



# **Rural youth: challenges and possibilities for the social reproduction of family farming**

**Cristiane Tonezer**

*Universidade Comunitária da Região de Chapecó – Chapecó – SC – Brasil*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0948-3809>

**Hieda Maria Pagliosa Corona**

*Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná – Pato Branco – PR – Brasil*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1790-5423>

**Eliziane Raquel Rauch Ceratti**

*Chapecó Region Community University – Chapecó – SC – Brazil*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7371-0789>

## **Abstract**

Rural youth has been gaining relevance a subject of debates on the dynamics of reproduction and strengthening of family farming, as well as the challenges between staying in or leaving the rural environment, which implies thinking about the relationship between urban and rural, between educational background and future perspectives for young children of family farmers. In this sense, the present article aims to analyze the strategies of rural youths who attend technical education in agriculture at Instituto Federal Catarinense (IFC), Campus Concórdia, for the social reproduction of family farming. The methodology used to collect the data was guided by qualitative research, of a descriptive and interpretative nature, through semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven pupils, ten girls and seventeen boys. According to the results obtained, it can be verified that the choice of some young people for the technical course in agriculture is as a strategy for the reproduction of family farming, either to apply the knowledge acquired in the rural unit, or to continue their studies via access to higher education, integrating rural activity with another profession. Those who want to leave the rural area, on the other hand, say that in the future they will seek courses for professional advancement in the urban environment. In general, it can be said that the future projects of these young people are the result of the material and socio-cultural conditions of the families, which imply different positions and roles, played by them within the rural productive units. All respondents identified that the technical course in agriculture allows the reproduction of family farming.

**Keywords:** Rural youth. Family farming. Social reproduction. Future projects.

## **Juventude rural: desafios e possibilidades de reprodução social da agricultura familiar**

### **Resumo**

A juventude rural vem ganhando espaço no contexto dos debates sobre a dinâmica da reprodução e fortalecimento da agricultura familiar, bem como dos desafios entre ficar ou sair do meio rural, o que implica pensar nas relações entre urbano e rural, entre formação

educacional e perspectivas de futuro dos jovens filhos de agricultores familiares. Nesse sentido, o presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar as estratégias de jovens rurais que cursam o ensino técnico em agropecuária do Instituto Federal Catarinense (IFC), *Campus Concórdia*, para a reprodução social da agricultura familiar. A metodologia adotada para o levantamento dos dados foi orientada pela pesquisa qualitativa, de natureza descritiva e interpretativa, por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com vinte e sete estudantes, sendo dez moças e dezessete rapazes. De acordo com os resultados apurados, pode ser aferido que a escolha de alguns jovens pelo curso técnico em agropecuária se configura como uma estratégia de reprodução da agricultura familiar, seja para aplicar os conhecimentos adquiridos na unidade rural, seja para dar continuidade aos estudos para acesso ao ensino superior, integrando a atividade rural com outra profissão. Já aqueles que querem sair do meio rural afirmam que no futuro buscarão cursos para a ascensão profissional no meio urbano. De modo geral, pode-se dizer que os projetos de futuro desses(as) jovens são resultantes das condições materiais e socioculturais das famílias, que implicam posições e papéis diferenciados desempenhados por eles no interior das unidades produtivas rurais. Todos(as) os(as) entrevistados(as) identificaram que o curso técnico em agropecuária possibilita a reprodução da agricultura familiar.

**Palavras-chave:** Jovens rurais. Agricultura familiar. Reprodução social. Projetos de futuro.

### **Juventud rural: desafíos y posibilidades en reproducción social de la agricultura familiar**

#### **Resumen**

La juventud rural ha ganado espacio en el contexto de los debates sobre la dinámica de la reproducción y el fortalecimiento de la agricultura familiar, así como los desafíos entre permanecer o abandonar las zonas rurales, lo que implica pensar en la relación entre lo urbano y lo rural, entre los antecedentes educativos y las perspectivas de futuro para los hijos de agricultores familiares. En este sentido, este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las estrategias de los jóvenes rurales que asisten a la educación técnica en agricultura en el Instituto Federal Catarinense (IFC), *Campus Concórdia*, para la reproducción social de la agricultura familiar. La metodología adoptada para la recopilación de datos se guió por la investigación cualitativa, de naturaleza descriptiva e interpretativa, a través de entrevistas semiestruturadas con veintisiete estudiantes, diez del sexo femenino y diecisiete del sexo masculino. Según los resultados obtenidos, se puede verificar que la elección de algunos jóvenes para el curso técnico en agricultura se configura como una estrategia para la reproducción de la agricultura familiar, sea para aplicar los conocimientos adquiridos en la unidad rural, sino también para continuar los estudios para acceder a la educación superior, integrando la actividad rural con otra profesión. Los que desean abandonar el área rural, por otro lado, dicen que en el futuro buscarán cursos para el avance profesional en el entorno urbano. En general, se puede decir que los proyectos futuros de estos jóvenes son el resultado de las condiciones materiales y socioculturales de las familias, que implican diferentes posiciones y roles que desempeñan dentro de las unidades productivas rurales. Todos(as) los(as) encuestados(as) identificaron que el curso técnico en agricultura permite la reproducción de la agricultura familiar.

**Palabras clave:** Juventud rural. Agricultura familiar. Reproducción social. Proyectos futuros.

## **1 Introduction**

The changing process of contemporary ruralities requires unique responses to the challenges and perspectives imposed by the ongoing global movement. In this scenario, rural youth, in its plurality of expressions, is situated in the context of family

farming demands, given the complexity to promote their social reproduction and guarantee the permanence of the youth in the countryside.

Rural youth, as a social category and political actor, has become central insofar as it has been the object of recent and acute social transformations in the countryside and in Brazilian society (CASTRO, 2009). Their demands, considered specific, reinforce the choice for rural development based on family farming, whose model is predominant in rural units.

The complexity of the process of social reproduction of family farming, through rural youth, brings to light old – albeit still current – structural problems of the Brazilian countryside. The absence of minimum conditions to have a dignified life, with quality education, access to land, income, leisure and cultural options, digital inclusion, easily accessible roads, health policies, employment, etc., makes many young people feel attracted to cities and migrate there (STROPASOLAS, 2006).

Currently, rural youth face many challenges and uncertainties between “leaving or staying” in the countryside (CASTRO, 2005), due to a series of economic, political, social and cultural factors, which influence not only their life plans, but also the implementation of strategies for the reproduction of family farming, with rural succession as an important aspect.

In normative terms, the Brazilian Youth Statute (BRASIL, 2013) defines a young person as a person aged between 15 and 29 years. However, youth as a stage of life goes beyond the age parameter, as other elements also comprise this stage. For Castro (2009), it must be considered beyond a specific population, that is, youth is a category that represents social identities permeated by social processes and configurations in different contexts.

Thus, the general objective of this study is to analyze the strategies of rural young people who attend the technical education in agriculture at Instituto Federal Catarinense (IFC) for the social reproduction of family farming. To achieve the proposed objective, field research was carried out with data collection through semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven pupils, in March, April and May 2019.

## **2 Rural youth and social reproduction of family farming**

Interest in rural youth follows the trend of discussions on family farming, target of debates and attention from the State and organized civil society. The debate on the social reproduction of family farming is marked by several problems: of economic, political, social and environmental nature.

In a context of intense social exclusion, land, means of production, good infrastructure and public policies are needed for a rural family to be able to reproduce itself through its youth. In this logic, the rural world is witnessing a double movement: on the one hand, some young people remain in the rural unit as successors or settle in other productive units; and on the other hand, some young people would like to remain, but need to migrate to urban centers, due to the scarce conditions to make their future projects viable.

Social reproduction, according to Spanevello (2008), has embeds the idea of continuity of individuals and social groups. According to the author, “[...] the notion of social reproduction involves, on the one hand, the dimensions of the production of material goods and, on the other hand, the social organization of this production

through work”<sup>1</sup> (SPANVELLO, 2008, p. 39). However, for the society or social group to maintain social reproduction, it must have strategies aimed at solving everyday problems and designing projects for the future with a view to continuing a given social, cultural, economic, political system, etc.

Bourdieu's (2004) notion of strategies aims to explain the reproduction of the social position of individuals within the group or institution through socialization. This socialization is what the author names as *habitus*, i.e., the concept of *habitus* is used to explain the means through which we learn, from childhood, to be part of a specific society or social group and reproduce it successively through actions, also learning to modify it through our choices. It is possible to produce thoughts, actions, desires and perceptions from the *habitus* human beings acquire and from the contexts in which they are inserted. In this sense, the *habitus* itself tends to reproduce the set of conditions and experiences that individuals experience on a daily basis.

Thus, the concept of social reproduction implies recognizing that every society is endowed with a material structure, determined by the need for production and reproduction of subjects to maintain or to alter the existing structure. This means that there is a set of knowledge, experiences, symbols, and structures that are part of a given society and that, in order to guarantee its continuity, must be reproduced for the next generations (CORONA, 2006). In this process, ways of living and social, economic, cultural, and political practices, as well as the way knowledge is produced in society, are reproduced, that is, it is about the reproduction of the totality of social life.

This concept allows analyzing several forms family members, in different social contexts, use to give continuity to this type of rural activity. The dynamics of social reproduction leads to the appropriation and assimilation of elements that interact inside and outside the social and cultural dynamics, in which rural families seek, through strategies, to promote the permanence of both the way of life and the rural unit.

In cases where there is no prospect for the children to continue in their parents' rural unit, Bourdieu (2008, p. 440) states that:

The departure of the heir signals the death of the agricultural enterprise – as it is shown that it owes its most striking features to the fact that the biological reproduction of the domestic unit, therefore of its workforce, is part of the conditions for its reproduction; it simultaneously condemns the hope of a lifetime and of the one who has had it, and who cannot help but feel (without necessarily being able to say it to himself/herself) that s/he cannot want for his own child, this socially designated other in which all their investments are deposited, a project so clearly deadly. (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 440)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In the original: “[...] a noção de reprodução social envolve, por um lado, as dimensões da produção de bens materiais e, por outro, a organização social dessa produção através do trabalho”.

<sup>2</sup> In the original: “A partida do herdeiro sinaliza a parada mortal da empresa agrícola – tendo-se mostrado que ela deve suas particularidades mais marcantes ao fato que a reprodução biológica da unidade doméstica, portanto de sua força de trabalho, faz parte das condições de sua reprodução; ela condena simultaneamente a esperança de toda uma vida e de quem a teve, e que não pode não sentir (sem poder necessariamente dizê-lo para si) que ele não pode querer para seu próprio filho, este outro si mesmo socialmente designado no qual estão depositados todos os seus investimentos, um projeto tão claramente mortal”.

In this line of thought, Bourdieu (2008) clarifies that a son who refuses to become heir to his parents' agricultural property will be committing a kind of "father's murder" by not succeeding him (worse than if he were to succeed). In these cases, it can be said that the rural unit will have a different fate from that predicted by the cultural tradition passed from generation to generation, which suggests thinking about the challenges faced by young people and the possibilities inserted in their projects for the future.

### *2.1 Rural youth: challenges and dilemmas for the social reproduction of family farming*

In all the social, economic, and cultural transformations that affect contemporary rural areas, family farming coexists with the dilemma of leaving or staying in the countryside for youth. Decades ago, the dynamics of family farming consisted of the assumption that the farmers' children would also become farmers. This condition was due to the few possibilities of other forms of life presented to rural youth, especially because of the isolation of the countryside, the scarce public services, and the distance between the rural and urban worlds. In this context, the logic of rural continuity prevailed (SPANVELLO, 2008).

Currently, rural youth have different projects for the future, no longer exclusively linked to agriculture. On the contrary, they consider taking other paths that may or may not lead to the reproduction of rural activity. Thus, "[...] there is a social problem of regional scope, expressed in the social and spatial mobilization of youth [...]"<sup>3</sup> (STROPASOLAS, 2006, p. 23).

As a result, families have little prospect of being able to pass on their rural establishments and their profession as farmers, as "[...] the replacement of working family producers takes place endogenously – parents being replaced by children [...]"<sup>4</sup> (BRUMER, 2014, p. 115). However, this succession dynamic depends, above all, among other important aspects, on young people's interest and motivations to continue their parents' activity.

In addition, the issues that challenge the social reproduction of family farming are related to the scarcity of land, difficulty of access to public policies, absence of specific social policies for rural youth, "inadequate" remuneration, hard work, lack of social acknowledgement of the agriculture professionals, the children's refusal to follow their parents' profession, etc. (BRUMER, 2014; STROPASOLAS, 2006).

Such situations are reinforced by what Weishmeier (2013) revealed, in an unfavorable context for young people in rural areas: the issue of social invisibility, that is, rural youth have their rights barely implemented, so that they are rarely benefited by public policies. Thus, "among all the excluded and marginalized in our current society, young people living in rural territories are among the most vulnerable"<sup>5</sup> (WEISHMEIER, 2013, p. 13).

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3 In the original: "[...] evidencia-se uma problemática social de abrangência regional, expressa na mobilização social e espacial da juventude [...]"

4 In the original: "[...] a substituição dos produtores familiares em exercício se dá de forma endógena – os pais sendo substituídos pelos filhos [...]"

5 In the original: "[e]ntre todos os excluídos e marginalizados de nossa sociedade atual, os jovens que vivem em territórios rurais figuram entre os mais vulneráveis"

## 2.2 The dynamics of rural succession

When talking about rural succession, it is important to revisit this concept and its particularities. As, in family farming, the control and management of the rural unit are normally performed by the parents, when they are absent, it is the children who assume responsibility for the management of the material patrimony and of the family.

The succession process implies the transfer of power and land patrimony, so that the older generation withdraws from the management of the rural unit, passing control to the younger generation and forming a new farmer. In this way, the rural succession system encompasses the transfer of material heritage (house, land, machinery, facilities, animals, etc.) and immaterial heritage, such as historical and sociocultural patrimony, impregnated with knowledge kept and transferred by generations, in addition to local tradition and cultural habits and customs, which may be lost in the absence of successors (STROPASOLAS, 2011).

In this sense, succession is understood as a process in which a new generation of farmers is formed. They remain in the countryside, taking over the management of the rural unit, and continuing the activities that the parents had been developing, and their children may in the future be the new successors.

For Spanevello (2008), succession is related to the economic and social conditions existing within each rural unit. According to the author, succession involves the formation of new generations of farmers, and it is composed of three phases: succession, inheritance, and the withdrawal or retirement of the parents from the management of the rural unit.

According to Carneiro (2001, p. 25), the pattern of inheritance in peasant society goes through two processes: “[...] the choice of a successor – the one who ensures the continuity of the agricultural activity and the maintenance of the family group – and the sharing of the goods, directly associated with the latter [...]”<sup>6</sup>. During these two processes, the family goes through moments of tension and contradictions that might either lead to the fragmentation of the family patrimony, causing its economic unfeasibility, or they can act to maintain the integrity of the patrimony.

Thus, the succession, as part of the family farming reproduction, involves different configurations, such as rules and strategies used by families for intergenerational succession, considering the gender differences (BRUMER; ANJOS, 2008) that might, at the same time, meet the material needs of the family and guarantee family succession. In this context, the gender issue assumes an important role, as there are tensions between the patriarchal tradition in family farming and the fractures that point to other possibilities for women, as will be discussed in item 4.

## 3 Methodological aspects of the study

This article was based on a qualitative approach, with a descriptive and interpretive perspective, with qualitative data collection and analysis, based on

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6 In the original: “[...] a escolha do sucessor – aquele que assegura a continuidade da exploração agrícola e a manutenção do grupo familiar – e a partilha dos bens, diretamente associada ao primeiro [...]”

theories and academic studies to understand the case selected for the study. In this way, qualitative research aims to understand complex social phenomena, in order to explain real-life situations of the researched subjects, focusing on contemporary real-life events (YIN, 2005).

The research was developed in two phases. The first one consisted of the exploratory stage, in which information was sought in the secondary database, such as the records of entrant pupils who passed the selection process in the family farming quotas, in order to identify them and collect information, from these records, which could help to characterize this group of pupils. Also in this phase, the first contacts of approximation with the population under study took place. From them, the family dynamics were identified, and the research questions were better problematized with them.

The second phase consisted of field research, with semi-structured interviews, based on aspects raised in the exploratory phase, and aimed at young people from families who work with small-scale farming. The interviews focused on pupils who occupy the quota directed to these families in Technical Education in Agriculture at the Instituto Federal Catarinense.

The study was carried out with pupils entering the family farming quota from the affirmative action system, and who, in 2019, were in the third year of the technical course in agriculture at the Instituto Federal Catarinense – Campus Concórdia. Twenty-seven pupils in this condition under the age of 18 were surveyed, ten girls and seventeen boys. All participated in the interviews.

The qualitative method was chosen to analyze and treat the generated data, as its focus is “[... ] mainly, on exploring the set of opinions and social representations on the subject that it intends to investigate [... ]”<sup>7</sup> (DESLANDES; GOMES; MINAYO, 2008, p. 80), having as an analysis perspective the explanation of the phenomena presented to the researched subjects. For the content analysis, the interviews were carefully transcribed to keep the lines, expressions and details mentioned by the interviewees.

#### **4 Youth perspectives on the social reproduction of family farming: some reflections**

Analysing the different contexts and situations experienced by rural youth has become necessary to better understand not only issues related to family farming and its forms of reproduction, but also those related to culture, labor and gender relations, generation, and other aspects that highlight the diversity and heterogeneity present in the rural world.

Even though youth as a category is defined by the age parameter (BRASIL, 2013), it goes beyond the biological stage, as it has specific qualities and needs (CONJUNVE, 2006). It integrates different contexts and is permeated by multiple social identities. Therefore, the characterization and analysis of IFC’s rural youth, subjects of this study, considers the rural young people as diverse and heterogeneous, especially due to the existing socioeconomic and cultural diversity in family farming in Brazil.

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7 In the original: “[... ] principalmente, a exploração do conjunto de opiniões e representações sociais sobre o tema que pretende investigar [... ]”.

The young people interviewed make up the group of pupils in the third grade of the technical course in agriculture at the Instituto Federal Catarinense – Campus Concórdia. Of the total of ninety-eight (53 male and 45 female) pupils who are in this grade, twenty-seven were selected through the family farming quotas, an affirmative action specific to this institution.

This group is composed of children of family farmers from the western region of Santa Catarina and northwest of Rio Grande do Sul. These families are dedicated to livestock and agricultural production of a mercantile nature, in addition to rural activities aimed at family subsistence, all carried out by family members, in units with a predominance of small areas of family or leased properties, including salaried rural workers.

As a part of the field research, we sought to know some elements about the education of these young people in a technical course in agriculture and the relationship of the course with their rural units, as well as the students' future projects.

It was observed, between the lines of the interviewees' responses, that education represents for them a perspective of realizing dreams and projects, of better living conditions, whether inside or outside the family rural unit. The study is pointed out as responsible for inclusion in the world of work, representing social ascension, becoming "someone in life". For them, the technical course in agriculture symbolizes, in short, a path to enter higher education, to improve the rural family unit, and to get a job.

Based on the interviewees' statements, the choice of a technical course aimed at qualification in agriculture is due to their affinity with the rural area, because their families are from the countryside and because they are interested in increasing their knowledge to apply what they learned in their own rural units in the future.

Also based on the young people's reports, it was possible to note that living in rural areas and being fond of the field are two important and decisive factors for choosing the course and, consequently, for them to be inserted in a future professional activity or for improving family farming.

In opposition to the old "rule" that stated that "those who stay in agriculture do not need to study", currently, education is no longer perceived as a motivation for younger generations to leave the countryside. On the contrary, high productivity in several agriculture sectors awaken in young people the search for improvement in technical schools, with the objective of encompassing broader visions and increasing the productivity of their rural units, as well as seeking alternative and sustainable forms of production. All that can be understood as strategies of family farming social reproduction.

Only eight pupils stated that no one influenced them in their choice for the course. The others were influenced by family members or close friends. A girl reported that, despite having been influenced by her parents, the technical course in agriculture was not what she wanted to do.

In summary, the reasons involved in choosing the technical course in agriculture show the conditions of the rural environment as a space for production and social reproduction. The process of professional training in agricultural activities emerges as central, mainly, as it is offered in a Federal Institution of Education. Among the most cited reasons for choosing the course, are the possibility of fully



attending high school and technical education, affinity with the rural area, the search for knowledge to improve the family's rural productive activities, as well as family influence.

It is noteworthy that all interviewees joined this educational institution through a selection process that has affirmative actions for those whose families work as family-based farmers. This is justified by the expansion of access and permanence, transversally promoted by public social policies, such as the quota system in public institutions and universities.

When questioned about what they identify in the course objectives and curriculum that gives possibilities to work in the rural family unit or in family agriculture and for their future projects, many interviewees answered that the course provides numerous subsidies for acting in the productive activities, as it serves as technical-professional support when they return to the rural unit. In this way, the technical course in agriculture provides possibilities for the reproduction of the family unit and/or family farming. Most pupils emphasized that technical training contributes to the expansion of theoretical and practical knowledge in the rural area and that it can also be directed to the job market. The technical course provides subsidies for working as an employee of a company, for managing rural family units, and for continuing to study in undergraduate courses related to the area, such as veterinary and agronomy, which are interconnected with these young people's future projects.

When asked if their families accept the knowledge and skills acquired in the course to develop production and management activities in their rural family unit, more than half (62%) answered yes. On the other hand, 33% stated that the family sometimes accepts it, and, in only one case, the young woman reported that her family does not accept it.

Throughout history, many changes have marked the configuration and organization of families and, to ensure good relationships among the family members, dialogue is fundamental, including in rural families, in which, historically, social roles are defined by the prerogatives of gender and generation.

In this context, we asked the interviewees what they see as positive and negative points of living and working in rural areas. The answers pointed to quality of life; owning their own businesses; flexible working hours; and family relationship.

As family farming positive points, we can list the various elements highlighted in the pupils' responses, which are related to the social reproduction of family farming in its multidimensionality (economic, social, ecological). The economic aspect includes the possibility of managing and working in one's own business, without necessarily hiring labor. In the environmental and ecological aspect, there is the form of production, which can be agroecological and/or organic. Finally, the social dimension consists of the advantage of being able to work together with family members, avoiding the risk of being unemployed and without income.

As for the disadvantages of family farming, it also covers several other aspects. Highlights include the low monetary value of products; the hardship of some activities; the little technology; the devaluation of the profession; the high cost of inputs; the difficulty of access to rural units; the incipience of public services, among others.

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of living in rural areas, the elements that make up the pupils' descriptions about family and community life presuppose the understanding of a double social dynamic. On the one hand, the rural dynamics are linked to home, family, work, neighborhood, local community, etc. On the other hand, the city is related to technology, urbanity, options for culture, leisure, access to health and education. These are social spaces with their particularities, but which intersect the living spaces of rural young people and give substance to the life experiences and their projections for the future.

As the young people's reports show, the "scarce access" to some services, such as entertainment, influences their decision between staying or leaving. In Chauveau's interpretation (2014, p. 100), there is a discrepancy in the provision of public services offered to rural and urban youth. According to the author, "[...] the imbalance between the abundant cultural offer of the urban environment and the rural 'cultural desert' is increasingly noticed [...]"<sup>8</sup>. In this analysis, rural youth seek in cities the opportunities they do not find in their local communities.

Even today, rural youth experience, daily, antagonistic situations, marked by exclusion from the current productive system, as well as precarious access to services and infrastructure resources, in addition to the lack of specific public policies for rural youth. According to the analysis by Castro (2016, p. 104), although there has been a progressive visibility of the rural youth category, this visibility has not led to full access and formulation of public policies. That situation highlights a paradox, i.e., there is "[...] an important advance in the social and political recognition of this youth, but it did not break some of the 'internal' and 'external' borders they face daily"<sup>9</sup>.

Due to that fact, obstacles in accessing education, work, income, and land hinder social inclusion in the country's development process. Therefore, "[for] many young people, living in the rural world, today, still means facing barriers to their autonomy and their possibilities of choices [...]"<sup>10</sup> (CASTRO, 2016, p. 101). In other words, the real possibilities of access to quality education, sufficient land to live and produce and satisfactory income to meet all needs are challenges that need to be achieved with the implementation and quality of public policies that can contribute to meeting to these demands and break with the "[...] perspective that treats rural youth as a symbol of backwardness and at the service of the urban areas [...]"<sup>11</sup> (CASTRO, 2016, p. 103-104).

When answering about how they describe the relations between the rural and the urban from their experiences, the rural youth presented particularly interesting views, with different meanings for each one. There are several very pertinent and distinct observations that young people make regarding the relationship between the urban and rural world. The issue of the little acknowledgement of the rural environment in comparison with the urban one is present in the responses, as well as

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<sup>8</sup> In the original: "[...] o desequilíbrio entre a oferta cultural farta do meio urbano e o 'deserto cultural' rural se faz sentir cada vez mais [...]"

<sup>9</sup> In the original: "[...] um importante avanço no reconhecimento social e político dessa juventude, mas que não rompeu algumas das fronteiras 'internas' e 'externas' que enfrentam diariamente".

<sup>10</sup> In the original: "[p]ara muitos jovens, viver no mundo rural, hoje, ainda significa enfrentar barreiras para sua autonomia e suas possibilidades de escolhas [...]"

<sup>11</sup> In the original: "[...] olhar que trata a juventude rural como símbolo de atraso e a serviço da cidade [...]"

the prejudice against the rural population, the low monetary value of family farming products, the quality of life in the countryside, among others.

Thus, the answers show an appreciation of the rural life and, consequently, a movement that breaks the paradigms that positioned the rural areas as only focused on agricultural production. Furthermore, family farming is being re-signified and revalued by society, due to the demand for healthy food, the environmental awareness, as well as the conservation of the historical and cultural heritage of rural communities (STROPASOLAS, 2011).

In addition, the young people's personal perceptions of how they evaluate life in the city compared to life in the countryside indicate that, in the urban environment, aspects such as peace, tranquility and quiet are not found. City life is described by young people as a more hectic life, with noise, turmoil, hustle. The urban lifestyle was not mentioned by the interviewees as something dreamed of or desired. What was noticed in the responses of those who intend to leave the countryside is that cities offer greater opportunities.

When asked about which concrete actions they have already proposed for the family unit, if those actions are related to the knowledge acquired in the technical course in agriculture, and if they were implemented, 44.44% of the total repliers answered that they never proposed any action for the family farm unit. Another 55.55% said they had already proposed something. Among those who have already proposed actions, 66.66% stated that they were implemented, while another 33.33% stated that they were not implemented. All the actions proposed by the interviewees were related to the technical course in agriculture.

It can be seen from the responses that professional training can make a considerable difference in the rural unit, with higher possibilities of productivity, profitability, and improvement of the results, with the implementation of projects developed in the IFC. In this sense, the technical course in agriculture contributes to the young peoples' lives, as they try to pass on the knowledge and skills developed in the course. That is linked to the fact that what they like most about the course are the practical classes.

#### *4.1 Rural youth's projects for the future*

Historically associated with the migratory process, the rural youth category is constituted by numerous issues and problems related to the social spaces in which they transit. Both a certain rejection of the children to follow their parents' profession and the choice to continue the reproduction of rural activity are based on different reasons. Some of these reasons can be found in the studies by Renk and Dorigon (2014) and in the data collected by this study.

Among the twenty-seven people interviewed, two girls and nine boys intend to stay in rural areas, either just to live or to establish themselves as rural producers through family farming. Another 22% (four female and two male) want to leave the countryside. The remaining 37% (four female and six male) are still undecided.

The reasons stated by the youth to stay in rural areas and in family farming suggest the compatibility between the professional training in agriculture and the profession as family farmer. The knowledge and skills acquired during professional

training make it possible to improve rural activities, encompassing overviews of diversified techniques of sustainable production in rural areas.

The justifications show the youth's participation in activities developed by the family; their affinity with the rural environment and family farming; and their family bonds. Consequently, they announce perspectives for the reproduction of family farming, through strategies that combine aspects of production and way of life.

For now, results also show that the countryside is a promising workspace. In a scenario in which the rural areas are seen as a place of production and ways of life, young people envision possibilities for personal and professional fulfillment, with the continuity and improvement of activities already developed by the family and with the implementation of other newer activities.

In contrast, the reasons listed by young people who do not want to remain in rural areas indicate, among other reasons, the issue related to land. In general terms, socioeconomic conditions involving the size of land ownership in relation to the number of children and economic subsidies for the development of rural activities, in addition to the affinity with rural activity, can be determining aspects in the process of the youth's professional choice.

In this broad context, in which work, land and income relations are intertwined, the economic issue of family farming is an aspect analyzed by rural youth (STROPASOLAS, 2006) in the decision-making process between staying or leaving the countryside. Although it is not just the only factor considered, it directly implies the decision of this young person, as access to income makes it possible to conquer other dimensions, such as land, culture, leisure, etc.

As for the succession process, in the case of large families, according to Wanderley (2009, p. 78), “[...] it is common for non-successor children to look for a professional alternative outside the family establishment”<sup>12</sup>, which, consequently, would not result in a reproduction crisis. This can be seen in one of the reports by one young boy undecided between staying or leaving the countryside. He explains that he has two younger brothers and that is why, perhaps, he might leave the countryside, to let one of his brothers assume the succession.

In this sense, the young people's reports and the studies cited allow us to understand that staying in family farming is not limited to an individual choice. As can be seen during the research, the project for the future emerges as influenced by certain socioeconomic and cultural conditions of the family involved in the process of constitution of the subjects themselves.

As for the young people's future projects, some are directly related to the reproduction of their family's production units and family farming. Of those who intend to stay, they want to continue as family farmers and keep their families' productive activities. Others aim to seek stability in urban wage employment or, at the same time, to reside in rural areas and continue with family rural activities. Pluriactivity is noted in these cases.

On the other hand, those who want to leave the rural environment refer to education as the path to professional fulfillment. They see in the expansion of schooling the possibility of achieving “a better life”. The concern with continuing studies reflects the desire to move to the city.

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<sup>12</sup> In the original: “[...] é comum que os filhos não sucessores procurem uma alternativa profissional fora do estabelecimento familiar”

In this context, youth want the benefits of both worlds: urban and rural. The first, with its qualitative space for housing and well-being; the latter with its greater possibilities for entertainment and access to public and private services.

Young people of current generations are increasingly aware of ongoing social, economic, and cultural changes. In this scenario, some rural young people seek to perform both urban and rural activities, as they do not want to be restricted only to the traditional production process of their families' rural units, that is, they want to expand and /or innovate the family's production activities.

This means that the countryside is currently considered as a space to live, and not just to work. In general, the rural environment has become a valued space, including by urban society, in which family farming has performed new functions based on the heterogeneity, diversity and plurality of life and work experiences in these places, where young people are seen as potential actors to promote the strengthening of family farming and rural development.

Therefore, Castro (2005, p. 2) highlights that “[...] ‘rural youth’ reappears in different rural contexts today as a key category for the social reproduction of the countryside and especially of family production [...]”<sup>13</sup>. Thus, it is necessary to design a family farming project that includes youth leadership, supported by the appreciation of rural youth. And this includes the support of the family so that the child stays there.

The field research revealed that 44.44% (nine males and three females) of young people are encouraged to stay in rural areas; 33.33% (six males and three females) are encouraged by the family to go out; while 11.11% (two males and one females) have family incentives to stay and leave the countryside at the same time; and another 11.11% (three females) have families that do not express their opinion. It is observed that boys (52.94% – nine individuals) are more encouraged to stay in rural areas than girls (30% – three individuals).

The sample suggests that most families still tend to prefer that the male child stays in the countryside, while the girls are encouraged to study to seek other job opportunities in the urban environment. When girls are encouraged to remain, it is usually because they are the only heirs, with no male brothers. One of the girls, who is 16 years old, reports that *“my mother wants me to leave because there is no future [here]. You know, so far, they encourage me to leave because they don't see a future”*<sup>14</sup>. In the words of another 17-year-old girl who is encouraged to leave the countryside: *“they want me to have opportunities they didn't have”*<sup>15</sup>. In contrast, another 17-year-old girl informs the reason why she is encouraged to stay in rural areas: *“because, as I said, they would have no one to leave their things to, and, as my father is also taking care of nonno and nonna...”*<sup>16</sup>.

In addition, it is observed in the reports of some boys that they are encouraged to leave the rural environment under the justification, as well as that of

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<sup>13</sup> In the original: “[...] A ‘juventude rural’ reaparece em diferentes contextos rurais da atualidade como uma categoria chave para a própria reprodução social do campo e em especial da produção familiar[...]”.

<sup>14</sup> In the original: *“minha mãe quer que eu saia, porque não tem futuro. Olha, até agora eles me incentivam a sair, porque eles não veem futuro”*.

<sup>15</sup> In the original: *“eles querem que eu tenha oportunidades que eles não tiveram”*.

<sup>16</sup> In the original: *“porque, como eu disse, eles não teriam pra quem deixar as coisas, e daí, como meu pai também está cuidando do nono e da nona”*.

the girls, that there is no prospect of future in agriculture. These are situations in which the reproduction of family farming is not approached as a collective family project.

Although some families encourage their children to stay in rural areas, they do recognize the importance of studies for their children, since studying is related to greater life opportunities. In addition, when there is not enough territory for all the children to settle in rural areas, the youngest child is usually the successor, as one of the 17-year-old boys declares when asked if his family encourages him to stay or leave the countryside: “*They encourage me to leave, since I have younger brothers*”<sup>17</sup>. In cases where the family has as a collective project the permanence of at least one of the children, they encourage formal education, even if the child stays in rural areas.

Regarding the family’s expectations towards the child’s profession, 25.92% (six male and one female) stated that the family expects the child to become a family farmer, while 55.55% (seven males and eight females) responded that the family expects them to work in a different area. As for 3.70% (one girl), the family does not have an opinion on this. And for 14.81% (four males), the family expects the child to integrate two professions (family farmer and some other profession).

It is known that rural families will produce the next generations of farmers, since the reproduction of this profession implies the socialization of rural activity, which begins in childhood, and learning takes place in practice, being transmitted from parents to children (BRUMER; ANJOS, 2008). More than half of the pupils reported that their families encourage them to seek another profession, and this implicitly reveals several aspects: the insufficiency of land/patrimony to establish all the children in the rural unit; the choice of only one successor child; the analysis that families make of agriculture; among others.

Regarding the succession and sharing of the rural unit, the interviewees’ answers indicate that children who no longer live with their parents in rural areas and who received material goods in urban areas are unlikely to share the same division of property and family assets. Likewise, the data show that most families will have only one successor. Only in two cases does more than one son appear as a successor.

In this context, it is important to assess the different motivations of young people to settle or not in the countryside. It can be seen, especially from the girls’ reports, that the families say little about the issues of sharing, inheritance, and succession of the rural unit. In the boys’ reports, this type of subject seems to be more common.

For Paulilo (2004), even if the law guarantees gender equality, women are still excluded in various ways from the sharing of family patrimony. Priority is given to male children in the succession of land, so that marriage remains as the main route for female children to access land. Furthermore, for those who have formal education, whether men or women, there is usually no access to inheritance, because “they have already got the education”. Those who go to work in the city do not receive inheritance either. Women who do not marry and remain in the family usually receive nothing; they are expected to take care of their parents and then “live” in a brother’s house, helping with household chores.

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<sup>17</sup> In the original: “*Ela incentiva a sair, porque eu tenho irmãos mais novos*”.

The guarantee of succession in rural family units is related to the set of characteristics of the family internal dynamics, that is, it is related to the teaching-learning process of rural work, to the internalization of traditional values and customs, and to the geographic, economic, and social proximity with the cities. These characteristics can affect the succession due to the changes surrounding agricultural activities and the way of life in rural areas (SPANEVELO, 2008).

In this sense, rural family succession is complex, because what is at stake, for the farmers' children, often goes beyond the economic aspect, that is, young people seek in the cities a personal and professional fulfillment that is hardly ever found in rural areas (STROPASOLAS, 2006).

## 5 Considerações finais

As a reflection on the above, we highlight that there are several macro and micro-social factors, in constant interaction, that influence rural youth in the design of their projects for the future. These, in turn, are the result of the material and social/cultural conditions of the families, which imply different positions and roles, played by rural youth within the productive units.

Among the results obtained in this research, it is highlighted that the choice for the technical course in agriculture is one of the strategies for family farming reproduction by some young people. These (two females and nine males among the twenty-seven) intend to carry out their future projects inside and/or outside the rural units of their families in the context of family farming. It was also found that these same individuals were already chosen, implicitly, by their families themselves, as their parents' successors.

Others (four females and two males), who intend to leave the countryside, guided in some cases by the family, will seek to carry out their future projects in urban centers. In these cases, access to higher education will allow, according to them, the insertion in the labor market and professional advancement. The others are still undecided and find themselves in the dilemma between leaving or staying in the countryside.

When describing elements that make up the way of living in rural areas, all interviewees highlighted numerous advantages, such as quality of life; the possibility of owning their own business; the flexibility of schedules; living with their families; the tranquility of the countryside; the possibility of producing healthy food for the family's own consumption; among others.

As disadvantages of family farming and the rural environment, they highlighted elements such as the low monetary value of the products; the hard work; little technology; little of appreciation of the profession; high cost of inputs; difficult access to rural units; incipience of public services; scarce access to culture and entertainment; impossibility of having weekly rest, among others.

As for the teaching of the agricultural technical course at IFC, all the interviewees identified that it covers several possibilities for family farming reproduction, as the course provides theoretical-practical knowledge and skills for innovation, entrepreneurship, and the improvement of productive activities and of the rural unit itself.

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**Cristiane Tonezer.** Doutora em Desenvolvimento Rural como Bolsista Capes pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Desenvolvimento Rural da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul Pgdr/Ufrgs, Doutorado Sanduíche como Bolsista cnpq na Universidade do Algarve (Portugal). professora Titular da Universidade Comunitária da Região de Chapecó e Coordenadora da Incubadora Tecnológica de Cooperativas Populares da Unochapecó. [tonezer@unochapeco.edu.br](mailto:tonezer@unochapeco.edu.br)

**Hieda Maria Pagliosa Corona.** doutorado em Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento pela Universidade Federal do Paraná (2006), pós-doutorado em Desenvolvimento socioambiental pelo Ladyss/Paris X (2012) e pós-doutorado em Desenvolvimento rural pelo PGDR/UFRGS (2013). Professora Permanente do Programa de Pós-graduação em Desenvolvimento Regional (PPGDR) da Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná (UTFPR). [hiedacorona@hotmail.com](mailto:hiedacorona@hotmail.com)

**Eliziane Raquel Rauch Ceratti.** Mestre em Políticas Sociais e Dinâmicas Regionais (Unochapecó). Assistente Social do Instituto Federal Catarinense - Ifc - Campus Concórdia. [eliziane.ceratti@unochapeco.edu.br](mailto:eliziane.ceratti@unochapeco.edu.br)

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#### CONTRIBUTION OF EACH AUTHOR

Conceituação (Conceptualization) Eliziane Ceratti; Hieda Corona  
Curadoria de Dados (Data curation) Eliziane Ceratti; Hieda Corona  
Análise Formal (Formal analysis) Eliziane Ceratti, Cristiane Tonezer; Hieda Corona.  
Obtenção de Financiamento (Funding acquisition) Eliziane Raquel Rauch Ceratti  
Investigação/Pesquisa (Investigation) Eliziane Ceratti; Cristiane Tonezer; Hieda Corona  
Metodologia (Methodology) Eliziane Ceratti; Cristiane Tonezer; Hieda Corona  
Administração do Projeto (Project administration) Eliziane Ceratti  
Recursos (Resources) Eliziane Raquel Rauch Ceratti  
Software Eliziane Raquel Rauch Ceratti  
Supervisão/orientação (Supervision) Cristiane Tonezer; Hieda Corona  
Validação (Validation) Cristiane Tonezer; Hieda Corona  
Visualização (Visualization) Eliziane Ceratti, Cristiane Tonezer; Hieda Corona  
Escrita – Primeira Redação (Writing – original draft) Eliziane Raquel Rauch Ceratti  
Escrita – Revisão e Edição (Writing – review & editing) Eliziane Ceratti, Cristiane Tonezer; Hieda Corona

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