



SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS: SALES DYNAMICS AT THE FAMILY FARMING FAIR IN SÃO LOURENÇO DO SUL, RS (BRAZIL)

**CIRCUITOS CURTOS DE ABASTECIMENTO ALIMENTAR:
DINÂMICA DA COMERCIALIZAÇÃO NA FEIRA DA
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ABSTRACT

Family farming is the predominant agricultural system in São Lourenço do Sul, RS (IBGE, 2019). Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) offer an alternative means of generating employment, income, and access to nutritious food for families historically marginalized by, or opting out of, conventional agribusiness networks. This study therefore investigates the marketing dynamics of the family farming fair in São Lourenço do Sul, RS. Employing a qualitative approach, we conducted twenty-two semi-structured interviews—eleven with stallholders and eleven with consumers. Our findings reveal that the fair serves as a vital venue for trading high-quality, healthy products: for most stallholders, it is the primary source of household income, while consumers value the longstanding relationships they forge there and the reliable access to fresh, nutritious food. Major challenges include the complete absence of infrastructure in the town square where the fair operates and the considerable distances that producers must travel from their rural properties to the market site.

Keywords: agroecology; food production; family farming; labor; income; short food supply chains

RESUMO

A agricultura familiar é o sistema agrícola predominante em São Lourenço do Sul, RS (IBGE, 2019). As Cadeias Curtas de Abastecimento Alimentar (CCAA) oferecem uma alternativa para geração de emprego, renda e acesso a alimentos nutritivos para famílias historicamente marginalizadas ou que optam por se afastar das redes convencionais do agronegócio. Este estudo investiga, portanto, a dinâmica de comercialização da feira de agricultura familiar em São Lourenço do Sul, RS. Adotando uma abordagem qualitativa, realizamos vinte e duas entrevistas semiestruturadas — onze com feirantes e onze com consumidores. Nossos resultados revelam que a feira atua como um espaço vital para a negociação de produtos saudáveis e de alta qualidade: para a maioria dos feirantes, é a principal fonte de renda familiar, enquanto os consumidores valorizam os relacionamentos de longa data ali estabelecidos e o acesso seguro a alimentos frescos e nutritivos. Os principais desafios incluem a completa falta de infraestrutura na praça onde a feira ocorre e as consideráveis distâncias que os produtores precisam percorrer de suas propriedades rurais até o local do evento.

Palavras-chave: agroecologia; produção de alimentos; agricultura familiar; trabalho; renda; cadeias curtas de abastecimento alimentar.

1. INTRODUCTION

An old proverb suggests that farmers will not consume what they do not know, a notion that gains renewed relevance amid today's debates on food production and consumption. Schneider and Gazolla (2017) argue that, in conventional markets, consumers have grown increasingly disconnected from producers—not only in geographic and logistical terms, but also in their understanding of local crop varieties and seasonal cycles.

It is a relatively recent phenomenon that has taken on global proportions. A good example of this is the production of livestock commodities in exponential quantities on a large scale in the interior of the southern states of the country, which are exported to different continents around the world (Medeiros, Bender Filho, 2019).

In contrast to this established conventional agri-food system, alternative possibilities have been emerging and developing in recent decades, especially those related to sustainable production systems and to food-related political activism by consumers (Schubert and Portilho, 2023). Short Food Supply Chains have stood out by prioritizing both organic and agroecological production, as well as the social construction of close relationships between producers and consumers, consequently contributing to regional development (Rover and Darolt, 2021).



In this regard, the family farming segment plays a strategic role in these alternative forms of food marketing, especially from the perspective of meeting local demands and offering fresh, in natura products rooted in the food culture of their regions (Portilho, 2005; Poulain, 2013; Schneider & Gazolla, 2017; Andreatta, Bueno Camara, & Balk Brandão, 2023).

Additionally, family farming embodies knowledge, experiences, and expertise in production methods, which, through interaction with consumers during the marketing process, materialize into relationships of trust (Rover & Darold, 2021). In these terms, family farming can be considered a strategic segment for local and regional development, positioning itself both as a key player in generating income and employment and as a supplier of healthy food (Schneider & Gazolla, 2017).

In the city of São Lourenço do Sul, located in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, family farming represents 86.6% of rural establishments — that is, 3,334 family units out of a total of 3,850 (IBGE, 2019). This significant presence is the result of the historical process of territorial occupation, which was primarily driven by European immigrants and resilient quilombola communities that survived the period of slavery in the region (Kovalski, 2011).

Furthermore, the municipality has an urban population of approximately 25,000 people, according to the 2010 IBGE Demographic Census, which represents an attractive local market for the commercialization of products from Lourencian family farming.

The Family Farming Fair, which takes place in the city's Central Square, is fifty years old and currently serves as the main direct sales channel. Therefore, the guiding question of this study is: *What are the commercialization dynamics at the family farming fair in São Lourenço do Sul, RS?* Consequently, the following objective was established: to analyze the marketing dynamics at the family farming fair in São Lourenço do Sul, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Regarding its structure, this article is organized into four additional sections beyond these introductory notes. The first section discusses the theoretical aspects that support the proposed theme and presents the main characteristics of family farming in São Lourenço do Sul (Rio Grande do Sul). The second section describes the methodological procedures that guided the achievement of the objectives. The third section analyzes and discusses the field research results. Finally, the fourth section provides final considerations and suggestions for conducting further studies from different epistemological perspectives.



2. FAMILY FARMING AND SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS (SFSC)

This section presents the theoretical foundations that underpin this study. It is organized into two parts: the first part discusses key aspects of Short Food Supply Chains, while the second part outlines the main characteristics of family farming in São Lourenço do Sul (RS) the setting of this research.

2.1 CONSIDERATIONS ON SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS

As Schneider and Gazolla (2017) point out, there is a profound problem in the way contemporary society produces and consumes food. The choice to start this section with the above statement results from a long period of reflective maturation regarding the direction of the agri-food scenario at the country level and also at the international level.

This is because conventional markets are taking great strides towards specialization, scaling of production factors, imposition of processed and ultra-processed products and annulment of any possibility of a relationship between producers and consumers (Schneider and Gazolla, 2017; Rover and Darolt, 2021).

Furthermore, the “long commercialization chains” contribute to the marginalization and productive exclusion of family farmers, especially those with smaller land areas and limited productive capacity (Troain, Aguirre, Oliveira, 2023; Fossá et al. 2023; Renting et al., 2012).

According to Schneider, Thomé da Cruz, and Matte (2016), it is necessary to develop solutions and alternatives that promote more sustainable and ecological agricultural practices, while simultaneously facilitating and reducing the cost of access to healthy foods. These outcomes can be achieved through shorter and more efficient food distribution channels.

It highlights the emergence of new relationships between rural and urban areas, emphasizing that these innovations are validated by social movements and civil society organizations from a consumption perspective (Wilkinson, 2023).

Nevertheless, food production and access remain embedded in an environment of profound contradictions, which compels us to rethink sustainable strategies aimed at democratizing and expanding markets, especially for minimally processed, organic, and agroecological products (Poulain, 2013).



Consumers' growing concern for food quality has coincided with the rise of alternative food marketing systems—Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs)—which began in Europe and have recently gained traction in Brazil. SFSCs challenge the conventional “long chains” by promoting new social models of food distribution and have become a prominent topic in academic discussions (Renting, Marsden, and Banks, 2017). National literature shows no single agreed definition for SFSCs, with divergent terminology across studies. For example, Rover and Darolt (2021) opt for “Short Commercialization Circuits” rather than “chains,” highlighting the cyclical, exchange-based nature of these local marketing trajectories.

The concept of Short Food Supply Circuits adopted in this study is based on the contributions of Rover and Darolt (2021), Renting, Marsden, and Banks (2017), and Schneider and Gazolla (2017).

Moreover, Short Food Supply Circuits (SFSCs) are defined as circuits in which food is traced to and identified with a specific producer, with no or minimal intermediaries between farmer and consumer. This arrangement fosters relationships that enable consumers to form judgments, values, and consumption preferences based on their personal experiences and exchanges of knowledge (Balestro, 2017).

One key characteristic of SFSCs is face-to-face interaction, which builds relationships of trust, proximity, and symbolism between consumers and producers (Balestro, 2017; Rover & Darolt, 2021). Such interactions occur via direct sales—at farmers' markets, on-farm outlets, or through home-delivered baskets—as well as on digital platforms engineered to replicate these exchanges, and other innovative channels born from evolving social practices (Schneider & Gazolla, 2017).

Renting, Marsden, and Banks (2017) argue that Short Food Supply Chains are characterized by three interrelated dimensions. First, they hinge on face-to-face interactions—most commonly through direct sales at farmers' markets or on-farm outlets—which foster personal connections between producers and consumers. Second, they operate within a “narrow” institutional scope, relying on local structures such as cooperatives or formal partnerships to coordinate marketing and distribution. Third, they extend into a “broader” reach by leveraging certification labels, adherence to recognized production standards, and the cultivation of reputational capital, all of which reinforce consumer trust and signal product authenticity.

Rover and Darolt (2021) further characterize SFSCs by highlighting their focus on clear product origin information, self-managed cooperative networks, and market localization tied to local seasons and traditions. They emphasize high standards of freshness, flavor, and safety, the preservation of traditional values and solidarity, fair pricing that rewards family labor, diversified organic practices, and maintaining a small-scale yet growth-oriented structure.

Since its formal definition under Federal Law No. 11,326 of 2006, Brazilian family farming has been recognized as a cornerstone of sustainable production and as a guarantor of access to healthy, certified foods (Conterato & Vasconcellos, 2020). Fossá et al. (2023) further demonstrate the strong alignment between the family farming sector, organic and agroecological practices, and marketing strategies based on Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs).

Brazilian family farming, institutionalized in legal terms from Federal Law no. 11,326 of 2006, is positioned as a fundamental category in terms of significant contributions to sustainable production, and, in terms of Conterato and Vasconcellos (2020) the guarantee of access to recognized healthy foods. For Fossá et al. (2023), there is congruence and numerous connections between the family farming segment, organic and agroecological production and marketing strategies via Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs).

Altieri (2000) and Caporal (2009) argue that these linkages arise from diversified production, sustainable soil management, careful stewardship of water resources, and the provision of healthy, nutritious foods at fair prices, all supported by continual exchanges of knowledge and experience and by close relationships between producers and consumers.

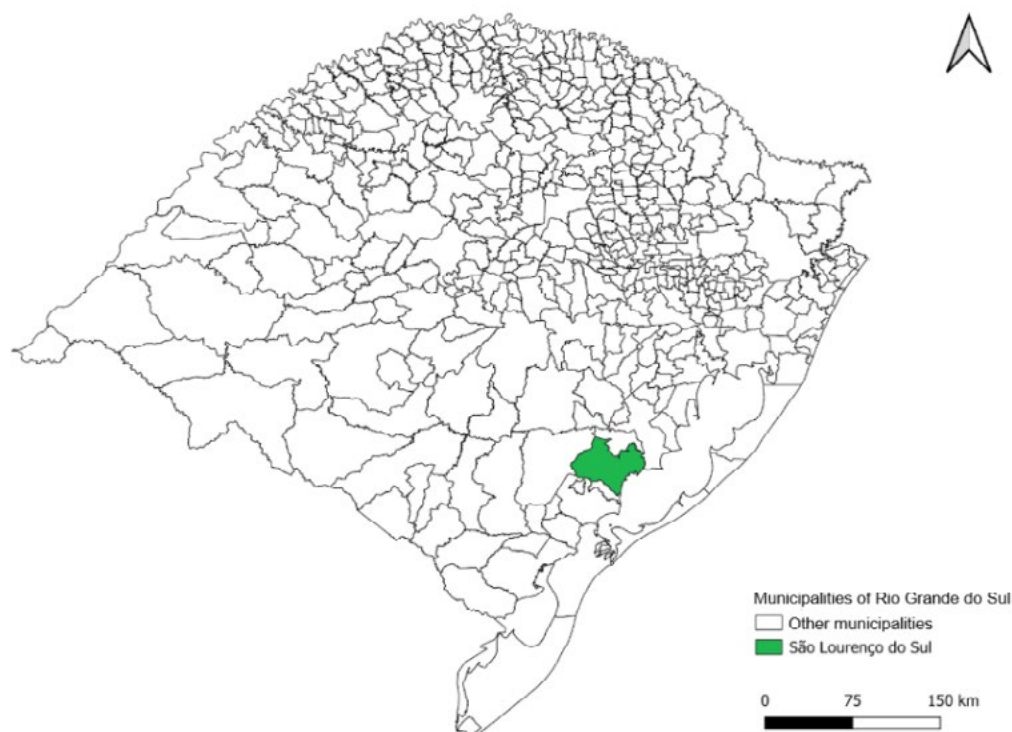
Building on this framework, Rover and Darolt (2021) describe multiple forms of short marketing circuits—especially those rooted in sustainable production systems. More recently, Maciel, Troian, and Oliveira (2024) have shown that agroecological practices not only create socioeconomic opportunities that bolster family livelihoods but also trigger dynamic processes that foster broader development.

2.1 CHARACTERIZATION OF FAMILY FARMING IN SÃO LOURENÇO DO SUL, RS (BRAZIL)

Family farming constitutes the primary agricultural sector in São Lourenço do Sul and plays a crucial socioeconomic role in its rural areas. According to the 2010 Population Census (IBGE, 2010), 18,874 of the municipality's 43,111 residents (43.8 %) lived in rural areas.¹

The historical development of family farming in São Lourenço do Sul reflects the predominance of settlers of Pomeranian and German descent², alongside quilombola communities—whose origins trace back to the enslavement that took place in the municipality and throughout southern Rio Grande do Sul (Kovalski, 2011).

Figure 1 | Location of the municipality of São Lourenço do Sul, RS



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

1 Municipal data on the rural population were unavailable until the final version of this article.

2 The Pomeranians, an ancient Slavic people, were gradually Germanized over the centuries (Hammes, 2010).

According to the 2017 Agricultural Census, of the 3,850 rural establishments surveyed, 3,334 (86.6 %) qualify as “family farms” under Federal Law No. 11,326/2006 (IBGE, 2017). This share exceeds both the state and national averages, which stood at 80.5 % in Rio Grande do Sul and 76.8 % for Brazil as a whole in that year.

Based on the 2017 Agricultural Census (IBGE, 2017), 3,172 family farms in São Lourenço do Sul—95.1 % of the total—occupy up to 50 ha. Of these, 643 establishments (19.3 %) are no larger than 10 ha, and 1,110 (30.3 %) measure between 10 ha and 20 ha. Outside this group, 158 family farms exceed 50 ha, and four report no land area (IBGE, 2017).

According to the 2017 Agricultural Census (IBGE, 2017), family farming accounts for 10,777 of the 13,034 agricultural jobs in São Lourenço do Sul—82.7 % of the total. By gender, men occupy 55.8 % of these positions (6,018) and women 44.2 % (4,759). The female share in rural family-farm jobs in São Lourenço do Sul (44.2 %) exceeds both the state average for Rio Grande do Sul (38.1 %) and the national average (32.8 %) for that year.

Adjusted to 2023 reais, total agricultural output from family farms in São Lourenço do Sul reached R\$ 317.6 million in 2017, representing 55.2 % of the municipality’s R\$ 575.0 million total (IBGE, 2017). Of this family-farm production, crop output accounted for R\$ 270.0 million (85.0 %), while livestock production amounted to R\$ 47.6 million (15.0 %).

Despite the importance of family farming in São Lourenço do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, the 2017 Agricultural Census reports that only 29 family-run rural establishments—just 0.9 percent of the total—are certified organic producers (IBGE, 2017). Moreover, the 2024 National Register of Organic Producers lists merely 24 registered operations and does not specify whether any are family farms (Brazil, 2024).

The data underscore the social, economic, and cultural significance of family farming in São Lourenço do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, while also highlighting the challenges of adopting sustainable production methods—such as organic and agroecological practices. Family farmers, however, can leverage Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) to access markets more directly, thereby creating vital opportunities for income generation and employment.



METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative approach. As Flick (2009) argues, qualitative methods privilege participants' perspectives, their diversity, and reflexivity. This approach seeks to understand individuals' meanings and experiences under real-life conditions (Yin 2016). By doing so, it broadens scientific inquiry into social phenomena and, as Stake (2015) notes, is inherently interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic.

Accordingly, qualitative research centers on grasping social issues from participants' viewpoints to illuminate social reality (Köche 2015). Marconi (2021) further emphasizes that all perspectives are valuable and should be considered, necessitating direct and sustained engagement with both the research context and its social actors—as implemented in the present study.

The research began with a bibliographic review following Michel (2015), surveying the most influential works and recent studies pertinent to the topic. From this body of literature, materials were selected, critically read, and synthesized into the present text (Michel 2015).

The study's locus and its delimitation encompass the municipality of São Lourenço do Sul, situated in the southern region of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil (see Figure 1). Accordingly, the research is framed as a case study—a methodological approach that facilitates an in-depth examination of one or a few entities, thereby enabling a comprehensive and detailed analysis (Yin, 2015; Stake, 2015).

Following Marconi (2021), data collection was designed to integrate multiple information sources through semi-structured interviews with both farmers and consumers in São Lourenço do Sul, RS, alongside systematic entries in a field diary. Between June and September 2024, interviews were conducted on-site at farmers' rural properties and with consumers at the weekly fair in Dedê Serpa Central Square. The interview guide was crafted by thematically organizing all aspects of the research object into coherent topics, which in turn provided a logical sequence to the conversations and ensured that each exchange remained focused on the study's core issues.

Before each interview, participants were presented with the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE), which was read aloud to them; they then provided their signatures and authorized the exclusive use of their images for academic and scientific purposes. Following consent, each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed, categorized, and analyzed.



In total, eleven stallholders—out of a possible twenty-one—were interviewed, alongside eleven consumers. The number of stallholders included was determined by the principle of saturation, whereby data collection continued until additional interviews no longer yielded new insights or considerations relevant to the research topic (Falqueto, Hoffmann & Farias, 2018).

Interviewing a small number of consumers was the strategy chosen for it is a qualitative research, providing a broad and detailed understanding of the respondents' behavior and perceptions. Qualitative research does not seek to quantitatively represent a population, but rather to explore and describe behaviors, attitudes and motivations (Marconi, 2021).

A smaller number of participants is appropriate, since the main goal is a deep understanding rather than generalization. In other words, interviews with a few consumers yielded richer and more detailed insights than mass interviews, where each person has less time. This depth of detail helped clarify the behavioral nuances essential to the research. Furthermore, with fewer respondents, the environment can be more welcoming and personal, fostering trust and transparency. This, in turn, encourages consumers to share honest, detailed information, thereby enriching data quality (Marconi, 2021).

Finally, in exploratory or initial studies, it is common to adopt smaller samples to identify trends, hypotheses and emerging themes. These initial interviews can be the basis for subsequent studies with a larger sample, if necessary. These points demonstrate how a small group of respondents can be strategic and provide valuable data for a broad analysis, especially in studies focused on qualitative insights (Marconi, 2021)

To ensure participant anonymity, stallholders are identified by letters (e.g. "A", "B") and consumers by numbers (e.g. "1", "2"). The research findings were then analyzed using Yin's (2015) triangulation method—combining data from interviews, photographic interventions, and field diary entries—and processed according to Bardin's (2016) content analysis framework, which comprises pre-analysis, material exploration, and result treatment.

This analysis explored convergences, contradictions, and divergences in participants' narratives to move from their literal discourse to its deeper meanings. Finally, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the study's focus, the emergent analytical categories were articulated and integrated

RESULTS PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The results section integrates insights from both family farmers and participating consumers. It begins with a general characterization of the research subjects and then proceeds to examine the analytical categories that emerged from the fieldwork.

The presentation of the results will consider and integrate the findings from the field research with both family farmers and participating consumers. We will begin with a general characterization of the research subjects, followed by an analysis of the identified analytical categories.

The rural establishments of the interviewed stallholders are located across eight different communities in the countryside of São Lourenço do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul. Their farm sizes ranged from 0.5 ha to 36.0 ha, with a mean of 14.6 ha—placing them all within the “up to 50 ha” category identified as predominant in the municipality by the 2017 Agricultural Census (IBGE, 2019).

All respondents own their land and have lived on it for decades: Respondent “F” reported a tenure of 24 years, while Respondent “I” noted that his family has occupied the same property for over a century, now into its third generation. Overall, the average length of residence among the eleven interviewees was 50.6 years.

Regarding family composition, household size ranged from one to five members, most commonly comprising a couple and, in some cases, parents and/or children. Field data also revealed signs of aging among stallholders: 36.4 percent of interviewees were over 60 years old, and when those aged 50 and above are included, the figure rises to 54.5 percent.

The number of people engaged in productive activities appeared even more limited, with most work carried out by adults or seniors. Respondent “G” noted that although other relatives live on the farm, only she and her daughter participate in production and sales. The various labor-organization models adopted by these families also warrant attention. Respondent “A,” who manages the rural property alone, explained that during harvest periods he hires additional workers to assist. Likewise, Respondent “D” shared that his wife helps primarily on Saturdays and whenever she is off work.

Respondent “K” reported a clear division of labor within his family, explaining that the men handled all on-farm activities while his mother, who suffered from a knee ailment, took care of domestic chores. Only four stallholder families—36.4% of those interviewed—indicated that they practiced organic or



agroecological agriculture; nonetheless, several conventional producers described a cautious, limited use of agrochemicals. Respondent “D”, for example, explained that he avoided pesticides whenever possible but acknowledged their necessity to control fungal outbreaks in his strawberry crops.

The primary motivation for embracing agroecological production stems from health concerns rooted in prior conventional-model experiences. Respondent “C” explained that he had grown weary of illnesses brought on by “poison” exposure and had lived amid constant chemical drift. Similarly, Respondent “H” emphasized that health considerations were paramount, and Respondent “K” recalled that his father, who applied pesticides even wearing flip-flops, eventually developed severe heartburn, insomnia, anxiety, and palpitations—symptoms physicians could not otherwise explain despite clear evidence of agrochemical exposure.

In continuation, the group of stallholders interviewed demonstrated a remarkably diverse production: some specialize in baked goods, medicinal herbs, and flowers, while others focus on agricultural output—including vegetables, tubers, and fruits—and even raise poultry such as chickens and geese for sale. Despite inevitable seasonal fluctuations in supply, the principal products marketed at the fair comprised lettuce, sweet potatoes, potatoes, beets, broccoli, carrots, beans, cassava, green corn, peppers, cabbage, arugula, and tomatoes. This breadth of offerings not only highlights the adaptability of family farms but also underscores the fair’s role in providing consumers with a wide array of fresh, locally produced foods.

When asked about alternative sales channels beyond the fair, five of the eleven respondents reported using other strategies. Respondent “G” indicated that they sometimes sell produce at the university and, in summer, at Lagoa dos Patos beach. Respondents “A” and “D” described leveraging delivery routes they’ve built over the years to serve both individual customers and restaurants. Respondent “A” explained that after market days they return home in the evening to fulfill deliveries for several regular clients, while Respondent “D” noted that, besides trading at the fair, they make weekday restaurant deliveries and that their father also distributes fruit to rural communities.

One of the primary challenges identified among market traders was their internal organization. Respondent “A” observed that stallholders must unite, since when each person follows their own approach, collective progress stalls.

Infrastructure also emerged as a significant challenge, since the fair takes place in the city's central square without any shelter, leaving vendors exposed to rain and extreme heat. Respondent "G" explained that setting up a tent on rainy days is particularly difficult, while Respondent "D" noted that having to rise early to pitch a tent and contend with wind and rain compounds the hardship.

The third set of challenges concerned distance and road conditions in rural areas. São Lourenço do Sul covers a vast territory divided into districts, and its downtown district (to the east) lies far from many farming communities. Respondent F noted that traveling more than 50 kilometers every Saturday morning presents a major hardship. Similarly, Respondents B and J both cited unpaved sections: B emphasized an eight-kilometer dirt stretch, while J explained that a seven-kilometer segment becomes especially treacherous when it rains.

Participants also raised concerns about both productive capacity and compliance with health regulations. Respondent I explained that health-inspection rules particularly restrict egg sales and that stallholders frequently face opposition from inspectors, leading to numerous conflicts. Additionally, several interviewees noted infrastructural shortcomings at the fair venue—limited access to electricity and internet, and the absence of adequate restroom and hand-washing facilities within the aging, poorly maintained structure in the town square.

Respondents were then asked about their access to rural credit, particularly through the National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (PRONAF). Only five of the eleven affirmed having obtained such financing: four under the "Mais Alimentos" subprogram to purchase vehicles for food transport, and one via the Agroindustrialization subprogram. This limited uptake underscores the lack of coordination among public policies, despite the potential for credit to enhance viability and expand production capacity. Fossá et al. (2024), in a study conducted in a municipality in southern Rio Grande do Sul, documented a sharp decline in the number of PRONAF contracts and showed that most resources are now being directed toward large-scale agribusiness crops.

In this economic-financial context, ten of the eleven respondents (90.9 %) indicated that fair sales constitute their family's main source of income. For four participants, it is the sole income, while the others supplement it with one or more family members' retirement benefits. Respondent "I" observed that, despite being retired, the fair remains essential to their livelihood. Similarly, Respondent "J" explained



that although both spouses receive retirement pensions, income from the fair is their primary support—enough even to fund their granddaughter's college education.

When it comes to interaction with consumers and the construction of relationships of trust and exchange — one of the defining characteristics of Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) — the stallholders' reports clearly express the existence of connections and bonds between themselves and their customers. Respondent A mentioned that clients often behave like family members, greeting them with hugs. In addition, Respondent D highlighted the sense of attachment by stating that some customers have been buying from them for many years, and their absence at the fair is felt with longing.

Interviewee 1 emphasized the importance of these relationships in sustaining their marketing activities at the fair, noting that continuing to sell is driven by the friendships and conversations developed there. Furthermore, Interviewee K pointed out that the motivation goes beyond financial aspects, highlighting the value of conviviality and explaining that some clients have even been invited to their home.

As noted in the Methodology section, we interviewed 11 consumers: seven (63.6%) were female and four (36.4%) male. In terms of age, 54.5% fell between 34 and 45 years, 9.1% between 46 and 57, and 18.2% each in the 58–69 and 70–81 brackets. Educational attainment was distributed as follows: 9.1% had not completed secondary school, 63.6% had a secondary diploma, 18.2% had some tertiary education without a degree, and 9.1% held a university degree. Reported monthly family income ranged from one to eight times the national minimum wage, with the most common bracket being two minimum wages (36.4%, $n = 4$).

When asked how long they have been attending the fair, most consumers reported a long-standing connection and involvement with this commercial space in the municipality of São Lourenço do Sul. Responses ranged from 2 to 50 years of attendance, indicating that purchasing food at the fair is a tradition deeply embedded in their daily lives. Moreover, attendance appears to be quite regular, as most consumers interviewed stated that they visit the fair every Saturday, the day it is held.

This behavior is exemplified by one respondent who reported attending for over 10 years and going every Saturday, and by another who shared that they accompany their mother, who enjoys buying groceries there.

When asked what motivated them to shop at the family farming fair in São Lourenço do Sul, respondents' answers correspond closely with the Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC) frameworks of Rover and Darolt (2021), Renting, Marsden, and Banks (2017), and Schneider and Gazolla (2017). Respondent 2 singled out product freshness as the key factor, while Respondents 7, 8, and 11 all pointed to product quality as their main incentive for attending the fair.

Interviewee No. 1 stressed the friendly relationship with the vendor family, noting that friendship, agroecological products, and the pleasure of social interaction were decisive factors. This view was echoed by Interviewee No. 5, who highlighted the fair's welcoming atmosphere and the chance to connect with others as primary reasons for attending.

Interviewee 3 noted that price plays a crucial role, emphasizing a strong cost-benefit relationship. They observed that it's often possible to find more affordable products, so today consumers seek both quality and value. When we asked about monthly expenditures at the fair, respondents reported an average of around BRL 275.00, with individual amounts ranging from BRL 50.00 to BRL 500.00. This spending pattern reflects the fair's dynamic: a diverse array of products and a steady supply of fresh, especially organic and agroecological, foods.

In this context, the wide range of products these consumers purchase reflects the diverse productive capacities of the farming families who market them. Interviewees most frequently mentioned items such as various vegetables (lettuce, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, potatoes), staples (corn flour, beans, peanuts), baked goods (wheat bread, cornbread, cakes), dairy and fats (butter, bacon, colonial chicken, goose), and other specialties (ambrosia, cuca, fruit jams, mustards, nuts, eggs, juices, and wines).

Regarding the demand for other products that are currently not offered, there was no clear indication from consumers on this matter, even though they were encouraged to reflect on the issue during the interviews. The only demands mentioned referred to organic soy and a greater variety of fruits, especially bananas, along with general suggestions about increasing diversity. This perspective can be exemplified by Respondent 01, who expressed that greater diversity in products would lead to greater satisfaction.

Regarding the preference for organic and agroecological products, most consumers expressed indifference toward the production methods and/or the origin of the food. This attitude may naturally be

linked to relationships of trust and proximity with the families of the market farmers. Those who prioritized these aspects directly associated them with health and quality of life, aligning with the perspective of an environmentally conscious consumer who takes responsibility for their choices (Portilho, 2005).

Finally, the results presented and discussed in this section shed light on and contribute to understanding the topic, while also being connected to the perspective of regional development. This is because local studies and research on Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) reveal new dynamics and strategies for the functioning of local markets.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The family farming fair in São Lourenço do Sul, in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, stands at the heart of the municipality's agricultural identity. For fifty years, this gathering of small-scale producers has been the principal marketplace where families bring the fruits of their labor directly to the community.

Yet, despite its longevity and central role in the local rural economy, the fair remains hamstrung by a chronic lack of basic infrastructure. Stalls are exposed to the elements, electricity is intermittent or absent, internet access is nonexistent, and restroom facilities are simply not provided. These shortcomings not only diminish the fair's appeal to shoppers but also impose logistical strains on the farmers, who must transport and display perishable goods under suboptimal conditions.

Compounding these structural deficiencies is the sheer distance that many families must traverse to reach the city center. Winding rural roads, often unpaved and poorly maintained, can turn a short journey into an arduous expedition. Producers frequently face delays and higher transportation costs—barriers that erode already thin profit margins. Interviews conducted with fair participants revealed a unanimous call for improvements in road quality: better drainage, paving, and regular maintenance would not only ease the physical burden on farmers but also encourage more frequent and reliable market attendance.

Despite these obstacles, the fair remains the cornerstone of income for participating families. Its importance cannot be overstated: without the direct sales outlet provided by the fair, many households would lose their primary source of revenue. Beyond pure economics, the fair fosters



social bonds and community cohesion. Consumers and producers meet face to face, exchanging not only goods but stories, recipes, and local traditions. This intimate interaction builds trust and affirms the social value of small-scale, family-run agriculture.

Yet the fair's sustainability hinges on consumer demand—and here too there is room for growth. Regular patrons appreciate the freshness and authenticity of the products on offer, but surveys show they would welcome a broader array of choices. Shoppers expressed concerns over pricing, noting that while they value quality, they also compare costs with supermarkets and other retailers. Furthermore, a limited variety of vegetables, fruits, and artisanal goods can lead to stagnation: buyers who visit weekly may find themselves purchasing the same handful of items, which can dampen enthusiasm over time. Expanding the roster of vendors, diversifying crop varieties, and encouraging small-scale processing—such as preserves, cheeses, and baked goods—could invigorate interest and draw new customers.

To realize this potential, the fair must enter the municipal public agenda as a strategic priority for rural development. Investment in a covered pavilion, reliable utilities, sanitation facilities, and digital connectivity would create a more hospitable environment for both sellers and buyers. Collaboration between the city's agriculture, tourism, and economic development departments could yield promotional campaigns, technical assistance programs, and logistical support. Engaging local civil society—community associations, schools, and cultural groups—in fair-related events could further strengthen public ownership and visibility.

Looking ahead, several issues remain unanswered and ripe for future inquiry: the level of commitment the municipal government can offer to rectify the infrastructural void at the fairgrounds; the innovative marketing approaches producers might adopt to reach new segments of the population; and the ways in which local residents and organizations can play a more active role in sustaining and celebrating this cultural and economic landmark.

By exploring these questions through diverse methodological lenses, subsequent studies can deepen our understanding of how short food supply chains function in rural Brazil and how they might be optimized to promote economic, social, and environmental well-being. In doing so, researchers and policymakers alike can help ensure that the family farming fair of São Lourenço do Sul thrives for another half-century and beyond.

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