce costs, is extremely important. In this bias, the Associação das Agroindústrias Familiares, created in the first half of 2020, of the municipality is having this same purpose, since from it, these actors have a common sales channel and place. For example, producers plan delivery trips together. In this shared effort, the producers perceive a positive sign because it contributes to reinforce the newly established initiative that, in this way, will end up favoring all agribusinesses and family farming. Therefore, this solidary relationship with colleagues or instead of competing is seen as a positive sign for the municipality, which, in addition to expanding its identity in the territory through the expansion of the preference for food from local agribusinesses, has greater space for recognition and strength in institutional support.

Therefore, all case study producers have experimented with different types of direct channels, and, in most cases, these maintain a multiplicity of market channels. With this, the relationship with customers is built in commercial spaces, where quality is an anchoring element. Direct selling is the instrument chosen by farmers to serve their public and establish this reconnection with local foods.

Furthermore, in contrast to conventional commercialization modes, the diversification of alternative markets in short circuits allows new forms of exchange

between cities and the field of production and consumption. Thus, such diversification offers new opportunities to defend the livelihood of family farmers, as opposed to the conventional market. Still, this alternative is also aimed at multiplying the chances of entering the support radar. In fact, the broader the social base that family farming can enjoy, that is, the possibilities of forging relationships with peers who are located in the territory – such as direct sales to consumers in the city and articulation of the association through municipal entities – the more your own identity is strengthened, as well as the impressions about it. Thus, more likely will be the opportunities for support and, as a consequence, those related to resilience (PLOEG, 2008).

## 5 Conclusion

This article shows a broader picture of agricultural production in the municipality of Tupanciretã-RS, while demonstrating, in detail, the reality of family farmers who agro-industrialize their production. Thus, it was possible to make a description of the small family agro-industries. This context is also described based on the local agricultural context, which converges with the model produced by the development of agribusiness, located at the productive and territorial interface.

Furthermore, it can be seen that the conception of primary production in a final product, processed on a small production scale, takes place in this predominantly hostile environment. This is reflected in an innovation that is dissociated from the imperative specialized and intensified production mode of agricultural commodities (soybean) that promoted (promotes) great changes at the territorial level – intrinsic, expressive, and social changes.

This new path is created from the independence of the conventional production chain, where transformation permeates the production and marketing of food in a regionalized spatial dimension. Therefore, this new arrangement is composed by combining strategies focused on: (a) agro-industrialization of food using traditional techniques that result in the production of food with properties such as colonial, homemade, and artisanal, linked to the niche market segment; (b) eliminate the various links and mechanisms of conventional chains, favoring direct and partial relationships with consumers, bringing their products to market in new markets, through short circuits, which allow them to extract greater added value.

Therefore, the fundamental aspect lies in differentiated production, in which quality characterizes the initiatives of farmers to offer consumers a product with idiosyncratic and symbolic attributes, in which the labels are linked to the agro-industrialization of a product condensed by the protection and respect for traditions and habits. Thus, selling in short circuits, either through direct sales at agricultural fairs, colonial houses, institutional purchases, directly on the property and delivering at home or through intermediary channels (indirectly), such as colony houses, bakeries, and local mini markets, family agro-industries tend to prefer channels that guarantee a greater degree of autonomy.

Consequently, in the abandonment of transactions and links connected to global value chains, families seek alternatives to produce an item with an added value in operational mechanisms that support the development of an agriculture different from the one that dominates the municipality. In this context, families share the

strategy of approaching consumers directly, transmitting and offering them a product with characteristics related to the processing processes and its local origin, putting into play elements of reconnection between agriculture, food, local economies, and territory. Therefore, this current is directed to use resources related to food processing, which are offered at the consumer's table with quality, by a family in the municipality, to combat local issues structured by unequal productive factors. Especially because family agricultural production occupies a peculiar position, being crushed by local productive forces.

Thus, when tracing paths for maneuvering the local productivist model, agro-industrialization through family farming is characterized by dynamism, which is key to its resilience possibilities, due to structural characteristics traditionally associated with productive resources, market forces, and dominant actors. Therefore, by enjoying an urban-rural relationship, in which knowledge about food and who makes it is transmitted, the foundations are advanced to carve out a new relevance for family farmers on the ground. This recognition is, therefore, finding its way into the public sphere, engaging in stakeholder articulation to obtain more vibrant spaces.

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