

A half-century of transformations in the Brazilian rural scenario and the governmental action

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Abstract – The purpose of this article is to associate the history of land in contemporary Brazil to government action, especially in relation to the most recent challenges when implementing its policies. The interpretation of Brazilian agrarian history is presented addressing the last fifty years, which is divided in five phases of ever-growing complexity. The first section highlights the crucial role of the modernization drive of the 1970s, a historical period when a new form of sociability became ingrained. Thereafter, the article presents some of the most notable changes in recent years, and calls attention to economic and productive aspects, although equally stressing the growing politicization of current debates about the future of rural Brazil. The last section summarizes some of the challenges considered urgent, which are confronting Brazilian agriculture in these times. In the conclusion, the article argues the need to discuss and implement a consistent strategy for rural development in Brazil, a government action which still does not exist.

Keywords: rural governance challenges, Brazilian agrarian development, contemporary Brazilian agrarian history, capitalist sociability.

Introduction

This article presents a brief overview of the Brazilian rural scenario and the changes it underwent over almost half a century. It is a sociological rather than multidisciplinary interpretation of a social and productive space of the Brazilian society that in a not so distant future was occupied by the majority of the Brazilian population, whether as their homestead or the place where rural practices were predominantly carried out. Another study points out that,

[...] in 1930, three out of four Brazilians lived in rural areas. By the end of the century, about one out of six remained in the same situation. (BUAINAIN; DEDECCA, 2010, in press).

It is a known fact that it was only in a historically recent year – 1956 – that the contribution of industrial activities in the formation of domestic wealth exceeded the agricultural activity, showing that urbanization and industrial expansion processes are relatively recent, despite having gained momentum during the

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second-half of the last century. This is the reason why different cultural and social behavior aspects still significantly affect the rural Brazil of not so long ago, despite the relative urban-industrial abundance and the Country's technological importance.

During the 1970s, the Central-South, one of the most important Brazilian agricultural regions was greatly undergoing a remarkable technological revolution. A new rationality about the rural environment and its activities was imparted gradually under a strong process of economic-productive transformations, which would determine equally gradually but continuous changes on the social behavior of rural families from then on. That decade of economic transformations that changed both rural Brazil and the domestic economy as a whole is, for sure, the most outstanding decade of our history. As a consequence, when that period was over, the 1980s would find a radically different country, much more urbanized and first and foremost, highly guided by an economic logic (and its social repercussions) that would increasingly and decisively affirm capitalist sociability in Brazil.

The intention of this brief essay is to systemize recent agrarian history and its main features, highlighting its relationship with governmental action, whereby the potential role of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply stands out. The first and longest section summarizes the history of Brazilian agriculture, as perceived by the author, from the 1950s until present time. The first (and brief) overview of the Brazilian rural scenario for the period at hand shows there was a simple segmentation, where agrarian development can be simple divided in two periods: before and after the modernization that took place in the 1970s.² However, this section proposes a more nuanced period-division limited to the five phases of agriculture since the 1950s.

² Despite not addressed in this article, it should be noted that we have not yet consolidated a debate that identifies the differences that are not mere theories, but the expression of usually qualify the term "development." Synonyms such as agrarian development and rural development are used when their meaning is almost the opposite. If this discussion were made many differences of opinion related to the rural environment would probably be clarified. For an introduction to such differences, see Navarro (2001).

The second section addresses some recent and significant changes and their implications to the Government, highlighting in particular the fact that governmental action imperatives were greatly changed over the last two decades. This section draws attention, for example, to the unprecedented growing political awareness between relationships involving different rural stakeholder groups, gaining ground especially when Brazilian society underwent a strong democratization process during the post-Constituent period.

Finally, the last section of this article presents a schematic list of some of the most urgent challenges to be overcome in order to integrate the Brazilian rural scenario socially and economically, reaching more consistent levels taking into account an actually capitalist modernity. This section ends with an admonishing as part of the main conclusion: Brazil needs a rural development policy, which in fact, we never had in our whole history. One of the most important features of such policy, should it ever be implemented, will be to realize that government action assumptions have radically changed.

In the past, this action was earmarked exclusively for producers (or just some of them) and agricultural activities as such, as if they were a stand-alone product, disconnected from the rest of society and economy. Currently, Government action – that is a top priority for Brazil – requires a more comprehensive and total vision that reaches out beyond the rural scope and that implies in the existence of innovative governance, under a political-institutional format unlike the traditional model in effect so far (CHESHIRE et al., 2007).

Thus, current government policies require that history and its contemporary consequences can be interpreted, integrating other social and economic sectors and overcoming misleading influent existing perspectives. They can be lim-

ited visions that address just the land, or visions that address just agriculture defended by some analysts. In other words, it is necessary to build a new rural development policy that equally reinterprets agrarian history if the purpose is to produce better results in terms of production and productivity; however, it is equally important to maximize economic and social results not just for the rural scenario, but extended to all Brazilians.

The concise history of Brazilian agriculture: from post-war to present day

Proposing interpretations about agrarian development, highlighting in particular the periods when it effectively underwent changes (ergo, the main phases), will always be a controversial endeavor – especially since that those interpretations are proposed under the approach of social science, which is a scientific field where theoretical disagreement still thrives. Hence, the form of assessment will always be subject to criticism by opposing analysts. For sure this is no different in the case of Brazil, in much less so under this study.

In making this acknowledgement – the intention of which is to highlight the preliminary aspect of this study, since discussions about “decisive moments” in the Brazilian agrarian development are still rare – this author believes that maybe it is possible to perceive that the rural scenario and its production activities underwent five relatively distinct periods follow the end of WWII. In each period, the agricultural and rural dynamics was transformed by new processes, especially economic ones, driven by the logic inherent to agriculture itself, or most commonly, exogenous forces strong enough to charter a different path to the intelligibility of the development of agricultural activities. Likewise, and especially over the last years, political and

institutional processes started to make a difference in each of the five periods mentioned as follows: i) post-war until 1968; ii) from 1968 to 1981; iii) during the 1980s; iv) during the 1990s; v) from 1998–1999 to present day.

The starting point for the first period, albeit somewhat vague in terms of beginning, is hereby indicated as the “post-war” period, culminating in the period 1965–1967, when the National Rural Credit System and other complementary institutional schemes were implemented, which would later greatly boost the next period.

During the first phase, agriculture underwent visible technological primitivism, and production increase took place exclusively due to the increase of the planted area. Agroindustrial inputs were rarely used, as shown in the 1960 Census, which identified that there were only 56,000 tractors in place, all of which were imported. In sum, until those years, Brazilian agriculture was a virtually prehistoric activity from the technological outlook.

In those years of this first phase, there was no development of significant social behaviors that would motivate producers by a capitalist economic logic *per se*, where a principle of capital accumulation basically prevailed, especially due to contractual conditions and because the formalization of agricultural activities practically did not exist³. The coffee culture reigned absolute, as coffee was practically the only significant product of all the export agenda that was comprised mostly of agricultural products. In that period Brazil was primarily an agricultural and agrarian country, despite the rise of the Brazilian industrial sector, especially in the 1950s.

The social organization of producers was then embryonic, as just the largest land owners formed their associations to defend their own interests (and were accepted by the political system). Other producers, particularly poorer ones and rural workers, ran into nearly insurmountable difficulties to form their own organization,

³Classic interpretation that explains production primitivism in rural areas, at the same time when the roots of modern capitalism were set up in cities is the article by Oliveira (1972).

and it was only in the early 1960s that rural worker unions were able to expand with any significance (especially in the administration of Almino Afonso, in the Ministry of Labor, during the brief Administration of President Jango – João Goulart). In 1959, for example, there were only three authorized and/or acknowledged STRs in Brazil.

This social, economic, technological and political-institutional primitivism would start to be broken in the period of the military regime implemented in 1964, but was intensified only as of 1968, when the second phase of the Brazilian agrarian development began. Those were years of notable economic expansion, illustrated by 8.9% annual average economy growth during the 1970s, and for the first time the Brazilian Government was to implement a bold national strategy for technological modernization of agricultural activities. This phase encompasses the period 1968–1981, unprecedented in terms of intense technological expansion in some Brazilian rural regions. This is, undoubtedly, the most important period of Brazilian agriculture, and for this reason, as aforementioned, a simplified division in periods would divide Brazilian agrarian development into two periods: before and after the decade of economy-production modernization in the 1970s.

The decisive relevance of those years that presented extremely high growth rates is essentially due to the fact that the new economy logic was implemented, together with its corresponding formal requirements, which would gradually but radically change social behaviors. Those were the years when the roots of a new sociability were formed, at that time still restricted to the regions that the military regime discretionarily chose to give priority when it granted favorable credit resources, as well as other agriculture-expansion mechanisms, such as infrastructure expansion, also fostering the creation of a comprehensive rural extension and technical assistance service. More important yet because of its future consequences in those years (in 1972) was the creation of Embrapa, that previously served as in-

cubator for new technologies customized for Brazilian biomes, which would prove to be one of the most relevant and successful decisions made by the military governments. At the end of this phase, a “different Brazil” would emerge, whether in cities or in some rural areas, expanding its economy infrastructure and high rate of urbanization, with a new social development potential (MELLO; NOVAIS, 2009). These changes ensued from an intentional and profound movement to foster macroeconomic restructuring, strongly backed by external savings, which would generate the foreign debt that would comprise the next phase. For illustration purposes, it should be noted that in those years, approximately one-fourth of international investments abroad were made in Brazil, resulting in a significant change in Brazil’s macroeconomic profile.

Following the successful model of agricultural modernization implemented in post-war United States, the Brazilian government irrigated rural regions with large and low-cost credit, fostering technological transformation to agricultural activities (KAGEYAMA; SILVA, 1983). Thus, the Brazilian agroindustrial park, boosted financially with the implementation of technological packages that were granted to rural producers. This tacit alliance between producers (selectively chosen in some regions, especially large-size producers), the new agroindustrial sector and Government policies finally enabled the parting away from the lethargic agriculture of the past. This resulted in the establishment of a new sociability – now capitalist – that gradually would be consolidated throughout the Brazilian rural scenario (especially since the second part of the 1990s). It is for the aforementioned reasons that the economy expansion decade of the 1970s represents a true “turning point” for the development of Brazilian economy and society. It is also important to note that in this second period, from 1960 to 1980, a strong relocation wave took place, where some 30 million Brazilians moved from rural areas to urban centers. Thus, the urbanization process was accelerated, definitely breaking away from Brazil’s agrarian and agriculture standard of the past.

This strong transforming dynamics ended in the disastrous year of 1981, when Brazil finally reaped the impacts of the turbulence from the previous decade, with the two oil shocks and the ensuing macroeconomic crisis that hit advanced capitalist countries; they led to new and unprecedented inflation rates, unemployment and reorientation of the macroeconomy policy. The greatest symbol representing this new phase was the highest negative growth rate of Brazilian economy in 1981 (-4.3%), only compared in our history to an equivalent rate observed in 1990. Under this scenario of imbalance, a new economy mindset would gradually arise, which would later be called neoliberalism, especially during the 1990s (GLYN, 2006).

When the overall data are studied for the Brazilian case, the 1980s were the so-called “lost decade” and comprise the third phase of the post-war agrarian development. That decade was affected by low growth rates for the Brazilian economy, which in average declined to only 2.4% annually, where inflation increased and the monumental foreign debt put a straight-jacket on economy, posing a huge challenge on rural producers. Those years were marked by repeated economic imbalances, where actual prices paid to producers were usually low (as domestic and foreign demand was insufficient, forcing prices to fall). However, with agriculture suffering the impact of adverse factors, the 1980s witnessed extraordinary gains in quality for Brazilian society. I am making reference to the unprecedented fact that in this decade there was the consolidation in the standard of food supply and agricultural inputs, aligned to the existing demand. This type of articulation would always be in place in future years, leaving behind the situations of temporary food shortage that erratically marked the Brazilian agrarian history.

This outstanding result was caused by another factor ensuing from the previous phase, but consolidated in this third period; in other words, the first fruit of social behavior marked by a new sociability. Another new aspect of those years was that results from agricultural

production would also ensue from productivity gains and not only from expanding crop areas, like in the past. In other words, the modernization of the previous decade and the intense absorption of an actually capitalist logic started to change social behavior among a growing number of producers; gradually, this new sociability motivated the better management of the activity, seeking results that would also incorporate productivity gains.

The fourth phase of Brazilian agrarian development was symbolically started in 1991, when the Asuncion Treaty was signed, which gave origin to Mercosul, thus inaugurating trade deregulation that is one of the aspects of that phase. In that decade, different aspects would turn those years in a unique period of Brazil’s rural history. They were critical years for many segments of producers, which were reflected in two movements. On the one hand, the actual prices paid to producers were even lower than in the previous phase (BARROS, 2010). However, on the other hand, the domestication of the monetary imbalance that marked Brazil since the early 1980s, with repeated and unsuccessful inflation adjustment plans, was established with the stability obtained in 1994 with the Real Plan, whereby producers would have to pay a price. Lower land price, ensuing from monetary stability, caused loss of asset value, and this, for many years in that decade agricultural activities were strongly hindered, leading to persistent reduction. From the economy point of view, for rural producer more integrated to trade markets it was a very unrestful decade, where profitability levels were often degrading.

This scenario of uncertainties also brought about emergency as a new factor, now more emphasized in land disputes, where a model of property invasion was installed, especially by the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST), to expand in the following years. Thus, a process of political awareness started in the relationship between producer organization, inciting disputes and conflicts that would spread through-

out Brazil. Finally, two other factors would typify this decade.

One was the regulation of social rights to rural workers, provided for the 1988 Constitution, universalizing rights previously denied to a large number of Brazilian, especially rural working women that before the Constitution lived under the unacceptable condition of substandard citizens, where they were not entitled to rural retirement plan, for example (DELGADO; CARDOSO JÚNIOR, 2000). In practical terms, the scope of those benefits are translated into monetary compensation for the poorer social segments of the rural region, which is an undeniable political conquest, albeit partial, to democratize social relations in the rural region.

The other, typical of this fourth phase, was the institutionalization of the “Family farming” concept, formalized with the creation of Pronaf in 1995, which became a law in 2006. This change would bring about long-term consequences, segmenting the group of farmers into two large groups, which became identified by arbitrary criteria (parameters that lacked any theoretic fundament).

The initial objective of the proposed concept was only to provide access to public funding, and hence it was necessary to adopt objective criteria to place producers into categories. However, in the following years there was an exaggerated segmentation, which reflects, first and foremost, the political disputes between producer organizations that were often inflamed by ideological motivation not always explicit (NAVARRO, 2010a).

Finally, there is a last and more recent phase of this proposed division in periods (the fifth), starting in the late 1990s, with the boom of agricultural products, stimulated by the astounding growth of Chinese demand, one of the new food importers. It is a period of economic intensification and prosperity, which actually had started much earlier, but gained momentum at the end of the decade until it was halted by the 2008 financial crisis.

This phase was built on a technical-productive base that over the last 30 years, after the establishment of the aforementioned changes in relation to the 1970s, is fundamentally different than other past phases of the Brazilian rural history. For sure, the greatest change was that productivity became the main driver for agricultural activity, now radically changing social behavior in most rural regions, and definitely implementing the essence of a capitalist rationality as its development driver. Gasques et al. (2010) analyze this period as follows:

[...] 6.5% of the increase of agricultural products from 1970 to 2006 was due to total productivity increase of factors, and 35% due to increase of quantity of inputs. In the period 1995–2006, 68.0% of product growth was due to productivity increase. Hence, productivity has been the main driver for the growth of Brazilian agriculture. (GASQUES et al., 2010, in press).

In the same article, the authors describe archetypical changes leading to a capitalist logic, compared to the last 30 years. For example, the relative reduction of costs with workforce, while expenditures with agroindustrial inputs increase in the same proportion, such as inventories of tractors, agrochemicals, fertilizers and soil additives, to mention but a few. In sum, this fifth phase now addressed represents the growing monetarization of social life and market expansion that would determine social relationships in those regions, as well as the establishment of the model for modern agriculture. Briefly, it is capitalist logic that now rules without any type of hindrance production activities and social behavior throughout practically all the Brazilian rural scenario.

Another feature of this fifth phase lies in the institutional plan, when the Ministry for the Environment was granted autonomy in 1999, where it was before submitted to other ministerial imperatives, and the creation of the Ministry for Land Development in the same year. During the period at hand, the Ministry for the Environment, which reports to its scope of action, has been able to “pool” the chances of expansion

for the agricultural activity by creating different norms that limit the action of producers. In turn, the Ministry of Agrarian Development has been stressing producer segmentations at extremely high rates, rendering the classification of family and non-family an antimony that causes visible harmful effects to model a logical and consistent government action.

Finally, in this phase there is the inciting of the more evident political disputes in the rural milieu involving Government and producer organizations. Although the MST is still more active in some regions, it is quite possible that in the coming years confrontation will not ensue from the landless organization, which is currently loosing political ground (NAVARRO, 2010b), but rather a dispute for public funding. This potential conflict may oppose the production funding needs of producers that are more market-integrated to the need of funding of family producers. The latter are institutionalized under a new law, where they are now granted substantial political and institutional support in this dispute that must be arbitrated and solved in a more transparent and republican manner by the Brazilian Government.

Recent changes and their implications for governmental action

Contemporary Brazilian agrarian history, briefly addressed in the previous section, certainly build over time a series of social, economic and political-institutional changes that must be studied in depth. Ensuing interpretations will surely generate empiric evidence elements that may support with greater logic depth governmental action in the years to come. Different processes could be discussed under this brief essay; however, as it is not possible to address them in detail, only some of the major changes made to Brazilian rural regions are addressed, which brought about different consequences for the economy activity, Government action and the rural population itself.

Possibly, the principal change was the more comprehensive social process mentioned at the end of the previous section – materialization – ever so more comprehensive and deeper, of a new sociability that determined social behavior. Social life monetization is not just a rhetoric and generic expression or an abstract sociological concept; it implies concrete and empiric situations that call for new social arrangements, new policies and new institutional formats. As agricultural activities became part of new economic and financial circuits, which involve a large number of producers, it is mandatory to make a rigorous analysis of those processes and new requirements that multiple market requirements impose on rural families.

An illustration of this reality was assessed in the 2006 Census and confirmed by Hoffmann and Ney when they called attention to the fact that “there is a clear trend to the decrease of the number of non-owners: partners, lessees and users” (HOFFMANN; NEY, 2010a, chap. 7, in press). In other words, a capitalist *ethos* is formed that becomes the determining factor, and among other aspects, this new rationality affirms the notion of property that renders the forms of access to land as “dated” as in the past, when sociability first started.

Another example of this new context and its urgency for analysis is discussed in a recent article by Dias (2010). Although a more specific theme is under study – the indebtedness of the producers – the author emphasizes the “gray zone” where a large number of producers, currently integrated to a new production dimension, must learn where they stand. According to the author,

[...] the technological standard of competitive agriculture requires a sophisticated monitoring of costs, which makes the resistance of producers to greater formalization of their responsibilities acceptable.

[...] Rural leaders rightly complain that urban citizens do not acknowledge the particularities of rural scenario, but in this case it is the rural citizen that must acknowledge the need to formalize the agreements between individuals and Government. (DIAS, 2010, chap. 10, in press).

Maybe the most important macroeconomic evidence that supports this new social mindset of today is the comparison of initial government funding – so strong on the 1970s – and funding sources that are currently used by producers to enable their activity. Over these 40 years, there was a significant transition between government funding and public expenditures for agriculture toward private funding. Despite the still existing undesirable informality of the agreements (DIAS, 2010), there is a strong change between the initial stimulus granted by the government, which initiated the technological modernization process of the 1970s, and current funding mechanisms for the agricultural activity. Public expenditures for agriculture even grew in the 1987s, when they accounted for 12% of the federal budget, but have varied from 1% to 2% in this decade. However, rural credit reached maximum figures in 1979 and has been dropping over the last years at 10%–20% of that maximum value (BARROS, 2010).

This economic intensification assumes, for example, access to information and knowledge control that are usually unknown or poorly known by Brazilian farmers. Hence, notwithstanding the spectacular increase of production and productivity in Brazilian agriculture during recent years, the high number of uneducated producers is alarming. An example are the low salaries paid (in 2008, half of the farm workers were paid less than the minimum salary) and the insufficient demand for qualified work force. In sum, compared to production changes, the work market still relates substantially to the agrarian past. In other words:

[...] the occupational structure of the rural environment transferred into the 21st Century, which articulates old and new forms of work and production relationships, recorded by occupation polarizations that should go against the development level reached by Brazil (BUAINAIN; DEDECCA, 2010, chap. 5, in press).

Remembering the old debate about the coexistence of “two Brazils,” changes hereby presented about Brazilian agrarian development

reinforce the existence of the “crisis of the new,” i.e. those traumatic historical periods when new social ways emerge, but old social relationships (or the old ruling sociability) resist taking a bow. Under new angles, the changes that Brazilian agriculture has undergone with the significant growth of production and productivity and likewise with the financial irrigation brought about by performance in so many rural regions. This occurs not only in the old production zones of the Central-South or the sugar-producing Northeast, but also – first and foremost – in the new agriculture regions, notably the Central-West regions that is becoming the most important Brazilian agricultural region.

However, this abundance in production is visibly contrasted, for example, with the high concentration of production, as shown in a very relevant article by Alves and Rocha (2010). After working with data from the 2006 Agricultural Census, the authors show that the production strength of Brazilian agriculture actually lies in the relatively small number of farms (8.2% of the total) that concentrate approximately 85% of total production, including what is traded and earmarked for self-consumption. Even more surprising: of that total, only 0.4% of farms accounted for 51% of total production.

Finally, alongside with this strong structural heterogeneity that is the trademark of the Brazilian rural scenario, another change occurred, mainly since the 1990s, which was the consolidation of Brazilian democracy. It was under this political regime – that thrived until the Constituent – where rural regions faced the inciting of conflicts between different groups of stakeholders. Hence, it is probable that Government action in the future may require improved ability to judge and arbitrate when it implements its policies or redistributes gains and losses among rural social classes. However, the creation of the political mindset of Brazilian rural area, which is a desirable ideal because it reflects the sedimentation of Brazilian democracy and rural society, requires a much more competent Government than the current one.

The main challenges for governmental action

The most important challenges for Brazilian agriculture, and consequently for government action stem from different approaches, all of which are inter-related. Firstly, from the financial point of view and producer indebtedness. Production funding has been discussed using antagonistic arguments, at times emphasizing the need to be increased to comply with production increase, at times professing a liberal vision by which agricultural activity, as any other economy activity, would be subject to market vicissitudes and its inherent risks. However, Barros (2010) consistently suggests that subsidies can be interpreted as short-term distortions, but that will not always be the case if they are on the long term. On the other hand, indebtedness is also given contrary or even contradictory assessment by some authors that acidly criticize “non-payment” practices (SILVA, 2010), while others, even acknowledging producers’ need to comply more transparently to the formalization of economy, propose new mechanisms to deal with that situation (DIAS, 2010). In other words, these contradictory points of view show the very need to identify means of funding that prevent indebtedness, making it more harmonious and balancing the future development of agriculture.

In turn, it is probable that the economic-redistributive challenge that was demanded for such a long time in the past will gradually cease to be a dilemma to be solved. This is directly related to the distribution of land ownership. Hoffmann and Ney (2010) compare the census results and show there are resilient indicators of land inequality, placing Brazil as one of the countries with the largest concentration of land ownership in the world, with the Gini index calculated at 0.856, according to data of the 2006 Census. Despite the fact that presently the measures to change this undesirable scenario of land ownership of distribution are still part of

the political agenda, and even if government action intends to continue with the national land reform policy, it is possible that these demands will be strongly deflected over the coming years. Persistent urbanization is gradually making this policy obsolete, and in the new future this issue will become increasingly set aside, where it no longer will pose a greater challenge to Brazil.

Another current challenge, the environmental one, has two trends. One ensues from the “territorial constraint” to the expansion of crop areas that were imposed by regulations approved by environmental organisms. It can be affirmed that presently the Cerrado region is the last agricultural expansion region, as the remaining biomes have already been occupied or are to a certain extent forbidden to be exploited, as in the case of the Amazon biome. If on the one hand those limits hinder the entrepreneurial action of rural producers, on the other it could encourage farmers to increase their productivity using the area already occupied by crops and cattle, which at the medium-term could bring general benefits for the economy. The other trend ensued from the perception of the limitations of the technological format called “modern agriculture,” which is a vision shared by many scholars (MACINTYRE et al., 2009). These limitations (energy-related, environmental and financial) are demanding a “second green revolution” that could be on its way, but that is yet to happen under new technological formats for different ecosystems.⁴

The third challenge that calls for innovative government action is related to ongoing social processes. They are diverse and their consequences are many, related to agrarian development and rural regions, but two stand out. The first one is demographic, representing the aging of the rural population, as a large part of their youngsters have migrated to urban centers or have given up the agricultural activity. This behavior, associated to the smaller number of children per couples that live in rural regions

⁴ In his relevant article, Favareto (2010) shows additional aspects about the dilemmas involving economic growth, environmental conservation and social cohesion.

account for the decrease of population in those areas. The second social process is related to the still high poverty rates in rural regions, especially in the Northeast region. Alves and Rocha (2010) studied this group and identified that the alarming high figure of 73% of the total of properties counted by the Census where the family income based on production is less than the monthly minimum salary (in Reais of 2006). In all, those establishments account for only 4% of total production; however, there are over 3.77 million establishments where income is totally insufficient. As such, these groups should be given priority if any form of rural development strategy is implemented in Brazil.

A fourth challenge for the Brazilian rural region is related to the relationship policy between producers and their organizations. However, unlike what would be expected, it is not the case to predict a growing opposition between the MST and its actions, and some organizations that represent the great land owners. The organization of the rural landless workers seems to be undergoing a process of loss of political strength, which can accelerate (NAVARRO, 2010b). In truth, this political aspect will become clearer in the coming years, opposing the groups of producers that are currently divided into family and non-family. This is one of the greatest challenges that defy government policies, as it is the dispute for the meager government funds.

Finally, the greatest of all challenges that provokes a consistent action from the Government in relation to the rural scenario takes place at the institutional level and is related to the urgent need to discuss and implement a rural development strategy for Brazil. It should be inspired by a systemic logic that removes existing misguided concepts, such as the aforementioned institutional segmentation between producers. It should overcome the existing ministerial hybridity that hinders national interests. It should, lastly, address the growing need of greater logistics consistency and infrastructure improvement (warehouses and roads, to mention but a few). However, this strategy must be

debated, where pre-established imperative convictions and prejudice are set aside in order to find a more effective and logic way into the future where the aforementioned challenges can be overcome. That is the only path towards a sustainable rural development in Brazil.

Conclusions

This brief article presents a generic and simplified overview of the Brazilian agrarian development over the last 50 years with the intention of highlighting some of its most decisive periods. Those periods and the main changes that took place over time should be the base for discussions about government action for the Brazilian rural scenario, specifically in relation to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply.

The main thesis of this article insists that the group of changes that caused somewhat radical historical transformations to the Brazilian agrarian profile now require a more open analysis approach by whoever is interested in this subject, with the purpose of better defining the deadlocks now posed to Brazilian agricultural activities. Starting with the harmful ministerial hybridity that nowadays divides Brazilian producers, it is mandatory to propose an effective government strategy that can address different economic and social agents that are directly or indirectly related to the rural scenario.

The concise history of agriculture in the contemporary period presented by the text analyses the main processes and changes related to current challenges and deadlocks. If they are correct, even in part, these themes will call for an urgent nationwide debate, where greater levels of analytical convergence may be identified, and maybe via a new agreement matrix it will be possible to implement a true rural development policy for Brazil, guided by a single government area with institutional legitimacy and history to carry out this task – the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply.

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