

The contribution of cooperatives to the economic and social development of the state of Paraná

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ABSTRACT

Agricultural cooperatives in Paraná are driving forces behind Brazilian agribusiness and are characterized by their promotion of innovation. In addition to investments in industrialization, there is a growing focus on technologies such as precision agriculture, improvement of zootechnical indexes in pig farming, poultry farming and milk production, process automation, and the use of renewable energy, aiming to increase efficiency and reduce environmental impact. The regions served by agricultural cooperatives stand out for their level of development, with the generation of jobs for residents both directly in the cooperatives and in general commerce, becoming reference centers for agricultural and livestock production. Of the 62 agricultural cooperatives in the state, 20 are located in the Center-South, 18 in the Northwest, 12 in the West, 8 in the Southwest, and 4 in the North. The sector is constantly consolidating itself for future challenges, continuing its sustainable growth, and thus Paraná stands out as a center of excellence in national agricultural cooperatives. International reports show that eleven cooperatives in Paraná linked to the agro-industrial sector are among the largest in the world in terms of revenue, but without losing sight of their social values.

Keywords: Agriculture. Marketing. Harvests.

INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of cooperatives in Brazil dates back to the 17th century. However, it only became a state policy in 1971, following Law 5,764, which defined the National Cooperative Policy. Currently, legal support for national cooperatives can be found in Law 12,690/2012 (BRASIL, 2012). The Brazilian Cooperative Organization System currently has 4,509 affiliated cooperatives, 221 of which are located in the State of Paraná (OCB, 2023). The seven principles that govern cooperatives are: 1) voluntary and free membership, 2) democratic management, 3) economic participation of members, 4) autonomy and independence, 5) education, training, and information, 6) inter cooperation, and 7) interest in the community (SESCOOP, 2022). It can therefore be inferred that they are voluntarily formed by rural producers, aiming at the mutual benefit of their members through joint efforts to sell their products and purchase inputs. An important differentiator is the promotion of training, which is constantly offered, and the attention to ongoing education for the children of producers, with a view to family succession. Their management is joint and democratic, characterizing companies with collective ownership and

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interests, solidified by mutual aid, solidarity, democratic participation, and shared responsibility.

Like capital companies, cooperatives are seeking alternatives for the best development of their strategies, to obtain better economic and financial performance. This approach of companies becomes relevant because, with the increase in competitiveness in the agricultural sector, there is a need for dedication, responsibility, and quality in the development of strategic planning (CAMARGO, 2021).

Cooperativism is a business model that combines income generation, sustainability, and the promotion of social development on a global scale. According to the International Cooperative Alliance, there are more than 3 million cooperatives spread throughout the world, encompassing around 1 billion members, equivalent to more than 12% of the world's population. These collective enterprises employ approximately 280 million people, which corresponds to 10% of the global employed population (COOXUPE, 2024).

COOPERATIVISM IN PARANÁ

To implement the system, the first challenges were overcome with great perseverance; the adaptation of rural producers was challenging at first sight. Habits, climate, and the lack of passable roads were powerful adversaries that deserve to be highlighted but were overcome with observation and wisdom. This culture has always sought to remain preserved and protected among the members of the communities, in the producing regions. There was concern with the structuring of schools, religious and social services, and daily activities in the western, southwestern, and northern regions of Paraná. The structuring of these families in search of the common good gave rise to what can now be defined as successful cooperatives, which have boosted trade and regional development. Investment in technology has been a great ally in overcoming challenges still arising from factors beyond human control, such as the challenges of off-seasons due to the region's specific climate. These challenges have served to strengthen and stimulate the diversification of production, and the organization of family businesses has helped maintain and increase their land areas, always uniting efforts for the benefit of the community.

Over the years of work and challenges, the cooperative system in Paraná has become known nationwide, becoming a reference in the production of soybeans, cotton, corn, milk, pork, and chicken, among others. Advances in the dairy sector attracted investments that solidified themselves in the state economy, attracting more investments and boosting the economy (MORAIS, 2022), with emphasis on productivity in individual dairy production in the Carambeí and Castro regions, and the installation of the largest cheese factory in the country in Marechal

Cândido Rondon.

The regions served by agricultural cooperatives began to stand out for their level of development, with the generation of jobs for residents both directly in the cooperatives and in general commerce, becoming reference centers for agricultural and livestock production. All of this activity encompasses extensive breeding and production in the Campos Gerais region, including the municipalities of Castro, Carambeí, Tibagi, Arapoti, Lapa, and Witmarsum. In the western region of the state, cooperatives stand out in Campo Mourão, Palotina, Medianeira, Maringá, and Cafelândia, with warehouses in several neighboring municipalities.

Specifically about the Cooperatives in the Castro region, it is observed that they are different from the others due to the success they have achieved in their seven-decade trajectory. They are characterized by their entrepreneurship and to maintain the well-being of their members and their families. Its greatest challenge is to maintain a large business structure without neglecting the social objectives of a cooperative. Currently, the Castrolanda cooperative has 1,258 members, and its sales generated revenue equivalent to US\$ 1.2 billion last year. Agricultural production reached a new record with the production of 708 thousand tons of grains (RANGEL, 2024).

In the cooperatives of Paraná, the initial objective of improving the living conditions of producers resulted in economic development, resulting in economic ventures linked to strategic management, innovation, and investments, which are extremely necessary for the sustainability of the organization and also so that the cooperative movement itself can continue to permanently achieve the social and economic development of its members and the community (SUZIM, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted based on visits made in November 2024 to the Castrolanda region and the west of the state, as well as to the Organization of Cooperatives of the State of Paraná, to collect information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Agricultural cooperatives have accounted for 80% of the total revenue of the cooperative system in Paraná over the last five years. The overall gross revenue of cooperatives in Paraná was US\$50 billion, also including the health, credit, transportation, infrastructure, consumption, labor, and goods and services sectors, with 80% coming from agriculture. The financial performance showed that five cooperatives account for almost US\$25 billion, with highlights for

Coamo (US\$8.2 billion), C. Vale (US\$6.1 billion), Lar (US\$5.0 billion), Cocamar (US\$3.2 billion), and Copacol (US\$2.6 billion). In the division by regions, the largest share of revenue comes from the western (41.67%) and northwestern (28.58%) regions. Paraná currently has 62 agricultural cooperatives, 20 in the Center-South, 18 in the Northwest, 12 in the West, 8 in the Southwest, and 4 in the North. Industrialized products correspond to 37% and non-industrialized products to 38% of the revenue. Around 50% of the revenue comes from products of animal origin, 47% from plant origin, and 3% from mineral origin. Agricultural cooperatives in Paraná have more than 215 thousand cooperative producers and 109 thousand employees (RODRIGUES, 2024). In a financial stratification, it is observed that 14 cooperatives in Paraná have annual revenues above US\$ 500.1 million, 15 between US\$ 56.1 million and US\$ 500 million, 12 between US\$ 10.6 million and US\$ 56 million, and 21 cooperatives with annual revenues below US\$ 10.6 million (OCEPAR, 2023).

The regions of Castrolanda and Carambeí have the highest corn and soybean productivity in Brazil, as well as the best dairy, swine, and poultry indexes (USDA, 2024). Milk production in this region reflects the professionalism of the production sector and technical departments, with the development of new technologies resulting from the research center maintained by local cooperatives, enabling the achievement of individual production records (APCBRH, 2023).

The World Cooperative Monitor lists the largest cooperative companies in terms of revenue and number of members and highlights eleven cooperatives from Paraná linked to the agro-industrial sector among the largest in the world (WCM, 2024). The companies that represent Paraná in the rankings are Agrária, Castrolanda, Coamo, Cocamar, Coopavel, Cooperativa Lar, Copacol, C. Vale, Frimesa, Frísia, and Cooperativa Integrada, demonstrating the sector's leading role (AEN, 2023).

The UN General Assembly recognized the transformative impact of cooperativism by proclaiming 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives under the motto “Cooperatives Build a Better World”, an initiative that seeks to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reaffirming the role of cooperatives in promoting social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and economic justice (MANICA, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The cooperatives of Paraná stand out for their strategic investments in sustainable technologies, demonstrating a commitment to the balance between economic growth and environmental preservation.

Cooperativism is an economic and social system in which cooperation is the basis on which economic activities are built. Thus, it consists of the primacy of people in the economy and the cooperation of all to achieve the common good. In the scenario of Brazilian agricultural production, the cooperative movement of Paraná stands out in the regions of Castro, Campo Mourão, Cafelândia, Marechal Rondon, Medianeira, and Palotina, in terms of productivity. This is due to the very well-executed work of the cooperatives, with the entrepreneurial nature that is observed in the state, with the support of research and cooperative credit banks, resulting in greater profitability when compared to non-cooperatives. The cooperatives of Paraná are managed with excellence and receive recognition from producers. They are highly economically viable, reliable, and well-organized associations.

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