

A COMPARISON ON FARMERS' PARTICIPATION IN FARMERS' ORGANIZATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL EXTENSION IN MINAS GERAIS*

Uma comparação sobre a participação de produtores rurais em organizações de produtores e implicações para a extensão rural em Minas Gerais

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a comparison on farmers' participation in farmers' organisations and attempts to explain why they prefer to carry out production and marketing activities by themselves. It also examines the implications of the findings for rural extension and related services. A total of 122 interviews were conducted with different categories of farmers and with the extension workers. The comparative analysis of two case studies (Cruz Alta and Pantano) showed that socio-economic characteristics were not very significant in determining the level of farmers' participation in farmers' organizations in Minas Gerais. The ability of managers emerged as one of the most important factors in the success or failure of farmers' organizations. The presence of private competitors can also greatly determine the direction and the destiny of the whole process. Another relevant conclusion is that farmers are more predisposed to participate when the organisations offer additional benefits to them, such as tractor services and sale of inputs. The research findings show that the role of rural extension should be more related to providing more advice on participatory activities and management techniques to farmers' organisations. The major implication of the findings for rural extension, and other institutions involved in the development of rural communities and farmers' organisations, relates to the importance of putting more emphasis on providing knowledge to local people in the technical aspects of managing collective businesses.

Key words: rural extension, associations, management.

RESUMO

Neste artigo, faz-se uma comparação sobre a participação de produtores rurais em organizações de produtores rurais e procura-se explicar porque os mesmos preferem conduzir suas atividades de produção e comercialização sozinhos. Examinam-se também as implicações dos resultados para os serviços de extensão rural e outros serviços relacionados. Um total de 122 entrevistas foram realizadas com diferentes categorias de produtores e com os extensionistas da região. Pela análise comparativa de dois estudos de caso (Cruz Alta e Pantano), mostrou-se que as características socioeconômicas não são tão significativas para determinar o nível de envolvimento dos produtores com suas organizações em Minas Gerais. A habilidade dos administradores apareceu como um dos mais importantes fatores de sucesso ou fracasso das organizações de produtores rurais. A presença de competidores particulares pode também determinar grandemente a direção e o destino do processo como um todo. Outra conclusão relevante é que os produtores estão mais predispostos a participar quando as organizações oferecem benefícios adicionais, tais como serviços de trator e venda de insumos. Pelos resultados da pesquisa infere-se que o papel da extensão rural deve estar mais relacionado ao oferecimento de aconselhamento em atividades participativas e à transmissão de técnicas administrativas. A maior implicação dos resultados para os serviços de extensão rural e outras instituições envolvidas no desenvolvimento de comunidades rurais e organizações de produtores rurais está relacionada com a importância de colocar mais ênfase na transmissão de conhecimento sobre aspectos técnicos de gerenciamento de negócios coletivos.

Palavras-chave: extensão rural, associações, administração.

1 INTRODUCTION

The strategies of development in many countries, including Brazil, have traditionally been based on the modernisation of the rural sector through the capitalisation of the productive sector and economic growth. However,

since the 1970s, these strategies have been questioned by politicians, researchers, and other groups of people involved directly or indirectly in the development process. The emergence of social movements in urban and rural areas, the growing income imbalance, and the difference between the costs and benefits perceived by the local

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population have brought about the redefinition of the earlier development model.

In this context, participation emerged as a mechanism of consensus to include the local population in development strategies with the expectation of bringing in more benefits for this excluded sector of small and poor farmers. The necessity of including the human sector as producers and 'subjects' of their own histories, and not only as simple consumers and 'empty objects' in development strategies was the main assumption underlying the recognition of the importance of participation. As a result, many participatory strategies were implemented and participation became an object of study in different parts of the world. For the authors of this paper participation is still an essential ingredient in the implementation of programmes, which aim the improvement of the quality of life in both rural and urban sectors.

Another important aspect to be considered within development strategies is related to farmers' organisations management. Many farmers have been organised into associations and co-operatives in order to facilitate the development of their activities, to increase their income levels, and consequently to improve the standard of living in rural areas. In this type of organisation, farmers are supposed to act in a participatory style to improve their production and marketing processes, which in turn are supposed to benefit the whole community.

Many studies have examined these issues and have raised the positive and negative issues involved in creating and sustaining farmers' organisations. Some authors place emphasis on participation while others are more committed to technical issues involved in the growth of the organisations themselves.

With regard to these topics and the agricultural sector, rural extension plays an important role in assisting farmers to sustain themselves, their communities, and their organisations mainly because the majority of 'small' farmers in many countries do not yet have the financial means to pay for private consultancy. Consequently, extensionists should have a clear vision of the types of cooperatives and participation needed to develop rural communities and to support farmers in managing their own organisations. Thus, this study attempts both to identify the nature of participation in farmers' organisations and to discuss the role of rural extension in helping both 'sides' to achieve their goals.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Farmers' Organizations

Many researchers have tried to understand what is involved in the development and maintenance of farmers'

organisations and one of the first concerns is to define them. According to Garforth & Munro (1995, p. 28) in general terms "organisations are structures of recognised and accepted roles established and performed by and for members". This definition may appear to be simple; however it is very complex indeed. As structure performed by and for members, the formal and informal interaction between the roles and the people involved in the performance of these roles is crucial. The collaborative form of participation is also extremely important because people are perceived as 'beneficiaries' in the system. As pointed out by Midgley (1986) and Oakley (1985) collaborative interaction is both feasible and desirable in situations that involve people. The process of 'empowerment' postulated by Oakley may be developed in rural communities and farmers' organisations through this interaction.

2.1.1 Characteristics of rural organisations

There are many models of organisations acting in the rural sector and most of them present similar characteristics, thus they may be grouped into two very distinct categories, conventional and participatory, as defined by Oakley (1990). The conventional or traditional organisations are able to bring tangible benefits to the farmers because government, which emphasises economic growth, supports them. They are formally structured, have a large membership and they normally have a professional management orientation. Their members support them with an emphasis on internal economic growth. On the other hand, participatory organisations usually have a small membership and the leadership depends on a collective basis. They are more focused on social development issues rather than on economic growth.

In Brazil, rural unions such as Rural Labour Union, which emerged in the 1980s, are examples of participatory organisations acting in the rural sector (OAKLEY, 1990; OAKLEY & MARSDEN, 1980). According to Gaifani et al. (1996), this movement emerged as one type of spontaneous political reaction of farmers and other people engaged in rural activities, and they have fought against a variety of modern and traditional organisations. Their objectives have been to resist unwanted changes and to promote their own vision of development.

2.1.2. Types of farmers' organisations

Farmers' organisations or rural organisations are broader terms that may be sub-divided or recognised by other terms. The most common type of such institutions, the cooperative, has a long history from the nineteenth

century on. On the other hand, rural workers' organisations feature similar characteristics, including their formation process.

Other types of rural organisations are mentioned in the literature such as farmers' groups, pre-cooperatives, farmers' associations, federations, farmers' unions, agricultural cooperatives owned and controlled by the members, and chambers of agriculture with a general assembly elected by farmers (IFAP, 1992). All these organisations have been conceptualised in different studies, but their essence may be drawn from the two concepts outlined above.

Independently of the kind of organisation, they exist to offer services and benefits to their members. In a study conducted in Saint Lucia, the most common services provided by the 16 institutions analysed were farm inputs, information, training, technical assistance, credit, research, and marketing activities (GRA et al., 1989). The organisations have given more emphasis to services required by their members and those services, which bring more benefits to the whole community. The members should determine these services on a participatory basis, but this has not always happened.

There are many arguments in favour of promoting rural people's organisations, in other words, promoting farmers' organisations in order to bring more benefits to farmers and rural communities. The arguments vary through a range of theoretical and ideological points of view. They include statements such as: working with people's organisations is much more efficient than work with individuals; in organisations, members achieve the aims which they cannot achieve on their own; and, participation would become a reality if local people were involved in extension services (GARFORTH, 1990).

2.1.3 Creation of local organisations

As explained previously, there are different types of rural organisations working to improve rural areas through participation. These organisations have been created with a specific purpose and have become important to many people. In spite of this, they sometimes face problems related to costs and sustainability (BEBBINGTON et al., 1994; UPHOFF, 1992). Leaders usually prepare a plan of financial resources to minimise economic problems in their organisation, and to visualise its situation, which also helps to avoid dependence on external assistance. The main sources of finance considered in cooperatives and associations are membership fees, income generating activities, and buildings (IFAP, 1992).

Organisations, which have been created based on a project, with external help, have often failed. Here, there is neither the motivation nor the local social and economic context to allow them to survive. The organisations do not achieve sustainability, because development assistance is normally an instrument of dependence. If rural organisations survive this first set of problems and manage to keep going, they may still face many other problems during their lifetime. Gra et al. (1989) have identified three significant categories of problems in the associations they studied. The problems were described as related to agricultural production, marketing, and management. In the first group, there are problems related to poor cultural practices, and insufficient capital. In the second category, one may find problems related to prices, lack of transport and storage facilities, lack of communication, and lack of a secure and guaranteed market. In the final group, when the associations are member-driven only few farmers understand the system of management, thereby placing a lot of responsibility in a very few people's hands.

Souza (1995) studies the dilemmas of collective management in small farmers' associations in the south of Minas Gerais. She considered participatory management to be a set of articulated intentional actions implemented to democratise the management process. The interest of people in organisational growth leads to the creation of instruments or tools that allows members' participation in the management process. She observed that the Poço Fundo Association has shown, in practice, that the organisation has grown stronger through participatory management and through the members' articulation, with regards to both short and long-term actions. The association's orientation is translated into committee members' and advisers' concerns in ensuring an educational process in which 'everybody' has the opportunity of deciding the association's destiny.

2.2 Farmers' Participation

In recent decades, many institutions have been involved with rural development and have expressed concern about people's participation at different levels. Researchers have developed many concepts of participation aiming to help in understanding the way people take part in different activities and why they do so. According to Farrington & Martin (1988), Oakley (1985) and Tsiane & Youngman (1986) participation is a 'tool' that enables people to be involved with their own needs and problems through decision-making process. Participation is a very long process, which sees awareness as a

fundamental pre-condition and not as an end in itself. As a result, participation needs to be developed, step by step, by those directly or indirectly involved.

Everyone interested in the understanding of participation should first understand decision-making because effective or 'real' participation has its roots in this process. The first step in the decision-making process is to identify the problem (MCCRACKEN, 1988). This identification may be carried out in a variety of ways: through an informal survey, group discussion, case studies, chain interviews, or intra-household analysis (FARRINGTON & MARTIN, 1988). After this, the people concerned will try to find possible solutions, sometimes with external help, by identifying the causes of the problems and by pointing out possible solutions. When this process is carried out in a group, through an interactive discussion, participation is certainly taking place and needs to be consistently developed and spread to other people around.

The role of the co-ordinator is fundamental to give to the group the sense of being a unit. Campbell (1994) argues that the aim is to foster community synergy. This means helping the group to make best use of the human resources available, by acting as a link person within the group and the community. Facilitation is much more a matter of skilled listening, asking the right questions to the right people at the right time. It is delivery of technical information or packages that challenge people (farmers) to open their minds to new possibilities, to new ways of looking their situation, their resources, and the options open to them.

Studies on rural development have put emphasis upon participation between people in rural communities and those outsiders implementing a project. Sharma (1986) presents some reasons for participation in rural development. Participation is, in the first place, a mean of obtaining information about the local conditions, needs, and attitudes. Without this information development programmes, projects, even the creation of farmers' organisations, could face problems in sustaining themselves when the external institutions stop giving their support.

Another important reason is the awareness of involving people in the planning and preparation of the programme. People are more likely to identify themselves with the project and see it as their project if they are committed before its inception. This is also important for getting local assistance in the construction or maintenance of the project. These two reasons are indirectly supported by IFAP (1992) when the importance of avoiding external dependence in self-support associations is discussed. Finally, one may say that the involvement of people in

their own development is considered to be a basic democratic right and in developing this right, people normally start working in their own immediate environment before achieving influence in the broader environment.

2.2.1 Forms and models of participation

Since 1970, many studies have been conducted with the purpose of identifying the way in which participation emerges and how it can be strengthened. Researchers have been looking for understanding about forms and models of participation, aiming to propose acceptable theories about the ways in which people get involved in particular activities. Oakley (1989, p. 27), for instance, identified three different forms of participation in his studies on rural development as described below.

- i) Spontaneous: 'based on local initiatives which have little or no external support'.
- ii) Induced: 'is arguably more common, results come from external initiatives seeking support or endorsement for external plans or projects'.
- iii) Compulsory: 'people are mobilised or organised willy-nilly to undertake activities in which they have had no say and even which they have no control of'.

Although Oakley (1985) emphasis is upon rural social development and the forms of participation are more concerned with rural development programs, they are normally present in creation and development of local organisations idealised by their own members and in other similar conditions. In this case, the farmers' first concern is their own well being. Miller (1990) also considers participation as 'voluntary' and 'direct' in a study about decision-making in Nepal.

2.2.2 Stages in the participatory process

Participation can also be divided into stages, which vary according to the level of people's involvement in activities developed during a certain period of time. In a study conducted by Oakley (1989), three stages were distinguished in the participatory processes. In the first stage, participation is considered 'marginal' because people's participation is considered 'limited' and 'transitory'. At this stage people have little direct influence on the outcome of the activity carried out around them. 'Substantive participation' is found in the second stage when people are actively involved in the determination of priorities. People also carry out activities, although they are externally controlled by sponsors' institutions and other outsiders directly or indirectly involved in the process. Thirdly, when participation becomes 'structural' people have an active and direct involvement in the activity. At this stage, people have the power to ensure that their opinions are taken into consideration.

In addition, Twelvetrees (1982) presents a basic principle to follow at all levels of working in a group. According to this author, the involvement of the focus people in the early stage of planning any change, including the implementation of new program is relevant. When the people have done the thinking with the facilitator they will not feel as if they were being presented with an 'all or nothing' decision later on, which is just one way to avoid their resistance to change programmed by outsiders. In following this principle, the best way is to go from the 'marginal' to the 'structural' participation discussed above. People involved in rural development and social change achieve better results when they try to set up community development from existing groups. Helping them to develop a structure and think about issues such as resources, decisions, skills, purposes, and publicity instead of trying to persuade them to implement a package of decisions drawn up by external agents is more profitable. These considerations are relevant in linking social participation and the development of farmers' organisations.

2.2.3 Origins and levels of participation

The term 'participation', especially in the Third World countries, started to be diffused through governmental projects in the post war period. People's participation in development programmes served as a strategy, originating from the capitalist countries, to maintain social harmony while they were improving their socio-economic and political activities.

During the cold war between the capitalist and the socialist countries in Europe, the poor countries were not very receptive to anti-capitalist publicity. At that time, mainly the United States of America started to finance projects of 'social help', creating strategies of a false or illusory participation in projects that were supposed to improve the quality of life. This kind of rhetoric ensured that beneficiaries experienced a certain level of satisfaction at the same time as it was used to create conditions that led to the consolidation of the capitalist system.

In Brazil, programs that usually offered subsidies for the creation of technical assistance and rural extension, rural education projects, and national plans of development were implemented in the 1940s. All these projects were examples of Community Development Programmes based on the above assumptions (AMMAN, 1980; DEMO, 1993; SOUZA, 1995). They were not implemented to help people to achieve either social participation or even political participation, but were only superficial.

According to Bordenave (1987), participation can be situated at two different levels and conceptualised as 'symbolical' or 'real'. Symbolical participation occurs when there is a minimal influence on the decisions and the people involved seem to have power, however it is nothing other than an illusion. On the other hand, real participation exists when individuals can affect and influence all the institutional processes. He also adds that the influence can be "expressive" when artistic and philosophical aspects are involved or "instrumental" if the emphasis is placed upon theoretical and professional aspects.

Valadares (1995) further identifies two different concepts in analysing the level of involvement and participation of a cooperative educational committee in the formulation of politics and objectives, and in the operationalization and control of the services offered by the cooperative to its members. In his study, 'passive participation' occurs when the involvement of the members consists only in being beneficiaries of the cooperative assets and recipients of the offered services. On the other hand, 'active participation' means involvement as owner or co-owner of the cooperative business. The active participation of members in cooperatives, discussing everything from simple to complex matters, constitutes an institutional form of pressure upon orders and contra-orders (*mandos e desmandos*) from the prevailing structure.

2.2.4 Constraints on participatory activities

Many rural organisations have faced problems in sustaining their activities and many governmental development projects have faced problems involving 'popular' participation. For these reasons, many studies have focused upon the constraints to participatory activities such as those of Bisalial (1994), Garforth & Munro (1995), Goldey (1980), Inger (1986), Gra et al. (1989) and Tsiane & Youngman (1986).

According to Tsiane & Youngman (1986), the existence of significant constraints on popular participation and the gap between policy makers' intentions and the reality of the community are the main questions surrounding the theory and practice of people's participation in rural development. These authors also discuss other aspects related to social participation and they categorise the constraints on participation as related to: Organisational structures, Personal problems, Socio-economic conditions, Political factors, and External influences.

Other authors have postulated different classifications of constraints on the development of

participatory activities. Inger (1986), for instance, presented the following classification in his study of popular participation in rural development: Educational background, Migration, Economic growth without development, Cultural constraints such as values and rules, The death of the spirit of self-help, and Low participation in meeting.

Bisaliah (1994), in identifying the motivating factors for participation in the 'farm forestry programme', observed that most of the constraints for non-participation in the programme were related to: lack of resources, for instance adequate land; technical issues such as gestation period and adverse effect on land fertility; and development support factors such as insufficient institutional finance and market facilities. On the other hand, the reasons for participation were related to natural and technical aspects, e.g. non-suitability of land for the field crop; economic reasons such as low human labour requirements for forestry and higher annual return than field crop; and domestic needs such as fuel and timber. Thus, this kind of study also helps to identify different reasons for involvement in other sorts of rural development programs.

3 METODOLOGY

This paper is based in a research study, which was carried out using an ethnographic approach. This research attempted to describe how participation is occurring in farmers' organisations in order to understand why most farmers prefer to carry out production and marketing activities apart from such organisations. As a result, the researcher aimed to identify the nature of participation in such organisations by identifying farmers' attitudes towards participation; the factors which facilitate the participatory process; and problems which interfere with and inhibit the participatory process in farmers' organisations.

The research was based on a bibliographic revision, direct observation, documentary analysis, formal and informal interviews and fieldwork. A total of 122 formal interviews were carried out with the associations' committee members, farmers who market their production through rural associations, ordinary farmers (non-members), and the local extensionists in two rural communities in the south of Minas Gerais, Brazil in 1998. This municipality was chosen because of the importance of strawberry crops for the economic growth of the region (MINAS GERAIS, 1998). The formal interviews provided the most relevant data and were compared with data from informal interviews and secondary sources of information.

A conceptual framework was set up to assist in answering the following research questions: (i) Who is

participating in farmers' organisations and why are they participating? (ii) How is participation occurring in the social context? (iii) How do farmers' organisations affect the production process? (iv) How do farmers participate in the management of farmers' organisations? However, it also indirectly helped in identifying the main factors that facilitate the participatory processes in farmers' organisations, and the main problems faced by farmers which interfered in the participatory process.

4 MAJOR FINDINGS

4.1 Strawberry production in Pantano and Cruz Alta

The strawberry crop was introduced into the Pantano community in the middle 1980s. Up to that time, the community had been very poor and farmers used to rely on subsistence crops and temporary work to sustain their livelihoods. Over the last 12 years, this has changed significantly as a result of the new crop. Nowadays, most farmers are involved or getting involved in strawberry production. It is very labour intensive and even children are welcome in performing different sorts of services such as picking and packing. The strawberry yield is normally high as each plant produces more than a kilo of strawberries during the harvest season and the resultant income can be considered high when compared with other common agricultural or livestock activities (MINAS GERAIS, 1998). Unlike other traditional agricultural activities, strawberries are easily perishable, cropping them requires many different abilities, and the harvest season normally lasts up to 6 months.

The creation of local organisations, which really was a challenge for new farmers, was soon accepted and implemented by them to improve marketing. The Pantano association has been faring very well in its enterprise. The Pantano association is a fresh organisation, founded at the end of 1992, by a group of 25 farmers. In 1993, its first year of operation, the association marketed 194 tons of strawberries from 65 farmers. In 1997, when the fieldwork was carried out, the association had 120 members effectively marketing their strawberry production through the association, and the quantity marketed was 650 tons. However, its best performance occurred in 1996, when the quantity marketed reached 780 tons. The association patrimony is made up of a 200 square meter headquarters built into a 440 square meter piece of land, a Massey Ferguson tractor, another 800 square meter piece of land, a computer, and furniture. All the association's belongings were bought with the 3% paid by members and the *quota* paid by partners, excluding the land where the headquarters was built, which was donated.

The figures above show that the association has been performing very well in this short period of time. It has a relatively high number of members and is marketing a considerable amount of strawberries. This association has a stable marketing system and is managing to offer additional benefits to members so it has not only attracted farmers but also has kept them committed to the organisation. The association sells inputs and delivers them to the farms, offers cheaper tractor services, and indirectly provides technical assistance. The directors also have a good educational background, and they have received technical support from the local extensionist to create and manage the business. These factors, along with the positive involvement of the community and loyalty of members have contributed to the growth of the organisation.

Nevertheless, the organisation located in the community of Cruz Alta, known as APROMOPA (The Strawberry Association of Pouso Alegre), where the strawberry crop was introduced earlier, has faced many problems over its 15 years of existence. These problems are mainly related to lack of capital and administrative knowledge in providing benefits to farmers, and a high sense of independence among the community. As a result, nowadays it is a small organisation in terms of membership and marketing. In 1992, the association had 73 members, but this number dropped to less than 30 members in 1997, and it tends to decrease even more unless a dramatic change happens in both the internal and external environment. As for the association's output, it marketed 116 tons of strawberries in 1992, 131 tons in 1995, which was its best performance in the last decade, and only 66 tons in 1996.

Another problem, which has affected the performance of the Cruz Alta association, is the presence of many private companies marketing strawberries in the community. This is because some farmers started to market strawberries by themselves many years ago, nowadays they are well established in the region and inhibit the development of cooperative movements like the APROMOPA. In addition, this association was set up with the help of external assistance, but it deteriorated in time as a result of the substitution of the extensionist responsible for attending the community.

Members and other farmers in the community have never been effectively committed to sustaining the organisation as they were always competing among themselves. The association had a brilliant start, with a farmer donating a piece of land and the extensionists helping to get funds to build its headquarters, but the

management committees did not manage to offer constant benefits to members as most of the private companies usually do. The benefits offered by private companies include money loans to buy inputs and prepare the soil, and free boxes for packing the product. The disputes and constant rivalry did not allow the farmers to pursue a common objective. As a result, a considerable number of farmers, including the capitalist ones, have achieved a relatively high standard of living but many farmers, mostly peasants and neo-peasants, still rely on external help to grow their crops and market their products.

4.2 The Nature of Participation

The nature of participation in the communities studied in Minas Gerais is summarised below, in reference to the conceptual framework developed for the research (VILAS-BOAS, 2000). There were not many differences between associated farmers and non-associated farmers. Thus, this paper will address only the main characteristics of the farmers engaged in the associations and their points of view about participation and related aspects.

- The community of Cruz Alta has specialised in strawberry production for a longer time. The farmers' characteristics are therefore different because the strawberry crop was introduced first into this community. The farmers tend to be older, to have lower educational levels, to own larger strawberry crops, and this in turn affects land tenure. Furthermore, they still tend to crop the same subsistence products, receive the same annual income, and work on the same size of lands. The personal and professional characteristics do not seem to be very important in determining the level of farmers' participation in organisations marketing agricultural products because non-members also have similar characteristics.
- On the other hand, the way the organisation influences the production process seems to be directly related to the level of farmers' commitment to cooperative organisations. The Pantano association assists the farmers indirectly in planning, organising, directing, and controlling their production; thus Pantano's farmers are more involved in the association than the farmers of Cruz Alta.
- Few ordinary farmers of Pantano are involved in the association's management activities while members of APROMOPA have not helped the directors to manage their business. Analysing this information in context, it is possible to say that participation in the management process is more likely to occur when the organisation interacts with the production and marketing processes in the community.

- The Cruz Alta association was initiated with an induced form of participation and it is still marginal for different reasons, while spontaneous participation was one of the bases for the collective business in Pantano. People's involvement seems to be a step ahead in Pantano and it may develop from a substantial to structural participation in the future. Both internal and external environmental issues, such as the marketing mentality and infrastructure of the community, the kind of assistance received, and the technical knowledge of the directors, have affected the bases of participation both positively and negatively.

- The levels of participation are different in both communities. Pantano farmers are much more involved in the association than the majority of Cruz Alta farmers who passively wait to receive advantages from the collective business.

- With regard to the characteristics of participation, direct and formal participation is more proactive and effective in Pantano than in Cruz Alta. Farmers attend more meetings and lectures in that association and they positively contribute with their points of view to improve the association's activities. They are also more receptive to advice on improving their own activities. The same applies to indirect and informal participation because the effects of these types of participation have been positive in Pantano and negative in Cruz Alta. The Pantano community is generally more positive about its organisation. Cruz Alta farmers however who market their produce independently and also some private companies are not totally in favour of the presence of an association.

- Bearing in mind the considerations presented above, the researcher may say that the results of participation on individuals, organisational groups, the organisation itself, and the communities can be summarised below. The individuals of Pantano have developed a cooperative mentality with regard to their involvement in the association and other community activities. Organisational groups, like directors, have a positive image in the society and consequently the organisation itself has benefited from the loyalty of both directors and members. In addition, the organisation has brought improvements to the strawberry crop and seems to have stimulated young farmers into getting involved in such crop. Meanwhile, the organisation of Cruz Alta has neither helped farmers in the production nor in the marketing of their produce; thus some directors and committee members have a negative reputation within certain sectors of the community. This organisation is now weaker than the association of Pantano because most of the community's farmers do not have a cooperative

mentality and there is a fierce competition among strawberry buyers in the community.

In summary, the researchers observed that the theories about farmers' organisations and participation were to a large extent 'proved right' in both case studies. As a result, this research has contributed to increase knowledge on these subjects through the theoretical replication postulated by Yin (1994). Understanding the nature of participation in farmers' organisations is a very complex issue in which researchers should look at many distinct aspects simultaneously in both the internal and external environment.

4.3 The Role of Rural Extension in Developing Farmers' Organisations

With regard to rural extension in providing guidance to farmers on marketing their produce, it is possible to infer that this orientation can be made operable individually or in-group. In the case studies analysed, the researchers observed that individual farmers as well as associated farmers have received more advice in Pantano than in Cruz Alta. More than three thirds of the Pantano associated farmers received technical advice to help with their farmers' activities and about half of all non-members also received technical advice in 1997. Although the assistance in both cases is directed more to the production than to the marketing process, members involved in farmers' organisations seem to receive more assistance than non-members.

Very few farmers do receive technical advice from the Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Company (EMATER), the governmental organisation which is in charge of providing rural extension in Brazil and about half of members and non-members did not receive any kind of advice in Cruz Alta, in 1997. Although some farmers complained about the poor quality of the services offered by the local extensionist, the majority of the farmers interviewed agreed that they already have sufficient experience with the strawberry crop and do not need any external assistance. A 32 year-old-man stated that 'I just uproot sick plants and throw them away instead of looking for technical assistance'. This attitude is not advisable and farmers should be instructed to search for help at any time, mainly during the production process.

Agricultural stores provide another source of technical assistance and farmers usually get advice from the salesmen. These salesmen usually assist farmers in choosing fertiliser, insecticides, and pesticides, but do not help at the marketing level. This source of advice is more available among the farmers of Cruz Alta than those of

Pantano. The findings are in accordance with the studies of Bisalialah (1994), Carter (1999) and Zijp (1998); they state that farmers have searched for advice in different spheres including the private sector and 'fellow farmers'. In Pantano, as well as in Cruz Alta, the farmers also have access to other sources of private advice such as agribusiness and fund suppliers.

The findings also have shown that the community, which has benefited from public extension, is better equipped to sustain its own organisation. The extensionist has worked as an intermediary between the farmers and the association, and has provided orientation about the role of cooperative groups in marketing the agricultural product. Group advice offered by the extensionist has created a very positive and strong link between farmers and the association. This method also helps to increase awareness about participation in organisational activities.

The analysis also shows that ordinary strawberry farmers do not have the financial means to afford private consultancy. Only private companies and wealthy landowners, which work with various sharecroppers, sometimes contract services from agronomists to assist with the strawberry crop. According to the extensionists, they usually attend small farmers as stipulated by the philosophy of EMATER. In the 1990s, during the reforms of the institution called the Business Development Program, it was re-defined that extensionists should mainly attend the needs of small farmers (GOUTHIER, 1998).

The relationship between farmers and extensionists is much more productive in Pantano as most farmers see the extensionist as someone who wants to help them; they rely on his knowledge and frequently accept his advice. The same happens between management committee members and the extensionist. They have a very professional relationship and the assistance of the extensionist, along with the abilities of the directors, were essential in the process of creating and sustaining the association.

The two extensionists have different backgrounds and perspectives thus their actions and attitudes towards the rural communities are also different. The extensionist, who attended the farmers of Pantano, seems to be more devoted to the practical aspects of technical assistance and he is usually involved in the production and marketing processes. On the other hand, the Cruz Alta extensionist is usually more involved with bureaucratic and publicity activities, and he is normally more committed to political issues, for instance, the organisation of the strawberry festival, which in fact does not directly affect the farm's development.

In brief, both extensionists are committed to their activities but they have got different approaches in dealing with their jobs. The older extensionist is more involved with cooperative movements, thus the Pantano community is one step ahead in sustaining its cooperative organisation.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION

Fruit growing is usually very demanding and employs a considerable number of people. Consequently it brings many positive results, not only in terms of contributing to a decrease in the level of unemployment in the rural sector, but also by increasing the income level of rural families as postulated by many authors, such as Almeida (1998) and Ferreira (1997). In this context, the strawberry crop was introduced into Pouso Alegre in the 1970s and it brought many benefits to the region. Farmers, who had previously dealt with corn, beans, rice, and milk, demanded external help to learn about the new production process and marketing system.

Rural extension played a positive role in this endeavour and a few years later extensionists assisted farmers in the creation of their own organisations to market their produce and provide more benefits for themselves, instead of selling to private companies and merchants. One organisation was founded in 1984 and another in 1992. The first one was created according to a more assistencialist philosophy and the second one seems to be more professional or business like as a result of the kind of orientation provided by the extensionists. However, farmers' socio-cultural characteristics also contributed to increase this differentiation. With this general reminder, it is important to observe the implications of findings for rural extension services.

The major implication of the research findings for public rural extension and other institutions involved in the development of rural communities and farmers' organisations, has to do with placing more emphasis on providing knowledge to local people on the technical aspects of managing a collective business. It is essential to prepare directors and potential leaders to carry on administrative activities especially in highly market-orientated communities.

One of the roles of rural extension should be to teach management techniques and the process of marketing instead of providing advice related exclusively to farmers' daily activities. The authors are not postulating that this kind of advice is not necessary, but they are highlighting an important area for assistance in the rural sector. Traditional farmers usually learn how to deal with

new crops quickly but it is still hard for them to apply ideal management techniques because they have a slightly different rationale from business-focused farming. They do not usually have written control of their activities and this is one of the most crucial factors in succeeding to manage a collective activity. Contacting NGOs, local schools, or university staff to produce lectures and short courses for potential leaders, innovative farmers, and even extensionists is a useful method of introducing administrative techniques into the rural sector.

Rural extension has a long journey ahead before creating and sustaining a cooperative mentality among farmers because they tend to be very individualistic. Rural extension may use various participatory methodologies such as Development Education Leadership Teams in Action (DELTA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and Theatre for Development to improve the levels of farmers' participation in collective business such as associations and cooperatives as stated by Brito & Gomes (1997). It may also adopt such methodologies to raise farmers' awareness in identifying and avoiding manipulative actions from different elements acting in the fruit market system.

5.1 Suggestions for Further Research

This study shows that the main constraints to participation in farmers' organisations are the lack of technical knowledge among directors; issues related to the kind of external help provided by rural extension services and other institutions responsible for providing technical advice; and socio-cultural aspects. Thus, this research suggests that other studies may look for detailed information on the relationship between the success of farmers' organisations and the professional characteristics of committee members, mainly directors. Further research may draw attention to personal characteristics such as formal and informal education, communication abilities, negotiation capacity, and leadership skills.

Concerning the role of rural extension in sustaining farmers' organisations, this study reveals that the community which received better orientation on associativism had a better potential in participating. As the other community also received assistance from the same institution, the authors believe that other factors prevailed upon this one to inhibit the development of Cruz Alta organisation. As a result, it would be interesting to follow up the development of the Pantano organisation in order to identify the effects of changes of the emphasis in rural extension. Research may identify changes when the extensionist is replaced or when the general

philosophy of the institution regarding cooperative movements is changed.

Finally, a very important and conflictive field for further research has to do with the cultural aspects that interfere in the development of farmers' organisations. It seems relevant to identify both political and ideological factors that could prevent people's participation in collective business. This includes studies on the roles of the different actors involved in the marketing system, their ideologies, power, and relationship with local people. Research may also emphasize the predisposition of the people in getting involved in such business *a priori* and after the creation of farmers' organisations.

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