

Brief history of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply

José Ubirajara Timm¹
Marlene de Araújo²

Abstract – The purpose of this article is to register some of the most recent historic factors about the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply (Mapa) based on the experience of the first author. It also intends to provide further material for the collection of institutional records at this time when the Ministry is celebrating its 150th anniversary. The text mentions some of the most important ministers and amusing anecdotes of that agency from 1960 to 1980; it presents and characterizes a typical public governance Brazilian institution, free from any analytical intention and emphasizes its evolution.

Introduction

The history of world agriculture confirms this statement:

[...] it doesn't matter if it's to feed twenty million people or to feed five; there is no other way but to plant the planet in order to multiply its plants and domestic animals, domesticating at the same time the wild flora and fauna (MAZOYER; ROUDART, 2001, p. 11).

This demand for food has reached great proportions over time, which gave rise to the creation of institutions, new techniques and the appearance of great authors and actors, some conservative and others revolutionary, but all with the same goal in mind – to ensure the supply of food. In Brazil it was no different; it may have taken a bit longer, but the Country joined that process.

I am very pleased to participate in this special issue of *Revista de Política Agrícola* (Journal of Agricultural Policy). First, as it foresees an honorable editorial initiative, the opportunity

and encouragement to other media bodies to contribute to the enrichment of the Brazilian public memory, still lacking historical account in the agricultural sector; and second, for the joy of being part of this event celebrating one and a half century of the ministry, run by 171 ministers. I do not participate with the credential of “the last remnant of those 150 years,” as affectionately referred by my old friends Eliseu Alves and Tarcizio Góes de Oliveira, but as someone who served the Ministry of Agriculture for over 50 years.

On July 28, 1860, Emperor Dom Pedro II signed Decree no. 1,077 and created the Secretariat of State for Agriculture, Commerce and Public Work Affairs (GUERRA FILHO; PLACER, 1966, p. 42). On March 2nd of the following year, the Viscount of Inhaúma – Admiral Joaquim José Inácio – took on the position of secretary. Since then, this position has been fulfilled 171 times by men acting as the incumbent or as acting secretary, under different names and competences from the current ones. Presently, Wagner

This article was translated by On the Road Idiomas Ltda., and not revised by its authors.

¹ Lawyer, master's degree in Public Administration, President of the Deliberative Council of the Brazil Environmental Institute (IABS), Brasília, Federal District. E-mail: timm@iabs.org.br

² Journalist, master's degree in S&T Policies and Management, analyst for Embrapa's Secretariat for Management and Strategy, Brasília, Federal District. E-mail: marlene.araujo@embrapa.br

Gonçalves Rossi, lawyer, economist and doctor in education, holds the position of minister.

The average of time in office has been less than a year for each minister. The incumbent minister that held that position for the longest period of time was agronomy engineer Alys-son Paulinelli during the Geisel administration, who was acknowledged internationally for his work in expanding the agriculture frontier to the Cerrado, with the creation of the Brazilian Company for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (Embrater) and with the consolidation of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) created during the previous administration by minister Luiz Fernando Cirne Lima. Rare were the ministers that held office for longer than 3 years; and after the country was redemocratized during the administration of President José Sarney, ministerial changes became more frequent, where changes occurred often in less than 1 year. The former governor of Brasília, Joaquim Roriz, was minister for only 15 days (March 15–30, 1990). Former minister Reinhold Stephanes had already held office in three previous administrations in important positions at Mapa, as well as for other ministries also in past administrations.

Of the 171 men, some were famous and historic references, without prejudice of the others, and should be noted: Quintino Bocaiúva, journalist and abolitionist leader; Pandiá Calógeras, a mines engineer; Assis Brasil, lawyer and diplomat; Juarez Távora, in the military; and ambassador Oswaldo Aranha.

Juarez Távora was minister during the first administration of Getúlio Vargas after the Revolution of 1930. Before that, he was the actor of two historic events: the Revolution of the Cadets in the Copacabana Fort and the Prestes Column. He later ran for president of Brazil. Oswaldo Aranha, who was also a minister during the Vargas administration, became well-known internationally when he chaired the session of the United Nations Organization (UN) that approved the creation of the State of Israel. Already retired and living in Rio de Janeiro, he would

visit the Ministry of Agriculture during the administration of Mario Meneghetti. However, he started visiting him every day for one month when veterinary doctor Paulo Fróes da Cruz took the interim position, the general director of the then powerful National Department of Animal Production. Curiosity: Paulo Fróes da Cruz, Oswaldo Aranha and other mates enjoyed their *chimarrão*, reminiscing about the good old days when they were just beginning their careers as lawyer and veterinary respectively. In one such occasion, Oswaldo Aranha said one of his famous quotes: “The horse is a noble animal that should be fruit of love,” in protest to the intended artificial equine insemination.

The ministry was the scenario of countless examples of honesty and character. For sure that the following examples are not the only ones among the 171 ministers; there were many others that took place both before and after, which could join the club with the same credentials. Brevity is justified by the limitation of space and by the singular fact of having borne witness to what is going to be told.

The minister is not corrupt

Minister Mário Meneghetti (Figure 1) was a doctor, just like Juscelino Kubitschek (JK), and represented the Pascolinist wing of the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB) with the government; another labor minister was precisely the Minister of Labor.

In the relationship between government and society there are facts that show an utter lack of citizenship in government areas and sectors of society, architected by groups that push to be granted undue government advantages. One of these cases can be reported as historical: in 1960, towards the end of the JK administration, one of such groups were planning a nefarious fraud scam called the “paper wheat,” where the mills that ground imported wheat would declare a greater amount of wheat than what was yielded by the Brazilian harvest, thus defrauding Banco do Brasil and the National Treasury in billion reais at current costs. In the face of that sce-



Figure 1. Anticipating the date of Mapa's 100th anniversary, minister Mário Meneghetti gathered the directors and their wives to a mass that took place in the ministry's headquarters, in Rio de Janeiro, celebrated by the Bishop of Pelotas, Dom Antonio Zatéra.

nario, minister Meneghetti talked to President JK to abort the scam by prohibiting the bartering of shares between the large imported wheat mills and national mills, especially colonial mills that grinded domestic wheat. At that time, rumor had it that wheat harvest for that year would be 5 million tons, but in fact it was verified that it would not exceed 1 million tons.

The corrupt parties were vanquished; however, the implications of the frustrated scam were huge, including the political ramifications, in that it became impossible for minister Meneghetti to remain in office. After that, he

was appointed by Juscelino as ambassador of Brazil for Central America³.

The minister is not a "shyster"

The "political being" can be defined as an individual that is active in the politics of a social group, formally acknowledged as the active member of a government, or as a person that has influence on how a society is governed given his or her knowledge about the political power of dynamics of a certain group. This precept has been the key factor of the choices

³ The fact had great repercussion with the media, especially newspaper O Globo that published the letter addressed by Minister Meneghetti to Vice-President João Goulart, before he even received it, justifying his resignation. João Goulart was offended by the Minister's involuntary action, as the "scoop" was engendered by a journalist who also worked at the ministry's press room, thus causing the letter written by Meneghetti a public letter, which was never his intention. Journalist Francisco Finamor (in the photo), a close friend of the Vice-President, delivered the letter with the due clarification about the Minister's innocence in that episode. Finamor is still alive and was one of the pioneers in Brasília; now lives in São Paulo.

made by Mapa, and it can be affirmed that in some periods their attitude is right and coherent, aligned to represent the group.

Lawyer and mill-owner from Pernambuco, Romero Cabral da Costa, appointed to the ministry as the representative of the mill sector of the Northeast is an example of such coherence. While he waited for his first meeting with the President, Romero overheard President Jânio Quadros referring to mill-owners as “scoundrels,” referring to the directors of the Alcohol and Sugar Institute (IAA), which had just had a heated discussion with him. Romero never had the meeting and stepped down justifying that in deference to the president he could not condone to having a “scoundrel” as a minister, as he was first and foremost a mill-owner⁴. After the interference of the first-lady, Ms. Eloá, Romero reconsidered his decision and remained in office, being supported by Jânio for the duration of the president’s short and frustrating administration.

During the seven months when Minister Romero Cabral da Costa remained in office, he worked intensely at Mapa, where there is evidence that he was strongly supported by Jânio. Dozens of work groups and interministerial groups were set up coordinated by Mapa. However, because of Jânio’s renunciation, the groups died away, victims of the lack of continuity of actions in ministerial changes. Changes became permanent cultural factors that until these days discourage initiatives to professionalize public administration, and are also a challenge to be faced.

The limit of tolerance

Innovation can arise even in unstable environments and can resist to the most unwilling ones when it proves to be a clear possibility of increasing competitiveness and a fundamental

factor for the society’s economic growth, albeit not understood by everyone at a given period in time. And one of the authors of this innovative process was Minister Luiz Fernando Cirne Lima, whose fame of a renowned university professor and technician preceded him when he took office. He was a close friend of president Médici and of Professor Leitão de Abreu, Minister and Chief of Staff to the President, who was also a close friend and peer of the Minister’s father, professor Cirne Lima, at the Faculty of Law of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Luiz Fernando was called by his childhood nickname – “Nando” – by both the President and the Minister. But no sooner was his stand in the conflict of interests between the requests made by the agricultural sector and those of the economic area (frequent conflicts during the history of Mapa) disregarded by the government, he stepped down from office and justified his resignation in a letter addressed to Médice but handed to Minister Leitão de Abreu. He went back to being a professor and a technician in Rio Grande do Sul, leaving his greatest legacy to the ministry – the creation of Embrapa.

The executor of works

The implementation of Brasília, the capital city of Brazil, abounds with nationalistic actions that express the prevailing spirit of that time. And as Brasília is celebrating its first 50 years this year of 2010, we believe it is relevant to talk about some actions and initiatives that took place within Mapa, some of which precede the inauguration of the federal capital, and other that happened later.

JK’s ability in perceiving the result-based management in detriment to bureaucratic inertia is seen in the case of the intended dismissal of Bernardo Sayão. In the early days of the JK administration, he received administrative pro-

⁴ Minister Romero told us what had happened after returning from the President’s Office. The witnesses to the reporting were diplomat and poet João Cabral de Melo Neto, a relative and head of the cabinet; poet Ledo Ivo, the Minister’s advisory chief; engineer Ricardo Grenhalger Barreto Filho, Administration Secretary General (when Romero left the ministry, on the same Day when Jânio renounced, he was appointed acting Minister), and myself, Ubirajara Timm, coordinator of the “Governor Meetings” during the Jânio Quadros administration.

ceedings proposing the dismissal of agronomy engineer Bernardo Sayão, from Mapa, denouncing his “misappropriation of public funds.” When the president studied the case, he realized that the crime was in fact a great work endeavored by Sayão as the manager of the Agriculture Colony of Ceres, in Goiás, which he converted from a small colony into a teeming city with bridges, streets, roads and other improvements. No specific funds were used from the formal budget of the colony to carry out the works, but rather, surplus funds from other activities, as the savings with personnel payroll, as he used the low-cost community workforce to do the building. The punitive proceedings were reviewed and Sayão was pardoned and summoned by JK to head the construction of the Belém-Brasília highway that would integrate the Brazilian territory. As irony would have it, Bernardo Sayão would become the icon of that monumental endeavor when he died at one of the works sites after a shady tree in the Amazon Rainforest fell on him.

Groundbreaking works in Brasília

JK was a “doer” that was intent in making true his motto, which was “advancing 20 years in only 5 years of administration,” and for that reason he was not inclined to holding frequent administrative meetings with his ministers. But he acted quite differently in relation to matters related to Brasília, which were discussed directly from the Catetinho of the future capital city⁵. At that time, Mapa had the comprehensive responsibility of managing the fauna, flora and mineral reserves. Having in mind the concern of leaving legacies in Brasília, the ministry carried out three Pioneer endeavors before the new capital city was inaugurated: the National Park that was under the Forest Service until then, and that nowadays is subordinated to the

Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama), with its famous pools of natural waters and exuberant Cerrado vegetation; the Sucupira Farm to foster animal husbandry, which was prematurely extinct; and the Agrotechnical School that was subordinated to the Superintendency of Veterinary Agriculture Learning (Seave), later transferred to the official network of the Federal District Government⁶.

The fish of Lake Paranoá

Despite being part of nature, human beings cannot survive in their environment without having to handle and change it. Relaying once again on Mazoyer and Roudart (2001),

[...] man is not a born farmer; when he came to be the *Homo sapiens sapiens* was a hunter-gatherer. When he started to farm and to raise cattle, he could not find in nature any species previously domesticated, but he did tame them in large numbers. Nor did he have anatomical instruments fit for farm work, but he did make all types of tools and each time more powerful. Man was able to evolve to the point of fine-tuning combined systems (MAZOYER; ROUDART, 2001, p. 38).

And thus humanity continues to evolve. In Brasília, Lake Paranoá was manmade and had to be populated. Hence, the Superintendency for Fisheries Development (Sudepe), which was an autarchy under the Ministry of Agriculture during the administration of ministers Alysson Paulinelli, Delfim Neto, Angelo Amaury Stábile and Nestor Jost, was responsible for stocking the lake with different species of native and imported fish that multiplied. Currently, those fish supply the markets of Brasília, fished by a cooperative of fishermen licensed by Ibama. Herbivorous fish that help in purifying and cleaning the water of Lake Paranoá are among those species. Recently, a silver carp weighing over 20 kg was caught, this species together with the Big head

⁵ The difficult trip from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília, on a non-pressurized airplane of the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) was compensated by the President's joy in approving requests and by dinner at the Catetinho, where the food was plentiful and music was live, in the company of JK, Israel Pinheiro, Arlindo Silva and other members of the Terracap, and guests of the President.

⁶ Mapa was also groundbreaking in transferring staff to Brasília even before it was officially declared the capital city of Brazil. By Ministerial Decree no. 227, of March 7, 1960, 59 civil servants (directors and managers) that used to work in Rio de Janeiro were transferred to Brasília.

carps and Grass carps species form the Chinese trio that Mapa introduced into Brazil as the result of the first visit to China during the administration of Delfim Neto.

Attributions in excess

Given that politics is the art or science that organizes, guides and manages a nation, such art in internal businesses – home politics – is dynamic and adequate for the purposes it intends to reach. Hence, over the 150 years since its creation, Mapa underwent different attributions, competences and structuring due to the progressive evolution of the Brazilian agricultural sector. Beginning as the Secretary of State for Agriculture, Commerce and Public Work Affairs, from then on different ministries were created to address trade and public works, and new and multiple attributions were incorporated to the new Ministry of Agriculture. The unfoldings were so many that when it is celebrated its centennial anniversary, in the universe of the ministry of agriculture, there were already a myriad of direct and autarchy administration agencies with diverse and different attributions addressing the execution, production, classification, standardization, inspection and monitoring of agricultural production. The ministry had yet to perform the role of teaching, researching and transferring Technologies, oversee the farming, meteorological and climatologic assessment, provide technical and funding assistance to the fishing sector, protect the indigenous people and foster immigration and colonization, rural development and land reform.

Fifty years ago, the land reform was already handled by the Rural Social Service government agency under the Ministry of Agriculture. Since those days until now, eight agencies under different categories and administrations, including those with the status of a ministry, have tried to solve this serious problem; nowadays it is undertaken by the National Institute for Land Reform (Incra), subordinated to the Ministry of Agrarian Development. This is a sorry example of the instability phenomena defined

as “structural ritualism,” which is an attempt to solve a serious problem very much part of present times, via illusory and multiple organizational changes that follow the last one, where only their acronyms are remembered.

Other important national sectors were transferred to the responsibility of the ministry, such as water and energy. Mapa started to be perceived as an eloquent example of organizational hypertrophy with its many services spread through multiple branches, in Rio de Janeiro (the capital of Brazil at that time) and in all the states and hundreds of municipalities. Its sheer size was so notorious that an interesting fact attests what transpired. At the time of its centennial in 1960, the minister’s office had four airplanes to perform the work. One of the airplanes was a dual-motor that had hydrogen and water circulation systems adapted to transport the fish that would populate rivers and dams in many states, which was coordinated by a team of technicians created by minister Meneghetti – it was called the Technical Team for Stocking Rivers and Dams with Fish (Etprar).

With the recent creation of the technical career of Federal Agricultural Inspector that encompasses agronomy engineers and veterinarian, among other careers, the almost century-old rivalry between these two important professions has come to an end, as before they would aspire ministerial predominance, where professionals would rule in old and powerful central departments of Mapa – the vegetal production and animal production departments.

Addressing the current situation of Mapa is not part of the scope of this work, hence we will give no further considerations about this aspect, but would like to note an unprecedented and auspicious fact that took place in the first quarter of 2010, when Decree no. 7,107, of March 4, came into effect. This decree signed by President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva approves the regimental structure and the framework of at-will appointments and hired functions of the ministry), where the chapter about the general and transitory provisions (art. 46) sets forth that management level

and at-will positions, the DAS, should be taken by employees of Mapa, selected by the minister from a triple-list of candidates.

The development of Brazil, and consequently the development of agribusiness over the last decades had aligned Mapa to this form of agriculture. Its current mission, deliberated via a comprehensive democratic process among its managers during the administration of minister Roberto Rodrigues, that was repeatedly disseminated and posted at every floor of the headquarters of the ministry in Brasília is the following: to foster agribusiness' sustainable development and competitiveness that benefits Brazilian society. The most important and innovative action in that sense was to expand the Brazilian energy matrix by investing on research on agriculture in order to generate new energy alternatives based on agriculture. Embrapa Agroenergia, founded in 2006, is the institution that makes this goal come true (EMBRAPA AGROENERGIA, 2006).

Conclusion

Summarizing this report, we can affirm that the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply has built throughout its history a

characteristic of a personal-based institution, based on the minister's figure and the group that represented him. However, it is successful thanks to the fulfilling of national goals and economic development, supported by a body of highly-qualified technical professionals that perceived and still perceive the institution as the instrument that can reach the goals of the State and that guide the administration of a government. This professionalism should be further supported as new result-oriented public management principles are put into practice, and will thus reach leadership positions and professionalism in order to meet the needs of the Brazilian society.

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