

EDITORIAL – The country's agribusiness and science going astray

Special attention has been paid to the topic agribusiness by the CBAB. The reason is simple: it is the chief sector of Brazilian economy and the one that directly reflects the high quality of the agricultural research developed by Brazilian education institutions and research organizations. Until of late, data of the Brazilian agribusiness pictured a sector of superabounding health. All this vigor was topic of the CBAB editorial, issue March 2005. Statistics indeed left no room for doubts. In 2005 Brazil exported US\$ 118.3 billion dollars, of which 36.8% or US\$ 43.6 billion dollars were derived from the agribusiness, repeating the tendency of the previous years. Of the total primary surplus of US\$ 44.7 billion dollars, the agribusiness accounted for US\$ 38.4 billions. But there were already some warning signs that this comfortable situation of the sector was not sustainable. Concern in this sense was expressed in the afore-mentioned editorial. The profit loss of the farmers and the chronic lack of credit assistance and of macro policies for agribusiness were clues of the upcoming breakup of the sector. The green anchor is losing its footing. The most cruel and determinant components of this situation, besides the above-cited, were the plunging international prices of the main commodities and the overrated real in relation to the dollar. The farmers who produced with raw material and utilities they had purchased at high dollar exchange rates were forced to sell their crops at a low dollar price. This situation was discussed in the cited editorial of March 2005 as well.

Presently, the situation of the agribusiness changed from alarming to chaotic. The prices of the main commodities collapsed and the overrated exchange rates smothered the farmers. All the indebted peasants could do, aware of being made victims of a brutal income transference, was to take to protests. The situation in rural regions today is a blend of misery, anxiety and insurgency. The government is doing its part by trying to save our farmers - too late and with innocuous policies. The agribusiness crisis has become so grim that the exportations of the next year are under threat. Encumbered and with no hope for a permanent policy in the sector, many farmers decided to reduce the areas of plantation or actually plant nothing at all. Accordingly, the 2006/07 harvest is expected to be the smallest of the last five years, with an estimated 106 million tons of grain. The nation with its leaders once more turns its back on the most profitable and strategic sector of its economy. We are killing the hen that lays the golden eggs. It is still possible to make up for the missed opportunities, but the importance of having a vigorous agribusiness in the country, a synonym of devises and alimentary security, must sink in. Part of the solution of the ongoing agribusiness crisis would lead along the path of correcting the exchange rates to more realistic levels, to implant a permanent policy for agriculture and create a reliable rural insurance. The challenges are here, to be faced now.

While the utopia of being the granary of the world is not becoming concrete, Brazil may otherwise be proud of being an island of competence in agricultural research. The creativity and talent of Brazilian researchers is undaunted and internationally acknowledged. Even with financial resources and salaries far below needs and dignity, national researchers have not stopped creating novel technologies to boost the agribusiness. The list registers new cultivars and top performance matrices, software systems of production management and clean, biomatter-derived fuel, besides numerous other spin-offs, products of the accumulated knowledge generated in Institutes of education and research. But agricultural research, similarly to the above-described happenings in the agribusiness sector, is not free of erroneous and disastrous interferences. A quick analysis of the area of diffusion of scientific research of which the CBAB is part highlights such meddling. Qualis, the Brazilian ranking index of scientific publications coordinated by the CAPES, announced the adoption of own new classification criteria in the 2005/07 edition. To this end, some international (Agris, CAB, Biosys, ISI) and Brazilian (SciELO) databases were chosen as quality criteria for ranking the journals. The new Qualis decreed for example that journals covered in the ISI databases and with a factor of impact are to be classified as international A (a fair judgment). Journals that are not covered by ISI would have to come up with three indexes (two

international and one national, for instance Agris, CAB and Scielo) to be classified as national A. Inexplicably, the scientific journals were not given time enough to get adjusted. The new criteria were determined at the end of 2005 and became effective in 2006. Consequently, many new journals that are not included in these databases were scaled down. The CBAB for example, indexed in two of the required databases (Agris and CAB, in this case), was downed from national A to B. Curiously, the journals of some institutions whose representatives sit in the committee that voted on and enacted the new criteria were catapulted to top classifications... The fact that the acronym Qualis falsely implies that it ranks the journals according to their scientific quality has serious consequences, once the Qualis classification determines a journal's survival. A journal like the CBAB that was degraded to national B will feel the disregard of researchers that work with CAPES ranking 7 post-graduation courses. Moreover, a national classification B means that it will get extremely difficult, if not impossible to raise funds for publishing the journal. It is time to protest against yet another arbitrariness. The country has to advance and solidify its key sectors. Qualis will need to be looked over to repair any injustice and reestablish the order on the field of divulgation of Brazilian agricultural science.

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