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# **SOCIAL INEQUALITY, HUNGER, AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF BRAZILIAN'S FAMILY FARMING COOPERATIVES TO IMPROVE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS: THE CASE OF COOMAFITT**

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## Abstract

This study aims to present the case of the Mixed Cooperative of Family Farmers of *Itati, Terra de Areia* and *Três Forquilhas* (COOMAFITT), a family farming cooperative located in southern Brazil, addressing its dynamics, revenue and challenges. The case is part of the current concern regarding the increase in the difficulty of access to food for segments of the population, due to the crisis caused by the pandemic. This situation is seen with a model of production and marketing of food that is not truly inclusive and sustainable. In this sense, this work intends to show the role of family farming cooperatives, as an alternative and/or complementary model of production, drawing attention to the need for public support policies.

**Keywords:** family farming cooperative, hungry, generation of work and income

## Expanded abstract

The current model of economic growth is unable to meet the basic needs of society, which includes the provision of food. The global food production system, despite scientific advances and the new techniques introduced, is unsustainable and exclusive from the social and environmental point of view. One consequence of these dominant and concentrated food patterns is the reduction of genetic biodiversity, traditional production methods and the presence of small local businesses in rural areas. An apparent decrease in knowledge related to local and endogenous food systems is also observed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had serious socioeconomic consequences throughout the world, one of the main impacts being the increase in hunger. According to FAO (2021), between 720 and 811 million people worldwide suffered from food insecurity in 2020, out of which 118 million were a direct consequence of the pandemic. Regarding Brazil, for Oxfam (2020), the pandemic turned Brazil into an “emerging epicenter of extreme hunger”. In this perspective, the objective of this work is to analyze the relevance of family farming cooperatives in Brazil in terms of a more supportive, humane, and sustainable production and marketing of food.

This approach, in addition to the production scale, highlights the quality of products, production processes and labor relations. Such a transition would make it possible to satisfy local food demand through the region's diversified production of fresh and healthy foods, which in turn would strengthen the local economy. For this, from an empirical point of view, this study will present the case of the “*Cooperativa Mista de Agricultores Familiares de Itati, Terra de Areia e Três Forquilhas*” (COOMAFIT<sup>1</sup>), an important family farming cooperative located in southern Brazil.

In this perspective, the article is structured as follows: section 1 will discuss the emergence of family farming, as a prelude to section 2 in which the role of their cooperatives will be studied. Section 3 will explain the case of COOMAFITT to later make the final considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.coomafitt.com.br/>



## 1. The emergence of family farming production in Brazil

In Brazil, according to Picolotto (2014), the emergence of family farming and the role of family farmers as “political characters” is relatively recent in the country’s history. According to the author, it was only from the 1980s that this category emerged as an agricultural model and as a means of political identity for farmers.

Historically and institutionally, the political importance of family farming was established through the formation of FETRAF (The Worker’s Federation of Family Farming), CONTAG (The National Federation of Agricultural Workers), government intervention, such as the implementation of public policies and of the Law of Family Farming, as well as attempts to reverse the negative notions that were attributed to this agricultural model, such as delays, inefficiency and inadequacy.

It is worth remembering that, for historical-structural reasons, in Brazil, the “large scale,” extensive, monoculture farming, aimed at exportation, was largely considered, including by the state, as the only way to guarantee currency for the country’s balance of trade via exportation of their most in-demand agricultural products.

Such findings implied the formation of a belief that family farming is related to the idea of precariousness, low efficiency, and marginal production. This idea is often reinforced by public policies and government recognition of the existence of only one type of agriculture, the large-scale agriculture.

In 2006, Law no. 11.326 of 24 June established the concepts, principles and tools involved in creating public policies to support family farming and rural family enterprises. According to the law, family farming takes place in a rural setting and must meet certain requirements such as: i) the majority of the labor involved in economic activities must be carried out by family members; ii) a minimal percentage of the family income must come from the farm’s activities; and iii) the family must be involved in the management of the farm and/or business.

According to Reis et al. (2015, p. 215), family farming is “a diversified and heterogenous activity, but is closely related to the use of natural resources, such as intensive use of labor and at times reciprocal help”. Cruz et al. (2021, p.1) state that “family farming covers a largely diverse population in terms of cultural, social and economic aspects”.

Data from the Brazilian Agricultural Census (IBGE, 2017) - the most recent - highlight that 77% of farms in Brazil fall into the family farming category. In terms of area, these establishments occupy 80.9 million hectares, the equivalent of 23% of the total area of all farms in Brazil. Also according to the census, family farming: i) employed more than 10 million people (67% of all those working in agriculture); ii) was responsible for 23% of the establishments total production value; iii) holds a significant participation of food production for consumption in Brazil: regarding permanent crops, the segment composes 48% of the value of production of coffee and bananas; in terms of temporary crops, it consists of 80% of the production of *mandioca* (cassava), 69% of pineapple and 42% of beans.



It can therefore be concluded that family farming plays a fundamental role in the Brazilian economy, given its contribution to the production of food and combating hunger; food security; the generation of work and income and improving the quality of life, directly and indirectly, of those in rural areas and in cities. According to Cruz et al. (2021), this justifies the creation of policies to support and stimulate the sector.

A number of important public policies in Brazil include: i) the National Program of Strengthening Family Farming (PRONAF – *Programa Nacional de Agricultura Familiar*, in Portuguese), created in 1995 by the federal government in order to offer more specialized support to small/family farmers<sup>2</sup>; ii) the Program of Food Acquisition (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* – PAA, in Portuguese), created in Article 19 of Law no. 10.696 of July 2, 2003 and iii) the National School Feeding Program (PNAE - *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar*, in Portuguese), created in 1979, with Law 11,947/2009, the program recommended that 30% of the resources be invested in the acquisition of products from family farming. The last two programs have two basic objectives: to promote access to food and provide incentives to family farming.

Nowadays, when analysing the budgetary resources destined to family agriculture, it is noticed that, in the current federal government, there is a process of negligence towards this sector. Such recognition reinforces the idea that only "one" type of agriculture should be encouraged and strengthened (Morais et al, 2021). In this direction, Silva (2022) reinforces the importance of family farming, in a scenario where Brazil "could immediately return the family farming purchase program, benefiting from the price differential", since "the current high prices can make it even more difficult for the poor to access food and require emergency treatment: support for the most vulnerable" (Silva, 2022, p. 1).

In this perspective, it is believed that the organization of family farming producers in cooperatives can increase the political, social, and economic strength of the sector. In this direction, Gaiger (2021, p. 2) states that "one of the historic roles of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) is to preserve systems of life and socio-economic organizations that are separate from the market economy, since they represent societies of people built on social relationships", and is characterized by the "principal of reciprocity, where it establishes other production processes and the circulation of goods". We believe that the fundamental constitutive elements of family farming are based on and related to the principals of cooperatives, entities that belong to the SSE. This will be further discussed in the following section.

## 2. For the strengthening of family farming cooperatives in Brazil

According to the Agricultural Census (IBGE, 2017), 11.4% of Brazilian farms (579,500) are associated to cooperatives; 67.3% more than what was registered in the 2006 Agricultural

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed understanding of the history and context surrounding the creation of PRONAF, see Schneider, Mattei & Cazella (2014).



Census. In terms of area, the cooperatives comprise 70.5 million hectares, the equivalent of 20% of the area of all agriculture and livestock establishments. A total of 70.6% of those associated to cooperatives hold an area between 1 and 50 hectares.

Out of the cooperatives registered in the 2017 Census, 71.2% were family farms, consisting of around 410,000 establishments. Even though cooperatives represent a low percentage of agricultural enterprises in Brazil, those related to family farming represent a considerable proportion, which not only highlights their importance but also reiterates the need for policies directed towards strengthening these cooperatives specifically. That is why family farm cooperatives still face major challenges, including financial difficulties, lack of access to technology and markets, lack of public policies and little knowledge of management.

The importance of strengthening them is because, according to Alemán (2009), family farming cooperatives improves quality of life and well-being and encourages the creation of local skills that enable the community to exploit their own resources. In addition, Motta (2007) highlights that alternative circuits of production and consumption flows, which is fundamental for the members of family farm cooperatives to maintain a level of independence.

In addition, Mira et al. (2018) affirm that the commercialization tools in the SSE are more advantageous for farmers, consumers and for the environment than those employed in traditional environments of production and commercialization, considering the pillars of cooperative production and self-governance and the concepts of sustainability and fair-trade present in the SSE.

Thus, according to Lima and Locatelli (2012), the implementation of tools that foment fair trade and solidarity for family farm cooperatives could contribute to overcoming challenges related to production, distribution, and consumption in the sector, above all in a country marked by extreme income concentration, inequality, and social exclusion, such as Brazil. Connecting and strengthening family farm cooperatives, via solidarity cooperativism, is directly related to improving investment conditions surrounding the production and commercialization of family farming, not only in Brazil, but around the world.

Greater integration between networks of family farm cooperatives consists of on-going learning to promote and better define policy related to this model of production, consumption, and interpersonal relationships, to increase the pressure on creating and implementing effective public policies aimed at the sector. It is believed that the strengthening of networks among family farmers can lead to the improvement of the entrepreneurial ecosystem for SSE in their respective territories (Morais & Bacic, 2020). This is important to face the challenges inherent to the operation of the enterprises, as well as to strengthen the "socio-economic circuits" for the food emergency (Pastore, 2021). In the following topic, the case of COOMAFITT will be presented, to better understand such relationships and their results.

### **3. Mixed Cooperative of Family Farmers from *Itati*, *Terra de Areia* and *Três Forquilhas* - COOMAFITT**

COOMAFIT was founded in 2006 by farmers and family farmers from three municipalities located on the northern coast of Rio Grande do Sul State, covering the municipalities of *Itati*, *Terra de Areia* and *Três Forquilhas*. The cooperative was created to promote the socioeconomic development of these families through fair trade in quality food respecting the





people and the environment. In other words, and according to the words of its vice president and one of the co-authors of this work, interviewed on March 23, 2022: “the origin of the cooperative was due to the desire to organize family farmers in the face of market exploitation agricultural sector and the 'middlemen', taking advantage of the creation of public policy for family farming, especially the PAA”.

As recalled by Leitzke & Cotrim (2015), the process that originated the Cooperative took place in 2002, through a state program called “*RS Rural*” that helped in the formation and organization of a group of family farmers dedicated to the agricultural chain of honey. Later, evaluating that only the production of honey and its derivatives would be insufficient for commercialization and its effective insertion in the market, the pioneer farmers went in search of the insertion of other groups, which produced other types of products, to add value in its production and marketing collective.

For the authors, two additional facts must be mentioned for the success of the creation of COOMAFITT: i) the paving of the *Rota do Sol*, at the end of 2004, which allowed the opening of a large number of “trade tents” in the Rota do Sol; and ii) the implementation of the PAA, in 2005, enabling the expansion of the building and the acquisition of a vehicle. From these episodes onwards, the group grew stronger, diversifying in terms of types of products (honey, brown sugar, baked goods, horticulture, citrus, bananas, tropical fruits such as pineapple and passion fruit and agroindustry); These facts allowed the constitution, in 2006, of a cooperative, the COOMAFITT (Leitzke & Cotrim, 2015).

Additionally, according to the Cooperative's vice president, in the aforementioned interview, other factors were relevant and pertinent for the creation and strengthening of COOMAFITT: i) the role of EMATER in the territory - Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Entities, created in 1977, aiming at promoting family farming, based on technical monitoring and training of farmers; ii) collective construction of the cooperative by the various family farmers and their interests; iii) transparency and trust among cooperative members; iv) quality and co-responsibility in production and marketing; v) political and community involvement of the cooperative members and vi) inclusion of young people and women among its staff.

Currently, the cooperative includes 200 families of associated family farmers, who provided, in 2021, more than 1.2 thousand tons of food, without the need of “middlemen”. That is, its operation takes place from a direct relationship between producer and consumer. Such a relationship also implies a more positive connection between the city and the countryside. In the vision of its directors, expressed on its website, “the cooperative is an essential tool to guarantee the sustainable development and socio-economic protection of farmers.”

Other relevant aspects inherent to the operation of the cooperative are:

- 1) **Self-management:** all associates participate in decisions, in actions such as classification, price of products, opening of markets and strategies to reach new consumers.
- 2) **Support for agroecological production:** the agroecological transition is one of the cooperative's focuses, based on encouraging the use of agroecological techniques and sustainable practices. It is important to note that the cooperative developed, together with other actors, the organic certification process. In this regard, Aydos (2020, p. 54) highlights: “The transition to agroecology is seen as one of COOMAFITT's main



- strategies, envisioning the diversification of organic food production, encouraging agroforestry certification, as well as the 'commercialization of these foods'.
- 3) **Technical and technological assistance:** either in production or in commercialization, with logistics and production quality becoming a “state reference,” in view of the organizational stages (collection, cleaning, storage, dispatch, and delivery), which influence the agility of the service provided, as well as the quality of in natura and agro-industrialized products. In addition, due to the technologies applied to production and conservation, the period of food supply was extended.
  - 4) **Fair price:** satisfactory remuneration for those who produce and supply quality food at “fair” prices for those who consume it.
  - 5) **Gender equity:** women represent 34% of the total number of members, present in all areas of the cooperative, from management to production organization and marketing. Even with the support of the “*Associação de Mulheres do Município de Três Forquilhas* (Amadecom),” they are currently developing gender policies to encourage women's productive and economic autonomy.
  - 6) **Encouraging young people to participate:** integration of young people in the management of the cooperative and in its decision-making processes, helping young people to remain in the countryside and be responsible for the future of family farming and the production of healthy foods.
  - 7) **Networking:** the cooperative coordinates the Network of Cooperatives for Family Agriculture and Solidarity Economy, composed of 43 cooperatives, 18,438 members from 29 municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul. This Network works in a self-managed and solidary way, through partnerships, integration of seasonal foods from each territory, enabling logistics, which implies reducing costs, enhancing the quality of the services provided and the food produced by each cooperative.
  - 8) **Diversification of activities based on rural and sustainable tourism:** the cooperative works in the organization of rural tourism chains as an alternative to supplement work and income.
  - 9) **Awareness-raising and projects trainings in schools:** based on the “*Escola Cooperativa*” Project, the cooperative, in partnership with State schools, executes actions to value family farming and create opportunities for rural youth in the countryside.

### 3.1 Recent information on COOMAFITT's management and billing

It is understood that an important parameter for verifying the maintenance capacity of an enterprise, as well as the main characteristics of its microeconomic dynamics is the verification of its management aspects. The evolution of revenues and surplus (result of the cooperative) are two relevant indicators. In addition, the structure of revenues, the evolution of the quantity marketed and the number of associates over time are also important indicators.

According to documents referring to the data of the Ordinary General Meetings of the Cooperative, from the years 2020, 2021 and 2022, made available to its members, in its Management Report, it is noted that, in 2022, there are 251 members in the cooperative, 70 of them in *Terra de Areia*, 72 in *Itati* and 109 in *Três Forquilhas*.



Based on the Declaration of Aptitude to the National Program for Strengthening of Family Agriculture (PRONAF) – DAP's, a document identifying family farming that can be obtained either by the farmer, a family member (individual) or by his rural family enterprise as associations, cooperatives, agroindustry, etc., as highlighted in Table 1, in *Itati*, *Terra de Areia* and *Três Forquilhas*, respectively, 56%, 64% and 86% of DAP's are associated with COOMAFITT. This data reveals a potential association present in the territory still to be explored by the Cooperative. That is, there is room to increase the percentage of participation of family farmers as cooperatives.

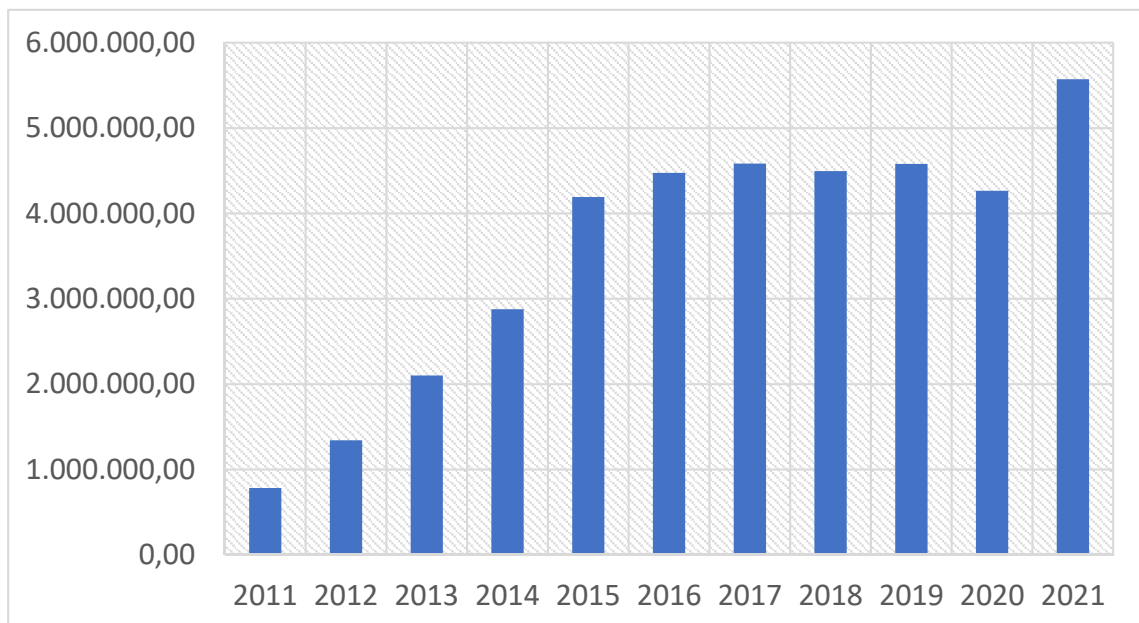
Table 1 – Number of Associates in COOMAFITT by municipalities covered, 2021

Municipality	Associated	DAP's	% COOMAFITT Associated
Terra de Areia	70	109	64
Itati	72	129	56
Três Forquilhas	109	127	86
<b>Total</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>68</b>

Source: COMAFITT (2022)

In terms of revenues, it is noted that COOMAFITT, since 2011, has a trend of increase in its revenues over the decade under analysis. This fact could be proven by the increasing value of less than R\$ 1 million in 2011, to almost R\$ 6 million in 2021.

Graph 1 – COOMAFITT Revenue, in R\$, from 2011 to 2021



Source: COMAFITT (2022)





Table 2. Surplus from each exercise.

Anos	Sobras (R\$)
2018	85.618,02
2019	41.316,08
2020	1.940,69
2021	30.925,69

Source: COMAFITT (2022)

It is possible to observe in Table 2 that the cooperative managed to obtain a surplus in the years analyzed, which shows its ability to operate respecting the economic balance over time.

From this perspective, it is interesting to know the main sources of revenue of the cooperative, which, as can be seen in Table 3, are: i) institutional markets (PAAs and PNAE), market dependent on public policy and ii) private markets (direct sale, sales to other cooperatives, etc.).

Table 3– COOMAFITT revenue source (2018-2021)

Source of Revenue - in Reais (R\$)	Years			
	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Institutional Market</b>				
PAA CONAB	47.230,72	160.579,80	187.670,85	173.431,50
PAA Simultaneous Donation (Susepe)	399.898,28	0,00	0,00	238.734,39
PAA Institutional Purchase	0	150.289,00	406.221,76	566.827,42
PAA Direct Purchase	32.401,00	415.495,66	296.926,74	91.362,43
PNAE	1.862.050,00	2.234.500,00	1.046.110,74	1.682.031,60
<b>Private Market / Other</b>				
Cooperatives	984.475,95	526.050,96	1.367.593,36	1.239.632,20
Services provided to cooperative members	1.521.185,44	990.922,22	843.155,48	1.047.370,58
Revenue for non-cooperative acts	46.741,08	4.659,99	51.883,04	490.801,93
Other Revenues	8.309,92	107.811,42	95.055,13	83.959,69
<b>Total tax-free</b>	<b>4.902.292,39</b>	<b>4.590.309,05</b>	<b>4.294.617,10</b>	<b>5.614.151,74</b>
Taxes (-)	5.362,26	5.330,22	29.044,96	42.111,98
<b>Total with Taxes</b>	<b>4.896.930,13</b>	<b>4.584.978,83</b>	<b>4.265.572,14</b>	<b>5.572.039,76</b>

Source: COMAFITT (2022)



Regarding the institutional market, this is historically the main market of COOMAFITT. Its operation began via PAA and, later, through strategies and structuring to meet the PNAE. In this process, there was the first increase in revenues between the years 2011-2015. In 2016, dialogue and market building began through the "Institutional Purchase PAA", serving some markets as pilot experience. This was the case of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), with the service of university restaurants and the Santa Maria Army Battalion, through UNICENTRAL, a central cooperative, of second degree, which COOMAFITT was associated with at that time.

In this direction, the process was consolidated, with more emphasis and in a growing way, in 2019, with the expansion in the care of other battalions of the Army, as well as other institutions, such as the Regional Clinics Hospital. Similarly, the PNAE showed constant growth, mainly due to the inter-cooperation processes with other State cooperatives. An important regional characteristic of COOMAFITT concerns its location in a banana-producing region, which is not produced on a large scale in the other regions. Thus, it is possible to do business with other regions and aggregate in the logistics of partner cooperatives.

In 2020, all this growth was strongly impacted by the closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic, when the commercialization was carried out through the delivery of baskets. In 2021 this market is mainly restarted from the second half of the year, and it is expected to be expanded again in the current fiscal year (2022).

The "PAA CONAB" - operationalized through the National Supply Company (CONAB) - and the "PAA Direct Purchase" - financed through the Ministry of Citizenship - have discrepancies in their revenues due to the constant changes suffered in the program in recent years. The main factor is the lack of resources in CONAB to be applied in the PAA and the consequent limitation of resources and projects. In this case, part of the amount was allocated to other Ministries and State Secretariats for the execution of the "PAA Direct Purchase". In this model, there is a strong dependence on the municipality's ability to articulate with deliveries, as well as its fitting of the required criteria that consider the Human Development Index (HDI), values, among others.

In the case of the "PAA Simultaneous Donation", it should be mentioned that it refers to the Union's resources for the execution of public purchase of family farming for prisons. As noted in Table 2, COOMAFITT marketed in two moments (2018 and 2021), delivering food to various regions of the State and strengthening the inter-cooperation process. These projects were fundamental as they strengthened COOMAFITT's relationship with the commercialization centers, such as Unicooper/Santa Rosa, CECAFES/Erechim and Unicentral/Santa Maria. These markets are considered extremely important due to permanent purchases, which guarantee the ability to flow the family farming production during the school holiday period (reduction of marketing in the PNAE).



The private market emerged in COOMAFITT in mid-2016, after the extinction of the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and the consequent signaling of weakening of public policies for family agriculture. With this, it was necessary to build other markets capable of draining the production of local farmers. One of the first strategies thought was the commercialization to other cooperatives of the State, reconciling the service of the institutional market concomitant with the "opening" of new private markets.

In this perspective, in 2018, the significant revenue for this market corresponded to this marketing process with the other cooperatives, combined with the service also directed to the local/regional markets (retail) of the cooperative territory, even if on a smaller scale. In 2019, as noted in Table 2, the sharp drop in the private market is explained by COOMAFITT'S departure from a Marketing Center, as well as by the strategy of prioritizing the PNAE in other regions, from the other Marketing Centers, including the creation and development of a Central in the Metropolitan Region of Porto Alegre.

In 2020, curiously, with the covid-19 pandemic, where an even greater reduction of this market was expected, the observed was the opposite: the growth of the private market, including this being the highest revenue of the year for the cooperative, when both markets and their segments are joined. It is worth highlighting some strategies adopted by the cooperative: i) the partnership project with the Network of Cooperatives of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (REDECOOP), through the delivery of family farming baskets; ii) the project "COOMAFITT Delivery" and iii) the opening of a Market Network of 70 (seventy) stores in the region of *Santa Maria*, in the center of the State, for the commercialization of silver banana and organic silver banana.

In 2021 these markets are maintained in almost their entirety, except for the "COOMAFITT Delivery", closed in August 2021, due to their lack of viability, in view of the relative return of people and the consequent circulation after social isolation. Additionally, it was evaluated that the cooperative would need to allocate strategic focus to improve its performance, and, at that time, it was essential to bet on the resumption of the PNAE to expand the commercialization. Either way, the "COOMAFITT Delivery" remains in memory as an important project and can be reclaimed later.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the values of services provided to the cooperative members correspond to the operational process performed by the cooperative for its associates. Most of these services refer to the transportation, handling, air conditioning and storage of perishable and non-perishable food products. Historically, COOMAFITT collects food directly on the property of members, storing and organizing the loads in the cooperative's own structure for later distribution in schools and other customers. All this process and services performed is charged through invoice provision of services.



Finally, no less interesting, another pertinent information that can be verified in Table 3, is the "revenues from non-cooperative acts", which correspond to the provision of delivery and distribution logistics services carried out by COOMAFITT for non-associated cooperatives. The significant increase in this service in 2021 was the result of an investment by the cooperative, through the opening of a branch in Porto Alegre - the state capital - to organize and operate the distribution of food, both in the capital and in the metropolitan region. Throughout 2021, services were provided to partner cooperatives with the delivery of 23,000 family farming kits to Porto Alegre, where COOMAFITT was responsible for assembling and distributing 85% of the total volume.

It is essential to highlight the importance of REDECOOP in the process of articulation and construction of the viability of these projects, since the service provided between cooperatives consists in the sharing of cargo, which makes the process more viable. In this sense, COOMAFITT is an important agent of logistics operationalization of family farming products in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, as well as the other cooperatives associated with REDECOOP that fulfill this same role in their respective territories, strengthening the process of inter-cooperation through networking.

The values related to taxes also increased in the last two years, being related to three main factors: i) the market transition existing in the cooperative resulted in a more expressive participation of private markets in revenues; ii) the increase in the marketing of industrialized products such as brown sugar, where historically the commercialization of fresh products has prevailed, the latter previously exempt from taxes (in this case, the ICMS – Tax on Circulation of Goods and Services) and iii) the increase in the provision of distribution and delivery services resulted in the increase of ISSQN (Municipal Tax Of Any Nature). It is important to highlight that public policies have tax exemptions in their operationalization, unlike the private market where products such as brown sugar suffer the incidence of ICMS.

From the point of view of the products most commercialized by the Cooperative in 2021, according to Table 4, little more than 1,000 tons of products sold, about half (47.1%) refers to silver banana, 14.5% organic silver banana, 9.6% tomatoes, 7% other vegetables and 5.4% carrots. A volume that composes more than 80% of the total sales. The remaining 20% are divided among other crops such as green cabbage, beetroot, sweet potatoes, sugar, and orange.



Table 4 – Products commercialized by COOMAFITT - 2021

Product	Production (in Kg)	%
Silver banana	500.967	47,1
Organic silver banana	154.062	14,5
Tomato	102.621	9,6
Others (greens and vegetables)	75.000	7,0
Carrot	57.740	5,4
Green cabbage	44.119	4,1
Beetroot	36.441	3,4
Sweet potato	34.388	3,2
Sugar	32.214	3,0
Orange	26.938	2,5
Total	1.064.490	100,0

Source: COMAFITT (2022)

### 3.2 Additional information on COOMAFITT's activities

In this topic, to expose important activities within the scope of COOMAFITT, it is necessary to highlight three projects carried out by it, involving the participation of women, young people from the rural area and articulation with the University. They are:

#### “More Woman”

It corresponds to the creation of a women's association policy, initiated in 2014, where women corresponded to 13% of the cooperative's social framework. The policy is based on the participation of women in production quotas, that is, they are associated, expanding the volumes of participation in planting, commercialization, as well as on the coordination structures and direction of bureaucratic and administrative activities of the cooperative. This process was constructed through meetings in the communities and meetings held annually in the territory of COOMAFITT, based on participatory methodologies for the social framework to discuss the importance of women's participation and, at the same time, to think about strategies for its inclusion in the cooperative. Currently, the participation of women in the membership is around 35% and it is worth reiterating that the presidency of COOMAFITT is led by a young woman.

#### "Rural Youth Collective"

COOMAFITT's Rural Youth Collective was founded in 2015, with the objective of debating the demands of the cooperative's youth, formed by associates, children of associates and collaborators. The meetings took place monthly and were attended by 15 to 20 young people.



The collective has had important relationships with local schools, creating a process of interaction, culminating in the realization of the Cooperative School Project, which consists of holding seminars and exchanges between COOMAFIT youth and high school students from local State schools. The collective also had representation at the National Youth Conference, held in Brasília-DF, in 2015, having also participated in other important spaces of the territory such as the Thematic Chamber of Youth and Regional Education. Through this process, the insertion and participation of youth within the spaces of COOMAFITT were strengthened, also counting on the understanding and support of the management of the cooperative in the period. In 2019, at the General Meeting, members and associates elected 3 young people to form the executive board of the cooperative, composed of the president, vice president and treasurer. This result shows the importance and need to create spaces for the active participation of youth within decision spaces.

### **Extension course at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)**

In 2019, an extension course on Youth and Public Policies was held in partnership with UFRGS, which consisted of monthly meetings held in rural properties, strengthening the partnership process between the cooperative and the university. During the 08 meetings, the debate of important and relevant contents for family farming was encouraged, strengthening the youth collective to think and create new strategies for action.

### **Final Considerations**

The cooperatives of family agriculture, both in their productive and sociopolitical aspects, if the example of COOMAFITT is representative, present themselves as an important instrument for coping with the difficulties related to food access for important segments of the population.

This, therefore, allows the development of a more sustainable production system that helps in mitigating the effects of the climate crisis, in addition to ensuring, for a portion of the population, food safety and quality and the generation of work and income, strengthening social bonds. Since it is a labor-intensive sector, it can contribute to the increase in income of part of the population and offer healthy food, implying a reduction in food insecurity.

However, there are still major challenges for this sector, which is experiencing financing difficulties, access to technology, markets, public policies, management knowledge, among others.

There is a broad path that can be created, to support family farming and the formation of cooperatives, from the adoption of legislation covering the sector, the development and dissemination of practices and support of universities, research and rural extension institutes and more mature producer networks. Brazil has a wide network of research and rural extension institutions that could have their performance dynamized with the approval of more favorable legislation, as well as better financing mechanisms. It is suggested the co-construction of





teaching, research and extension agendas in universities that can help strengthen the cooperatives of family agriculture, to discuss and face the real problems that the sector is facing. In addition, with the activities of cooperatives and networks of producers and marketing, a solid ecosystem of innovation and support for family farming enterprises could be built.

Regarding the case of COOMAFITT, the information and data presented reveal us a successful experience in the south of the country. However, to expand its operational capacity, COOMAFITT is restructuring the Distribution Center at the Porto Alegre branch. The aim is to improve logistics capacity and storage time, considering the diversity and quality of food and services provided. In addition, the Center is a strategic agent in the operationalization of logistics services through cargo sharing, a process stimulated and conducted through REDECOOP, with the objective of meeting the demands of production flow with viability and value aggregation, generating better operational results for cooperatives and, consequently, more income to farmers.

It is also essential to continue the structuring of the private market by adding value to the products commercialized. In addition, COOMAFITT needs to strengthen its agroecological transition process, as well as support the structuring of family agroindustry with the potential to benefit food. In addition, it needs to continue strengthening the articulation in network, understanding the dimension of family farming and the need for it to be organized, especially in commercialization. It is also necessary to maintain and expand its capacity for political impact, to ensure a perennial public policy of support and strengthening of family agriculture.

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