FAMILY FARMING AND THE AGROINDUSTRIAL CHAIN.
SOME NOTES ON THE GERMAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The present study forms part of the joint ECLAC-GTZ project entitled "Promotion of the economic and social integration of small and medium scale farmers into agroindustry", the aim of which is to formulate strategies to promote beneficial integration between agroindustry, agribusiness and small and medium scale farmers. The desired aim is to disseminate technical progress toward the small scale farming sector as well as contribute to sustainable rural development.

The study seeks to complement case studies prepared at the Latin American level, and to present German experiences which show the integration of family farming in the agroindustrial chain; the aim is to contribute ideas and suggestions that come from a different country, to help design alternative strategies.
1. The general state and development of family farming in Europe compared to Latin America.

Family farming in Latin America can be characterized as peasant farming, whose aim is to reproduce the family and the family farm, and is partly for commercial purposes. In Germany, family farming is a business activity, whose aim is to increase profits and capital accumulation, and is wholly for commercial purposes. In both cases, the primary labor force is composed of family members, additional help is contracted only during the harvest season.

In 1990, 88% of farms in the Federal Republic of Germany were family operated and 80% of the rural labour force worked on these farms (Henrichsmeyer and Witzke, 1991, p. 88).

In Latin America, the growth observed in other sectors of the economy did not lead to an absorption of surplus farm workers. There it proved impossible to create enough jobs for the people from the countryside. Against a background of high rates of population growth, ineffective agrarian reforms -where indeed they exist or have been introduced-, and an ever smaller land/person ratio, there was a trend toward impoverishment in the countryside, together with a drift to the shanty towns in large cities.

In Germany, there did not exist such a strong dichotomy between peasant agriculture and business agriculture. In the postwar period, the level of income in the farming sector rose with respect to that of other sectors. The pattern of ownership changed in West Germany after 1949, owing to the introduction of new techniques, the slower growth (or decline) of demand for products, and the job growth recorded in other sectors of the economy. The number of farms dropped from 1.6 million units in 1949 to 567,000 in 1993. The number of holdings of less than 30 hectares (ha.) fell, while the number of holdings of more than 30 ha. rose. Beginning in the 1980s, the number of holdings of 50-100 ha. increased considerably. The average size of farm holdings increased from 8 ha. in 1949 to 21 ha. in 1993 (statistics by BML [Bundesministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten]).

A comparison of these figures with the situation in other member countries of the European Community reveals that Germany is just below the average for these countries.
2. The German food industry and fruit and vegetable processing

The food industry is one of the most important sectors of German industry -accounting for 11% of industrial output in 1994-, together with the chemicals, machine-building, motor vehicle and electrical engineering industries.

The food industry is characterized by the medium size of its firms. These firms have a relatively weak position in relation to the commercial sector. The 10 largest commercial firms together account for some 78.4% of all sales. (BVE, 1994, p. 17).

The most important subsectors are dairy products (16.5% of sales), meat (15.6%), flour milling products (14.3%), beer (9.6%), confectionery (8.2%), fruit and vegetables (5.1%) and soft drinks. Thus, the processing and conservation of fruit and vegetables constitutes the sixth subsector of the food industry. In view of its importance, we will examine this subsector below in order to give an example of the relationship which exists between the farming sector and agroindustry (BVE, 1984, 1991, 1994).

3. Vertical cooperation between the farming sector and agroindustry
   in fruit and vegetable production in Germany

a) Initial observations

The expression "vertical cooperation" refers to the contractual collaboration between farmers and independent agroindustries; there may be agreements on: 1) type of product, variety, quantity, commercial grades, minimum size, 2) period, place and method of delivery, 3) contract price - exact definition, 4) conditions of payment, 5) quality control, 6) production and use of technology, 7) product rejection, 8) force majeure and 9) arbitration procedure.

Vertical cooperation has a direct impact on the structure of firms, their organization and their ability to make choices.

Two elements in particular have a bearing on vertical cooperation: the institutional framework and producer organizations.

b) Institutional framework

i) European Union Market Regulations (EU-Marktordnungen)

The fundamental objectives of European Union market regulations are to: 1) increase and stabilize producers' incomes, 2) supply the needs of the population at reasonable prices, 3) avoid market disputes with non-member countries, 4) eliminate excessive spending in relation to agricultural market policy.

The most important policy measures enacted by the European Community with respect to fresh fruit and vegetables have been:
1) The establishment of quality standards (commercial grades of products) for 21 varieties of vegetables, as well as for citrus fruits, strawberries and kiwi and other fruits, which enable farmers to provide agroindustry with defined grades of fresh produce.

2) Financial incentives toward the establishment of producer organizations and groups of producer organizations, covering varieties of fruits and vegetables produced in the Mediterranean countries but not in Germany.

3) Intervention for market stabilization purposes, in the form of the withholding of produce from the market and destruction of up to 80% of the quantities involved. The cost of these measures, i.e. the payment of minimum prices to European Union producers, is borne by the European Agricultural Compensation and Guarantee Fund (EACGF).

4) Year-long or seasonal protection of production through the application of tariffs of between 25% and 26% of the value of the produce.

Policy measures enacted with respect to processed fruits and vegetables have been as follows:

1) Production subsidies for a specified number of products. The granting of such subsidies to the industry is linked to the payment of minimum prices for farmers' produce. The main objective of such subsidies is to promote products in the interests of Mediterranean member countries.

2) Minimum prices on imports of some products processed from sour cherries and berries, and quantitative restrictions (import quotas) on imports from non-member countries; these measures serve to raise the price of imports of semi-processed products which are of significance to German agroindustry.

The influence of market regulations on European Union markets for fruits and vegetables is limited compared to other agricultural products, particularly in Germany (Behr, 1994, p.46 ff).

ii) General legal principles

The Government plays only a minor role in the standardization and quality control of agricultural products. However, processed agroindustrial products are subject to strict regulations, such as demonstrate the following pieces of legislation: the act on trade in foods, tobacco, cosmetics and other items of consumption, the act on classification of foods, the act on plant protection, the act on maximum use of plant protection products, the act on preserves and related products, the act on fruit juices, the act on frozen foods, and the act on product grades (Handelsklassengesetz) (Nehring, 1993).

c) Horizontal cooperation: organization at the farmers' level

The expression "horizontal cooperation" refers to the voluntary collaboration between production units or firms of the same stage of production and trade.
All forms of association of producers are engaged in the following tasks: tailoring production and marketing to the quality requirements of the market, setting common standards (quality regulations); adapting the quantitative supply to the needs of the market; and carrying out of European Community intervention activities as a contribution to the stabilization of producers’ prices.

Producer organizations recognized at the level of the Federal Republic of Germany and/or the European Community are legal persons under private law and are exempt from the prohibition of monopolies (Kartellverbot) within the framework of the act on restraint of competition (Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen GWB). The members of these producer organizations have the right to align prices, reach agreements on prices with respect to other members and relinquish market share. Informal organizations face one restriction: they can only make recommendations on prices.

The predominant forms of association are cooperatives and informal associations with mutual interests which act as negotiators with the industry. In contrast with cooperatives, informal associations represent a loose form of cooperation without a fixed organizational and administrative structure, and are hence cheap. They have as their sole purpose to negotiate the conditions of contract with agroindustries through an elected representative, whose position is a honorary one, and thus entails no costs (Will, 1995, p. 13,14).

Informal organizations are becoming an increasingly important force in the market, and this is due to:

1) centralized supply of products, 2) the coordination and seasonal staggering which characterizes the delivery of products, and 3) improved standards of information.

Organizations of mutual interest have been set up in all the federal states (Bundesländern) of Germany. These organizations are supported in their negotiations with the industry by regional federations of farmers or by chambers of agriculture, depending on the area.

d) German experiences with vertical cooperation in the fruit and vegetable industry

It is advisable, in the case of Germany, to highlight a set of specific characteristics, that have an effect on the actual form vertical cooperation takes.

One such characteristic is the regional structure; this is designed by the federal states (Bundesländer), in which the chambers of agriculture (Landwirtschaftskammern) are organized, with links to the federal states’ agricultural secretariats, and whose role is extension and guidance, and the farmers’ federations (Bauernverbände), as the regional organizations representing the interests of farmers.

Vegetable production in Germany is dominated, beside cooperatives, by associative forms of organization of producers with mutual interests, having no fixed organizational structure.
German agroindustry basically takes the structure of a medium sized enterprise. This structure also implies an absence of significant market power. In this respect, the relatively unstructured forms of organization of fruit and vegetable growers parallel the typical structure of German agroindustry. Such forms of organization are suitable in this situation, as there is no great pressure on the part of farmers to organize. German farmers have a tradition of independence and freedom of action, and reject forms of organization which limit them.

The prices of agricultural products are increasing as a result of government intervention in the form of market and price stabilization measures, as well as the artificial shortages that these create. This situation leads to a reduction of agroindustry's competitiveness in the market, together with its interest in vertical cooperation.

In instances where a new commercial relationship is entered into, both parties very frequently end up making complaints for breach of contract. Many ventures in fruit and vegetable growing often fail. This is due to the fact that there exist many alternatives for the sale and/or purchase of produce apart from contract arrangements. Consequently, it is necessary that both contracting parties study the conditions thoroughly, that they offer real advantages in respect of the sale or purchase in the market, and that they examine important criteria for each type of product separately: these criteria include natural risks inherent in production, market regulations, the relative importance of capital and labour in agricultural production and manufacturing, storage and transportation capacity, and prospects for standardization.

In order to settle conflicts about the fulfilment of the contract, it is very important that:
- there exist definitions of standards of quality for the different products in the form of different commercial grades or categories which also determine the prices of the products;
- there exist regular quality controls which occur on a voluntary basis; and
- there exist courts of arbitration or arbitration committees, which review cases before they appear in judicial court.

Whether a contractual relationship is attractive to the parties over the long term depends in essence on the parties themselves. One key factor for farmers is always the level of quality and reliability that they can achieve. If farmers can attain a high level, they will always find buyers for their produce. Any agroindustry which seeks to cooperate over the long term with a particular group of farmers or farmer organizations is advised to introduce a system of bonuses or financial incentives in order to encourage farmers to maintain quality and reliability.

Advantages attained as the result of a strong negotiating position, or the short-term benefit in cases of supply shortages in the market, leave the other contracting party in an insecure position and lead sooner or later to disputes and a breaking-off of the collaboration. For this reason, it is advisable to negotiate all the conditions of the contract in a detailed manner and establish them in writing. In this way no opportunity arises to avail oneself of alternative methods of sale and purchase.

As a general rule, agroindustries enjoy a stronger negotiating position than farmers. Consequently, it is vital that the farmers’ position be strengthened for the duration of the cooperation. The relationship can only develop over the long term if both parties derive advantages from the collaboration. This presupposes the existence of a
certain balance between the contracting parties, and that broad transparency facilitates a balance of interests through the dissemination of sufficient information. Here it is important that the informal associations of producers with mutual interests be tightly organized. Often outsiders take advantage of the outcome of the negotiations or members allow themselves to be distracted by manoeuvrings within the community itself. The need thus arises for agricultural producers to aspire to stronger horizontal cooperation. Communities of mutual interests should attempt to achieve greater momentum toward integration and should have punitive measures available to them.

Contracting parties tend to adapt standards to the supply situation at hand. Standards are interpreted loosely, when there is shortage of a product, and very strictly, when there is a surplus. The net result is that producers supply average quality products over the medium term. To head off such a situation, quality standards should be clearly defined in a contract and quality control should be carried out by an independent body, chosen jointly. (Will, 1995, p. 31 ff.)

e) **The importance of vertical cooperation in fruit and vegetable growing**

Nearly half of the vegetables grown are of significance to German agriculture. These include varieties of cabbage, spinach, carrots, beetroot, celery, peas, beans, cucumbers and sweet cucumbers. In 1993, 64% of the area planted with these vegetables was done so on a contract basis; considering vegetable production as a whole, 32% of the area was planted on a contract basis. Between 1988 and 1992, the area planted under contract in western Germany increased at an annual rate of 8.1% (Lohner, 1995, p.124 ff.; ZMP 1994).

Vertical cooperation on a contract basis is still less widespread today in Germany than in neighbouring member countries of the European Union, like France and Holland.

The reduced use by the European Union of market stabilization measures has provided a spur to planting under contract. Cutbacks in such measures in turn lead to a steady increase in competition, both in the markets for agricultural products and for processed products. Changes in consumer behaviour provide an additional incentive for an increase in vertical cooperation in Germany.

4. The impact of changes in consumer behaviour on the vertical cooperation of the agroindustrial chain and on niches in international trade

a) **The impact of changes in behaviour on elements of quality and evaluation of foods: from a focus on nutrition to ethical, ecological and aesthetic aspects**

As in other European countries, Germany has undergone a change of values in the past three decades, which has also affected attitudes toward agricultural products. The change is characterized by the transition from values of obligation and acceptance to those of personal development. The demands of consumers regarding the quality of foods has also changed during this time. The concept of the quality of a product can be broken
down into a number of components. It is possible to distinguish elements of nutrition, health, usefulness, pleasure, prestige and ethical value in a food.

The value accorded traditional components was revised during the course of the last two decades, when new attributes were introduced such as ethics, pleasure and health considerations. The consumer is not able to see these attributes just by looking at the food. The branding of products serves as a guarantee of quality on the part of producers (including farmers, agroindustries and businesses); only when products are branded can the consumer identify the quality standards demanded. The result of this situation, in the wake of a period of two decades when collaboration on a contract basis between the agroindustrial complex and farmers had a minor role, is that production under contract has taken on new importance. Only this way can the required components of quality be guaranteed, and a greater influence exercised over the harmonization of agricultural products, which in any case vary enormously.

Today, production under contract is of more importance in animal production than in plant production; animal production accounts for some 56% of total production, compared with about 34% in the case of plant production. Overall, about 47% of agricultural products are produced under contract. It is estimated that this figure will rise to about 67% in the year 2000 (Lohner, 1995, p.124 ff.).

This means that the drive for greater vertical cooperation originates in those stages which are closest to consumers, and it is these stages which increasingly will offer contracts to farmers. Farmers will need to adapt to this development; it should be noted that today they are not especially inclined to reaching arrangements. Many farmers, particularly those on family holdings, criticize such arrangements and reject them, believing they threaten their independence.

b) The consequences of changed behaviour by consumers on niches in international trade: Alternative trade and family production in developing countries

Changes in consumer behaviour have also opened up a niche in international trade. Under the banner of ethics, a small, though still limited, group of consumers is prepared to pay a price deemed just by independent organizations of small producers in developing countries. This niche is known under the name of alternative trade or "fair trade". Coffee was the first of a range of products marketed under fair trade, and which today include tea, honey, cocoa, chocolate, wine, sugar, seasonings, as well as handicraft products.

The volume of alternative trade has risen rapidly in recent years, above all thanks to the introduction of a "TransFair" seal of approval. Products bearing this seal can be found in the cafeterias of municipal legislatures, universities, hospitals, businesses, and religious communities; even one restaurant at the Bundestag, the German federal parliament, offers coffee sourced from alternative trade (Lampe, 1994, 14 ff.).

Nevertheless, alternative trade is limited in terms of quantity.

In 1994, sales of fair trade products in Germany totalled approximately 130 million deutsche marks or US$ 89 million (US$ 1 was worth 1.46 DM in September
This represents a small fraction (0.18%) of Germany’s total imports from developing countries (excluding China) in 1992 (72.12 billion deutsche marks) (Callenius, 1994, p. 15).

Alternative trade, none the less represents an interesting niche for the members of the 156 producer associations which currently market their products as "Fair Trade" (see Annex: Fair trade partners in the Americas, GEPA Infodienst No 2 and No 3, 1995, p. 18-19). The potential impact in the area of learning processes exists both with respect to certain groups of producers in developing countries, and trade and consumers in importing countries.

5. Conclusions and suggestions

The present study presents German experiences of the integration of family farming in the agroindustrial chain, and begins with a comparison of the general state of agriculture in Germany and Latin America. The study seeks to present ideas and elements that may contribute to the formulation of strategies for beneficial collaboration between agroindustry, agribusiness and family farming in Latin America, in the context of sustainable rural development.

The situation in Germany differs markedly from that in Latin America. Contract arrangements cannot be transferred directly; this also applies in the case of production and marketing arrangements, and market structure. Contractual cooperation between farmers and agroindustry will take different forms, and have different effects and chances of success, depending on the particular characteristics of the country, the market and the unit of production in question. These factors will need to be examined in each country, as regards their impact on the relationship between agroindustry and the farming sector. Such an examination would serve as the basis for discussing the prospects for, as well as the limits on, transferring selected German experiences.

This study has considered a series of factors which contribute to an improved understanding of the trends likely to effect agriculture and the relation between family farming and agroindustry in Latin America. These include the role of producer organizations, forms of vertical cooperation, consumer demands, the institutional framework and intervention by Government and its impact on vertical cooperation.

a) The role of producer organizations

The situation in Germany is notable for the fact that informal organizations of mutual interests related to certain products are among the organizations which play a major role within vertical cooperation. In Germany, these organizations meet the needs of farmers to organize in a part of the horticulture industry. This is due to the predominance of medium scale structures in the food industry. This example could serve as the basis for analysing the degree of organization required in certain situations. The actual form of the producer organization should be functional and chosen in compliance with the organization of agroindustries and their market power. The benefits derived from such an organization are unquestionable. However, it is not certain that a higher degree of organization is always the best solution in the case of specific problems.
b) **Forms of vertical cooperation**

In Germany as well, many complaints are lodged for breach of contract, depending on the market situation and the existence of alternatives for the sale and/or purchase of products. The issue of whether cooperation under contract really confers benefits requires detailed examination. In instances where such cooperation is indeed beneficial, all the conditions pertaining to the contract should be specified and set out clearly. In particular, the rights and obligations of both contracting parties should be defined, as should quality requirements. An independent body should be chosen by mutual agreement of the parties for quality control of the product and for arbitration. One general rule applies to the individual farmer: if he maintains a high degree of quality and reliability, he will always find contractual partners in agroindustry.

c) **The consumer and his impact on vertical cooperation**

The habits of German consumers have changed over recent decades, together with their concept of quality. A product's invisible attributes are playing an ever increasing role; these may relate to the use of plant poisons or hormones, or the origin of the product. With the advent of branded products and specialty foods, the food industry is providing guarantees of quality. These can only be observed if farmers respect standards of quality. The need thus arises for contractual arrangements on the part of agroindustries. Planting under contract has been increasing in importance in Germany in recent years.

Just as new consumer habits are spreading across the globe, so too in Latin America similar trends are occurring; these trends are intensifying with the growth in the urban middle classes. As a result, it can be assumed that cooperation by contract will also assume progressively greater importance in the countries of Latin America. Already in the international marketplace, incentives are provided for farming that adheres to the quality standards in force in the United States and Europe.

Changes in consumer behaviour have opened a niche for producers from Latin America: alternative trade, under conditions considered "just". Although the volumes involved are very limited, just trade serves as a model for raising farmer organizations' awareness. Its potential impact in the area of learning processes exist both for certain groups of producers in developing countries, and for trade and consumers in importing countries.

d) **The institutional framework and promotional policies**

The political objectives formulated in Germany in the context of the European Community were to ensure the population was adequately supplied, and to increase and stabilize producers' incomes. The most significant policy measures where the fresh fruit and vegetable industry is concerned are: 1) the establishment of quality standards, 2) financial incentives for the setting up of farmer organizations, 3) funding by the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund for the withholding of produce for market stabilization purposes and 4) tariff protection.
The measures enacted concerning processed fruits and vegetables include: 5) production subsidies for a number of products, linked to the payment of minimum prices to farmers and 6) minimum prices for certain imported products and import quotas.

The measures which may stand to benefit the countries of Latin America need to be examined on a case-by-case basis. Factors such as the establishment of quality standards, the introduction of commercial grades for products, and strict regulations concerning products processed by agroindustry and their supervision by Government play a major role in the relationship between farmers and agroindustry. Their importance will increase as domestic markets are further integrated into the international marketplace.
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Annex

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