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FEMININITY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: ANALYSIS OF THE INSERTION OF WOMEN IN THE AGRIBUSINESS SEGMENT

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ABSTRACT

The presence of women in the labor market is a reality in Brazil and the world, not being different in the agribusiness segment, which in 2021 presented significant participation of 27.4% in the national Gross Domestic Product. Qualitative and descriptive, an in-depth interview with the creator of “Dama do Agro” was used, with media projection through YouTube and Instagram channels. Thus, the objective was to describe the phenomenon of the insertion of women in Brazilian agribusiness activities from the perspective of this businesswoman, considering her peculiar involvement with the segment. In general, the findings from the systematization of the content analysis of the interview allowed us to observe that her perception does not differ significantly from several studies found in the literature, highlighting the fact that for the interviewee a significant change in corporate mentality has been the main contributing factor for the insertion of women in the labor market in general and in the agribusiness segment in particular.

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INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in the agribusiness segment has gradually increased so that debates about it have gained space in academic and corporate environments. Women have been involved in activities that range from the field itself (planting, cultural treatments, harvesting, machinery operation), reaching management positions, acting directly in decision-making processes, often with well-established entrepreneurial characteristics. Several structural transformations of a cultural and social nature that have taken place in Brazilian society have led to an increase, albeit slow, in the participation of women in the labor market. Data from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) reveal that, between 2002 and 2015, the Rate of Female Participation in the Workforce (TPFT) grew by approximately 3 p.p., reaching 40% in the last year (Barros, Castro, Gilio, Souza Junior, Morais & Almeida, 2018). Research on structural change and the creation of a predominantly service-based economy has shown significant variations in the impact of a labor market with increasing female participation (Buckner, 2009; Gordon, 2003; Yeandle, 2009). For Staduto, Nascimento and Souza (2017), the participation of women is fundamental within the family structure which, by expressing its potential, contributing to the development of rural

communities, can raise the level of social capital, an intangible asset that is fundamental for creating a development path. In this sense, rural development also involves greater involvement and appreciation of women in rural activities (Staduto, Shikida & Bacha, 2004). Goldenberg (2000) postulates that one of the most relevant social transformations in the history of Brazil is the increase in female participation in the labor market, a fact that has been taking place with greater prominence since the 1970s. As for the more subjective aspect of work, studies have shown that women have a higher level of job satisfaction than men, without a significant and, therefore, relevant weight regarding the possible trade-off between work and family (Grönlund & Öun, 2018). The studies by Osei and Zhuang (2020) highlight the transformative potential of rural women entrepreneurs who use the social capital of formal and informal social networks to alleviate rural poverty. In turn, Russell (2020), from a case study with women entrepreneurs, found that they had a specialty in reaching the female audience and taking advantage of their experiences with home economics and women's clubs to promote a variety of clients from agribusiness, heavy industry, and organizations governmental and non-profit. These entrepreneurs paved the way for other women, contributed to the development of professional standards and influenced other professionals to reach out to women, and their inclusion initiatives paralleled those of other groups based

on race, ethnicity, and gender diversity. Therefore, knowing more accurately the specificities of women in this context may serve to broaden the understanding of this phenomenon, contributing to the debate. Thus, this research aims to describe the phenomenon of women's insertion in Brazilian agribusiness activities from the perspective of the "Dama do Agro". In addition to this introduction, the article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents an overview of national agribusiness, women in the labor market, and women in agribusiness. Section 3 describes the methodological design of the study. In section 4, the presentation of data and discussion of the results. Finally, in section 5, the conclusion of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

National agribusiness: Agribusiness in Brazil has a significant share in the country's economy, representing approximately 25% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Brazil is a country with very favorable characteristics for agribusiness. The increase in world demography and consequent demand for food can lead Brazil to reach the level of the world leader in the supply of food and commodities related to agribusiness, solidifying its economy, and catapulting its growth (Bacha, 2004). Brazil has presented itself as an exporter of a wide range of processed foods, including soy, grains, meat products, fruit juices, and sugar, in addition to biofuels. It holds technology in agricultural machinery, inputs, hybrid seeds, and biotechnology sectors. The agribusiness sector represents around 40% of the value of exports and around 33% of GDP (Lora, 2012). Consequently, agribusiness now exerts a powerful influence on Brazilian economic and foreign policy. The Brazilian State has supported agribusiness by encouraging the development of strong public research in agriculture. It also actively participates in the construction of regional free trade blocs, such as the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), which creates markets for Brazilian agribusiness, and lobbies internationally for free markets and greater access for Brazilian agricultural products to US markets and of the European Union (Lechini, 2005).

The segment has been the engine of the national economy, registering important quantitative and qualitative advances, which remains a sector of great employing capacity and income generation, whose average performance has surpassed the performance of the industrial sector, thus occupying the position of highlighted globally, which gives it growing importance in the process of economic development, as it is a dynamic sector of the economy and its ability to boost other sectors (MAPA, 2011). Agribusiness presents itself as a segment of significant relevance in the national economy. According to data from the Center for Advanced Studies in Applied Economics, which, for methodological purposes, understands agribusiness as the sum of four segments (inputs for agriculture, basic or primary agricultural production, agro-industry, and agro-services), the segment's share in the Gross Domestic Product for the year 2021 was 27.4% (CEPEA/CNA, 2022; Oliveira & Carraro, 2019). However, the sector has faced major challenges, such as creating value beyond the farm gate. Agricultural products, including some value-added goods, face large price fluctuations over which they have no control (Brenes, Ciravegna & Acuña, 2020), requiring new configurations ranging from marketing strategies, supply chains, and logistics, to the training of work teams.

Women in the Labor Market: The role of women in the labor market, driven by economic development and increased levels of schooling, combined with demographic and social changes, has changed considerably in recent decades. Female work, considered without productive value and focused mostly on activities that ensured the maintenance of the family structure and other domestic activities, now has a new connotation, effectively participating in the production system (Heredia & Cintrão, 2006). The effective participation of women within the productive system occurred through a major change in the social, cultural, and economic scenario in society, enabling women to obtain new perspectives in the professional sphere.

The insertion of women in the labor market, in addition to economic issues, was also driven by demographic issues, such as a reduction in the fertility rate; reduction in family size; population aging, with higher life expectancy for women. In addition to demographic aspects, other factors contributed to boosting female participation in the labor market, such as changes in cultural patterns and values related to the social role of women, the expansion of schooling, and entry into universities (Bruschini, 2007). Bruschini (2007) argues that, from the 1970s onwards, with the feminist movements, the demands for recognition of the role and space that women occupied in society became more constant, providing greater participation of women in different public spaces. It is a fact that, in the beginning, the admission of women into the productive system took place, above all, through work, carried out in family environments. Today, female participation in all economic sectors is notorious, not only to complement the family income but as a leadership role and family financial responsibility.

According to Pereira, Machado and Boas (2008), one of the consequences of the inclusion of women in the labor market was the change in family arrangements. Currently, women are more qualified for work, in addition to being more economically independent. In general, the professional career started to be perceived in an interconnected way and associated with other dimensions, a construction process, characterized by a more active role of the professional in all stages of the process. Nevertheless, several diversified aspects of the interaction of life cycles, leisure, and lifestyle with the scope of action are increasingly notorious (Kilimnik, Castilho & Sant'Anna, 2006). By equating power and decision-making relationships between women and men, women have the physical and psychological constitution elements that differentiate them by nature and function. The configuration that passes from generation to generation, in which the man holds the power and decision-making, especially in matters related to work, generated a historical-cultural positioning rooted in relation to the role of women in the market. The change in the labor market model contributed to this insertion. Companies have valued skills such as the ability to work in a team, and flexibility, in addition to constantly encouraging training, regardless of gender (Pereira *et al.*, 2008). According to Żołnierczuk-Kieliszek, Janiszewska, Mielniczuk, Dziedzic and Firlej (2016) it has been increasingly common for women to occupy positions that require responsibility and strategic and crucial decision-making for the business.

Especially on boards of directors, studies have shown that female participation brings benefits to organizations, given the fact that some female behavioral characteristics tend to positively influence decision-making, especially communication, empathy, risk aversion, search for consensus, a more democratic aspect, among others (Lazzaretti; Godoi, 2013; Dezsö; Ross, 2012). Some studies have insisted on the fact that, although women are assuming important positions in the Brazilian economy, organizations, and politics, they are still not properly valued in the labor market, both in terms of salary and opportunities (Lazzaretti, Godoi, Camilo & Marcon, 2013), which seems to us to be quite contradictory and biased. Just to mention a single example, for the same positions, with the same working hours in terms of workload, the remuneration of women does not present any difference in relation to men. The same can be said of public office, including political office; salaries and earnings can be consulted directly on government websites and there is no such difference. Barsoum's (2019) analysis strongly disagrees with the prevailing cultural view that reduces women's employment decisions to ideological aspects. She considers, however, approaches related to the inseparability of work and family; the role of social policies and labor market conditions in shaping women's employment decisions; and the potential disconnect between employment and empowerment, as conditions directly influencing this dynamic. Kriesi, Buchmann and Sacchi (2010) through quantitative studies and statistical analyses, concluded that employment opportunities are strongly linked to the economic cycle; notwithstanding the fact that these same opportunities remain largely dependent on professional credentials. Companies that fail to hire a qualified candidate very quickly

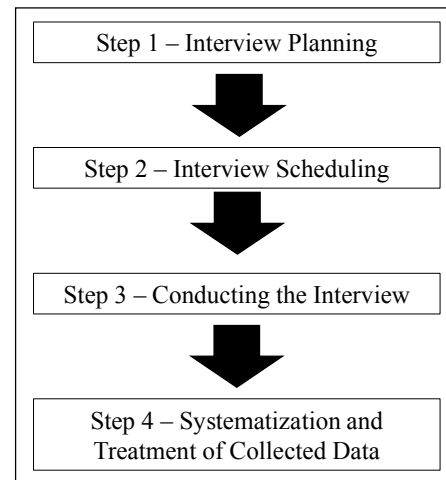
discover that she was briefly hired by the competitor (Stafford, 2019). The studies by Warren and Lyonette (2018), carried out exclusively with women, also showed that the worst effects of an economic recession were felt by women with a lower level of education and, therefore, qualifications and skills development, with no differences for those with a lower level of education full and/or part-time. According to Tilly (1996), skill development is a central indicator of work quality, demonstrating the possibilities available for workers to improve their prospects. On the other hand, inflexibility in labor laws coupled with economic volatility has contributed to women facing greater job reallocation than men. Recent studies carried out in India strongly demonstrate this relationship (Veeramani & Banerjee, 2022). For the Brazilian case, although the country has already taken important steps, there is still a lot to be done in this regard, notably by maintaining a strict commitment to a reform agenda, especially the labor one, that allows for greater flexibility in the rules, with a consistent increase in negotiation autonomy between contractor and contractor. Kahn (2012) corroborates this assertion by postulating that although the more interventionist model seems to cause lower levels of wage inequality, as well as higher levels of job security, it conclusively entails greater difficulties in new access to the labor market, especially for women and youth. Therefore, for the author, making labor markets more flexible could bring these groups into the regular labor market to a greater extent (Kahn, 2012).

Women in Agribusiness: The country has undergone several demographics, and cultural and social transformations, directly impacting female participation in the labor market. Previously, the role played by women in the countryside was household chores, however, the role given to women in the sector has changed significantly. These demographic transformations allied to changes in cultural patterns and values related to the social role of women have altered the configuration of women's work, increasingly focused on productive aspects (Bruschini & Puppini, 2004). Studies by Mourão (2011) and Karam (2004) point to the growth of female participation in the decision-making process both in farming and in-field administration, which translates into greater power of influence for the conduct of rural businesses and greater prominence in the scenario of agribusiness. For Karam (2004) the woman who is participating in some way in agriculture plays a fundamental role in the whole process. Men and women see work in agribusiness differently. Kozera-Kowalska and Uglis (2021) report that women see it as an opportunity for self-development and building good social relationships, in addition to acting on behalf of the environment. For men, work-related prestige and economic benefits are much more important. It was found that men had greater aspirations to pursue their own businesses, while women were more likely to pursue further education. The attitudes towards work in agribusiness represented by the respondents are a good predictor of meeting their knowledge needs. Other studies have contributed to the literature by showing that young women entrepreneurs in agribusiness are as competitive as their male counterparts and that opportunities for young women in agriculture are good and promising (Fani *et al.*, 2021). The growth in the role of women in the labor market in general, and in agribusiness, is undeniable, especially when considering the economic importance that the sector has played in the country's economy. Therefore, different aspects such as those related to financial results, promotions, achievement of goals, adaptability, identity with work, market visibility, and balance between personal life and work are essential for career success (Costa, 2010).

METHODS

With a qualitative approach, the research is characterized as descriptive, since it seeks to describe a given problem, analyze the interaction of certain variables, understand and classify dynamic processes experienced by social groups, in addition to enabling, in greater depth, the understanding of the particularities of the individual's behavior (Seale, 1999; Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000; Stenbacka, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Richardson, 2007).

Bibliographic research, especially in scientific journals (Arenas, Garcia, & Espasandin, 2001; Campos, 2003; Tahai & Meyer, 1999; Vilhena & Crestana, 2002), provided the necessary theoretical framework to support the discussion of the results. An in-depth interview was used as proposed by Santos, Oliveira Filho, Royer and Ferreira (2016). Figure 1 presents the methodological design for this type of data collection.



Source: Adapted from Santos *et al.* (2016)

Figure 1. In-depth interview execution steps

The choice of the interviewee is directly related to the purpose of the research. In this sense, no probabilistic sampling scheme was followed, considering that the objective of the in-depth interview is strongly linked to the search for detailed information and not to its statistical representation (Churchill, 2001; Santos & Fogliatto, 2002; Richardson, 2007). The selection criterion, therefore, followed the logic of the interviewer's direct interest, notably related to the direct ability of the answers to contribute to the achievement of the proposed objective. In addition, the selection of the interviewee was motivated by her trajectory and involvement in the agribusiness segment. For Duarte (2004) interviews, if carried out well, allow the researcher to make a kind of deep-dive, collecting evidence of how the subject perceives and means his reality. The interpretation connects the analyzed data to the purpose established in advance, making it possible to generate a logical and objective explanation that clarifies the research problem. Interpretation is a reflection with a critical assessment of a subject (Flick, 2008; Pereira, 2004). In compliance with the health protocols of Covid-19, the interview was conducted by video call using the Google Meet platform. The recording was carried out with free and informed consent obtained, for later transcription and analysis. The duration of the interview was 50 minutes, with a total of 24 questions, 16 of which were pre-established initially, and the others (08), the result of the unfolding itself, an intrinsic characteristic of this type of interview.

Profile of the interviewee

Fernanda Nanini is 48 years old, married, 2 children; the oldest aged 26 resides in Sweden; the other, 21, works with his mother. Nanini is a technologist and technician in agribusiness and is currently studying Agronomic Engineering. The interviewee is the creator and presenter of the program "Dama do Agro" on digital platforms (YouTube and Instagram) since 2018, focusing on interviews with farmers, and speakers, among other players linked to the poultry and swine industry. Initially, the objective of the program was to make their work and performance in the poultry and swine sectors better known and, therefore, more valued, in addition to giving greater publicity to the work of women in the countryside. In addition to all these occupations, Fernanda Nanini is a project director and owner of a consulting company specializing in the agribusiness segment, based in the city of Itapetinga, state of São Paulo, Brazil. Table 1 summarizes the main information from the interviewee.

Table 1. Main information from the interviewee

Interviewee	Age	Formation	Professional Performance	Other Professional Performance
Fernanda Nanini	48	Technologist in Agribusiness Technique in Agribusiness	Project Manager Director of Consulting Company Agro Empreender	Creator and Presenter of the "Dama do Agro" Program on Digital Platforms

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It can be said that the interviewee's perception of the role of women in the agribusiness segment is confused with her own family and professional life history. In her words, *"the Dama do Agro is a character that we created to value my work in the poultry industry, to bring, let's say, the woman next to her husband, not to be always behind, you know."*, shows her interest as a woman to be with your husband. Another relevant aspect refers to the fact that Nanini started her graduation and technical training after being married and being the mother of two boys. It's never too late for her to start a career. *"I think you have to chase your dream, regardless of your age,"* says the interviewee. Facts narrated by Fernanda Nanini highlight the fact that women entrepreneurs in agribusiness are often not recognized by other women entrepreneurs. In her own words, *"but for example, here in my city, which is Itapetininga, there is a confectionery meeting for women entrepreneurs, those who are from the agro never go, they are never invited, although my city is an agro city, society here still does not wake up to this, it still does not value women who undertake agriculture, you see,"*, corroborating the proposition of Staduto, Shikida and Bacha (2004) for whom rural development is linked to greater involvement and appreciation of women in rural activities. However, the example of women entrepreneurs studied by Russell (2020) fits here.

The interviewee did not inherit an interest in agribusiness from her family; It was a case of discovery. She saw an opportunity from the undergraduate course at a public educational institution, in addition to the agricultural vocation of the region, being the city where she lived quite expressive in the composition of the GDP of agribusiness in the state of São Paulo. Asked about the fact that she works in a predominantly male environment, the interviewee confirms this fact, but says that she feels *"flattered in reality"*. He complements by stating that with the work, his posture, and, above all, with the results presented, respect comes naturally, which seems to corroborate the understanding of Heredia and Cintrão (2006) and Barsoum (2019), notably in the face of the new challenges faced by the segment. (Brenes, Ciravegna, & Acuña, 2020). Regarding the fact that it took some time to be recognized, the interviewee answered that *"it took a while, it took a while, because the market was very closed [...], to break this barrier I had to insist a lot and to achieve my goal. I had to fight a lot, but over time things started happening..."*. However, it is noted that the delay in recognition is not limited only to the female sex, but is a situation common to both sexes, given the fact that organizations want to see the results effectively delivered so that from this there is the due recognition.

It is not recognized only by the fact of being of this or that sex but by the technical capacity obtained from qualification and experience (Pereira, Machado & Boas, 2008; Kriesi, Buchmann & Sacchi, 2010; Stafford, 2019; Warren & Lyonette, 2018). From the perspective of the interviewee, many of the difficulties faced by women in the past still prevail. For her, *"women have more challenges to face than men"*. Furthermore, the "Dama do Agro" believes that there needs to be more cooperation between women. The fact is that demographic changes combined with changes in cultural patterns and values related to the social role of women have altered the configuration of female work, increasingly focused on productive aspects (Bruschini & Puppini, 2004). However, a competitive internal environment exists between both sexes; Nanini understands that competition *"is generalized, it's not just for women, it's a competition between all men and women; always one wanting to be better than the other"*. This environment of fierce competition usually brings an overload of stress that can trigger other problems. Fernanda tries to prevent this

is proposed by Costa (2010) and Kilimnik, Castilho and Sant'Anna (2006). As for the fact that there could be resistance on the part of small producers and family farmers to the participation of women in the segment, Fernanda was blunt when she stated that she believes it is *"only a few heads, and she can be in family farming as she can be in the medium to large scale" producer, does not have exclusivity for family farming."* The interviewee attributes the change in mentality as one of the factors that contributed to the entry of women into the agribusiness segment. In her words, *"a change in social, cultural and even economic paradigms occurred"*, data corroborated by the proposition of Heredia and Cintrão (2006) and Pereira, Machado and Boas (2008). This work does not intend to make an apology for a biased position devoid of robust data and corroborated by renowned authors on the subject. When asked if she would believe that there would be more facilities in the day-to-day of her own work or in the sector in which she works if the number of women was greater, Nanini confidently asserts *"No, for me what matters is the professional. [...] so for me what matters is competence and dedication at work, regardless of gender."* From the above, it is evident that the commitment is with results, arising from the combination of skills, competencies, and professional experience, in addition to the continuous development of the ability to learn. Still, in the words of the interviewee *"she has to be well qualified, well-prepared, more prepared than men, in order to compete on equal terms."*, which Kriesi, Buchmann and Sacchi (2010) call *"professional credentials"*. Nanini notes that he has witnessed a steady growth in the participation of women in agribusiness. According to her, *"many have stood out; I have already interviewed women who occupy leadership positions, the more open-minded companies are already building this space and I believe that the trend is for accelerated growth, even with some taboos to be overcome, it is a long way we are only at the beginning."*, indicating equivalence with studies by Lazzaretti and Godoi (2013), Dezsó and Ross (2012) and Żolnierczuk-Kieliszek, Janiszewska, Mielniczuk, Dziedzic and Firlej (2016) and Fani et al. (2021). In general, the perspectives of Nanini, the "Dama do Agro", about the insertion of women in Brazilian agribusiness corroborate studies already carried out (Lazzaretti et al., 2013; Silva & Martins, 2017; Pereira, Machado & Boas, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to describe the phenomenon of women's insertion in Brazilian agribusiness activities from the perspective of the "Dama do Agro". The interviewee's perception does not differ greatly from the studies constituted in the theoretical framework of the present work, notably about the fact that women entered the agribusiness segment after social, cultural, and economic changes. Nevertheless, the phenomenon has been happening with increasing intensity, not because of an unfounded social demand or simply to meet a certain ideological spectrum, but, above all, because of the pressing need for personal and behavioral skills that are better developed naturally in females and that has been very beneficial to organizations, be they from any sector or business segment. Not unlike other works, the study has limitations that are peculiar to it. The very fact of being restricted to only one interviewee does not allow extrapolating the results; however, in accordance with the methodological design, the research proposed to investigate this phenomenon precisely from the perspective of the only interviewee who, due to her own peculiarities and profile of action, became relevant for this study. As an agenda proposal for future work, it is considered relevant to include new players as the focus of in-depth interviews, in an attempt to find

converging and divergent points that contribute to greater elucidation of this important social phenomenon, especially the positive and negative implications arising from it.

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