

**FOURTH EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON EUROPEAN FARMING AND RURAL SYSTEMS
RESEARCH AND EXTENSION INTO THE NEXT MILLENNIUM**

Workshop 4. The resilience of small scale farming systems in Europe in the context of globalization

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“The family forms of production in agriculture, characteristics and persistence in a local context, the case of Buenos Aires, Argentina”

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This paper examines the impact of global economy in Argentine agricultural complex. The author is interested in the changes which occur at the level of family forms of production in the Pampa region. First, the article presents an historical perspective of the development of agriculture in the Pampa region by describing social, political and economic processes leading to the origin and development of family farms. Next, focusing on economic adjustments affecting the global economy in the last decade, the author examines its impact in the agricultural sector and the new series of regulations and policies by the governments in turn. The following section characterizes and describes the emergence of new social actors. The author concludes by examining exactly which farmers are surviving the changes brought about by globalization and why.

“The family forms of production in agriculture, characteristics and persistence in a local context . The case of Buenos Aires, Argentina”

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1. Introduction

In a number of countries of the European Union, as well as in Canada and United States, 'family farms' have constituted the dominant form of production in agriculture. Throughout the years this form of production has played a significant role in the production of food for internal consumption and for international trade.

For those of us who observe family farms from a Latin American perspective, the 'family farm' is considered to be a *natural or given* component of those societies. However, we know that the foundation or development of certain forms of production in concrete societies has been the result of diverse historical processes that conform to and transform them.

Although in certain societies the historical dominion of family farms makes them appear as a 'naturally' occurring entity, we should not forget that this particular form of production constitutes a social situation and as such does not constitute an absolute historical necessity (B. Jean and O. Stanek, 1987).

In the Argentine case, and more specifically in the Pampas region¹, 'large ranches' and 'large properties' have been the historically dominant forms of production in agriculture. Although the Colonization Law (1876) aimed to promote the establishment of family farms² throughout the greater part of the region, this political project failed due to the political power of large land-owners in the area.³

In the smaller remaining sections of land left dispersed among and between these large ranches and parcels, small agricultural colonies were being established, either as a result of State or private initiatives, or by the companies involved in the construction of the railway. As Gaignard (1989) discusses, by 1884 all of the profitable land of the Pampa region had already been claimed or possessed and the thousands of immigrants who arrived with the idea of owning and working their own small piece of property had to choose among other alternative sources of work, at times transforming themselves in "tenants" and "sharecroppers".

In sum, the family form of production in Pampas agriculture has slowly developed in the interstitial spaces settled during colonization, on portions of land which were purchased by immigrants who entered the country with enough capital or by those who have accumulated enough capital through other activities, and in the cases of those who cannot afford to purchase their own land, through lease or sharing agreements with larger land owners.⁴

In this paper, my objective is to describe the heterogeneity of situations which family farms presently experience. These situations, as well as certain features or characteristics of individual farmers, have contributed to the survival or persistence of family farms in the complex globalized context.

In order to achieve this objective and according to the theoretical and methodological conceptualization outlined in the third part of the paper we will briefly describe the global transformations and their consequences at the local level. Next, we will describe the diversity of situations which agrarian family farms find themselves in the local context, and will examine those family farms which have persisted in the actual socio-economic context.

We believe that the analysis of the characteristics of the family form of production in the context of globalization and that of the Pampa agriculture, which is characterized by an unregulated market, non-protectionist policies, a lack of subsidies and adequate financial support for the agricultural activity, is of primary interest to the scholars of this form of production.

2. Global Transformations and Local Consequences.

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¹The Pampa region consists of the province of Buenos Aires, the south part of Córdoba, the south part of Santa Fe, the south part of Entre Ríos and the east part La Pampa provinces. It has 55 million hectares where three zones are defined according to their productivity: the agricultural zone (north of Buenos Aires, south of Santa Fe and Southeast of Córdoba with 7,5 million hectares); the livestock zone (the valley of the Salado River in the center and east of the province of Buenos Aires with 9,5 million hectares) and an agriculture-livestock or 'mixed' zone of 38 million hectares (INTA). Fieldwork for this research was carried out in the center of the province of Buenos Aires, in a livestock and mixed zone of production.

²The minimum size of a colony was 40,000 hectares. The minimum lot was of 50 has, and it was necessary to have at least 140 families settled during the first two years.

³Larger extensions of land given by the Enfitéusis system are deferred in property. The territories seized from the aboriginal people were not granted in correspondence to the established laws. The result was that 10,869,000 hectares granted to new owners between 1881 and 1884 were divided between 344 owners with land extensions ranging from 10,791 hectares to 162,368 hectares. The average land size was 31,596 hectares (Gaignard 1989).

⁴See Villafaña A. 1995, 1996

The situation I wish to analyze cannot be understood without including it within the context of the processes that characterize the different stages of development of global capitalism and its corresponding regime of accumulation of capital. These processes have produced transformations in local societies and marked regional inequity. The end result has been the marginalization and segmentation of geographical spaces and social sectors of society.

The Pampa agricultural sector originally participated in the world market by supplying countries in the process of industrialization with raw materials and food. This activity produced a series of social changes. First, it redefined the relationships between indigenous and white people in the struggle for space and livestock. Second, it modified forms of labour. Third, because of the necessities of new activities, it imposed new technologies, techniques and specialized skills and knowledge on the 'labour force'. In order to respond to these new requirements, the immigration of groups of European origin who were considered to possess necessary qualities was promoted. Through the establishment of an appropriately tailored immigration policy, there was an attempt to encourage the entry of migrants to 'Europeanize' the native population and promote "modern" agriculture.

During the 1930s the agricultural commodities export model in Argentina went into crisis and lost its standing in the international market.

At the international level, particularly after the second world war, the aggressive export model policy of both the United States and later of the European Economic Union, today the European Union, began to displace countries such as Argentina from their previously held positions in the international market.

Nowadays, the food commodities new world order has emerged much as a result of global mechanisms and institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and GATT, all of which played an important role in the restructuring of post-war economic systems (McMichael y Mhyre 1991).

In the case of Latin America these transformations have had extreme consequences, largely due to the imposition on part of the international agencies, which have obliged Latin American governments to implement a series of economic adjustment policies in order to pay the external debt and thus guarantee a steady flow of funds to these countries to the North.

The economic policies which Argentina implemented after the hyperinflationary period in 1989 and 1990 deepened the extent of economic adjustment, which in turn stimulated the entry of foreign capital, which flowed into strategic sectors such as agro-food industries, but without any special authorization or control by government branches or sectors. There are also no restrictions on the transfer of capital from the country.

These new economic policies also meant the withdrawal of the state from its essential functions in society at the economic as well as at the social level. The state began to desist from its role of redistributing revenues, allowing an increasing autonomy of market forces. In addition public corporations were privatized and user fees skyrocketed; modifications in the labour market created insecure employment and increased unemployment and underemployment; and there was a polarization and decrease of income in many sectors of the population, with an accompanying increasing poverty due to the "falling out" of the middle class sectors, the so-called 'new poor'.

The following has occurred in the agricultural sector:

- In the international market, the process of the "*...deterioration of the relations of exchange between primary and elaborated products*" has been deepened as much by the protectionist policies of developed countries⁵ as by the appearance of new products which replace agricultural raw materials due to technological change (Lattuada and Renold 1999).
- Modifications in internal food market demands. There is now a sector with large buying power that consumes processed products with larger aggregated value. The market now offers an array of products such as frozen fruits and vegetables, frozen meals and snacks, and a significant amount of foreign capital is being invested in the production of these types of foodstuffs (Ghezán and Mateos 1999). The low income sectors of the population have to limit their consumption to bread, pasta and cereals, meat, particularly more inexpensive cuts beef, and potatoes (Ghezán and Mateos 1999).
- Related to the aforementioned, and in the context of industrialized agricultural production in which the greatest profit potential lies in special processed products, "*...the producers who participate only in the primary production, constitute the sector of the chain that has the lowest level of participation in the creation of the final value of the product*" (Lattuada and Renold 1999).
- The development and expansion of transnational supermarkets which impose their own norms of commercialization and pricing on all products. This situation is especially evident in the meat production sector, where the producer is forced to adjust their product to supply a particular requested product. This situation is aggravated if the farmer does not or can not produce that particular kind of meat, resulting in the decreasing prices and return for his product.

⁵The protectionist policies of OECD associates particularly affect traditional Argentine export products, where "...subsidies represent no less than 160% of the income of the producer at international prices..." (Llach, La Nación 19-9-99).

- Critical indebtedness of the agricultural producers. The ratio of ‘default’ loans, or those loans which are not paid or are paid in an irregular manner, among livestock producers reached 58.1% during the 1991 -1993 period.⁶ In 1997-98 the number of defaults decreased to 25% due to re-financing carried out by the Argentine National Bank, “Banco Nacion”, which financed 44% of the farm sector’s loans.⁷ This farm credit situation is aggravated by the high interest rates of loans in Argentina. In January 1999, a 15% tax was imposed on bank loan interests, while a 35% tax applies to all non-bank loans. As an example, a rural politician “...declared that the interest rate for loans of the National Bank in American dollars, which is 12.5%, is now actually 14.7%” (Clarín 2/1/99). Adding even further despair to this situation, there has been a decline in the prices of the primary products at both the internal and external level, as we have already indicated.
- Tax increases: a new tax called the “Presumed Rent” or “Supposed Rent” is established and “Income tax” is increased from 33 to 35%. The presumed rent tax must be paid when a profit does not exist, which is the case for the majority of farms.

3. Family forms of agricultural production

3.1. Antecedents

The trajectory as well as the characteristics of the domestic forms of production in the agricultural sector have been addressed in classic discussions in the past (Chayanov: 1973; Marx K.1965; Lenin V. 1973; Kautsky K. 1970; Wolf E. 1966). However, these have recently become a topic of renewed interest. A number of scholars of socio-agricultural issues have considered these domestic forms of production as their object of study as much in advanced capitalist societies as in dependent capitalist societies.

Some scholars, including the supporters of the ‘disappearing middle’ hypothesis (U.S.Department of Agriculture 1981; Edwards C. 1985 et al.) indicate the disappearance of these forms of production. Others emphasize the capacity of adaptability of such forms of production, which has allowed them to continue to exist throughout time under different generic forms. In this sense, the works of F. Buttel (1982, 1991) on North American ‘family farms’; of B. Jean and O. Stanek (1993, 1992, 1987, 1985) on the Canadian case; the works of H. Lamarche (1992) and J. P. Billaud (1992, 1987) in the case of France; and in Brazil the studies of A. Brumer, M. N. Baudel Wanderley et al. (1992) are prime examples.

In the case of Argentina there have been extended academic debates on family exploitations since the 1960s. The initial focus was the question of which was the ‘most desirable type of unit for agricultural expansion’ (Murmis 1988). The core of the discussion, particularly in the Pampa region, was the role of the large landowner capitalist exploitations in the expansion of agricultural production, in correlation to the role of family farm exploitations.

A number of research projects on the structural viability of these types of exploitations were carried out. A series of criteria were established in order to distinguish this social form of production from the “campesino” or “peasant” form, characterizing these “capitalized family farm” or “farmer” by their capacity to accumulate capital (Vessuri H. 1974; Archetti y Stölen,1975; Achinelli y Borro,1975; Bartolomé L. 1974)

In recent times, there has been a reemergence and growing interest in the direction of this form of production. A number of researchers examine farms within different productive and geographical zones, and from different theoretical and methodological frameworks (Barsky O. 1987; M.I. Tort 1983,1991; I.Llovet 1988; H.Mascali 1988; R.Ringuelet et al. 1993; S.Cloquel, 1992; Trincherro H. et al. 1992; Balazote A., Radovich J.C. 1992.)

What is presently being debated in different political and academic realms is the issue of which are the agricultural exploitations that will ‘survive’ in a globalized context.

Some scholars argue that only those farms that possess adequate capital and who have the capacity to obtain financing are not in a critical situation of indebtedness, and those who are able to further train their human resources and operate under improved management will be able to adapt the new rules of the game (Obschatko 1994).

Within this framework, two distinct positions have emerged. There are those individuals who consider that farms which do not meet the previously aforementioned criteria are not viable and therefore should cease to exist, and there are those who would prefer to somehow avoid the social and economic exclusion of these farms.

Lattuada and Renold (1999) argue that small scale agricultural production must transform itself in order to respond to what is almost the “...only path of growth of the sector of processed-differentiated products, with a large aggregated value and destined to a population with high acquisitive power and with higher demands in terms of quality and presentation, etc. (...) but for that it is necessary to respond in time and manner to these specific demands. In this new conception there is a radical change, since one does not produce then commercialize, but instead one identifies or creates a market for which to produce (...) within in the context of

⁶ Source: Central Bank of The Republic of Argentina, Statistic Bulletin, April 1994.

⁷ Source: La Nacion 24,10, 1998.

the global market, which services towards an industrialized, subordinated and concentrated agriculture, there is scant possibility of being successful if one is not a part of the types of economic organizations that could become competitive in such scenario. In this sense, cooperatives probably constitute one of the few options available to preserve or increase participation in the revenue of the sector" (Lattuada y Renold 1999, highlight mine).

In the mid-1990s the State established the Federal Program of Productive Re-conversion for Small and Medium Agricultural Enterprises (Rural Change). According to Lombardo and Tort (1998), the beneficiary of the program is defined in the title of the program. They characterized the program as having *'...very few quantitative or objectively measurable indicators: an interval of the net income generated by the original exploitation and minimum surface area in relation to the surrounding agricultural production systems. There are no guidelines pertaining to the organization of labor, the productive orientation, the product destination or the existence of other sources of revenue'*. The operational responsibility of the program is in the hands of INTA, the National Institute of Agriculture Technology, and the provincial governments and producer associations carry out the program follow-ups and evaluations. *"The action strategy of Rural Change consists in strengthening the activities of the group of producers in order to consider different organizational forms and identify alternative actions in order to overcome the economic crisis"* (INTA-SAGyP 1994). The program is intended **to assist the producer with technical support and orientation on how to access financing sources.**⁸

In the works of Obschatko (1994), Lattuada y Renold (1999) as well as in the documents of the Rural Change Program, the way in which farmers organize their production does not appear as an element or factor to be considered in relation to the capacity of farms to survive or continue.

3.2. Theoretical Aspects

Chayanov was one of the first thinkers who analyzed family labour-based farms with an emphasis on the motivation or logic of the agrarian producers. The author observed this point in order to identify certain courses of action which producers took which were incomprehensible to the agrarian promoters. The problem was centered in the fact that certain producers, in this case the Russian farmers, behaved in ways different from what was expected. With the purpose of understanding the functioning of the family labour based units, Chayanov proposed a theory that is built on the peculiar logic or motivation of the 'farmer', which was to principally satisfy the needs of the family, or more precisely 'all of the material benefits absolutely essential to the mere existence of the family' (Chayanov 1974: 47-48).

As we will observe in the analysis I will advance later, one cannot consider the family producers of the Pampa region as being exclusively motivated by the reproduction of the labour force, in this case the family. However, this aspect does constitute one of the distinctive elements of the logic of these producers.

F. Buttel centers his analysis on another type of exploitation based on family labour, the North American 'family farm', focusing on their structural and historical aspects. Buttel (1982) considers 'family farms' as independent producers of consumer goods as being a form of production which developed with and is subordinated to the capitalist mode of production, but is differentiated from other forms of productions since it is not based on salaried labour.

As Buttel indicates family farms played a determining role in the development of capitalism in the U.S. during the industrialization process of the country. They were not only the providers of cheap food but satisfied the demand of labour that the urban industry required, given that the incorporation of new labour-saving technologies brought about the expulsion of the rural population.

Buttel conceptualizes the family farm (F.F.) as 'independent producers of consumer goods (...) in which the producers are the owners of the means of production, contract little or no labour (that is, the major part of the labour force is provided by the individual producer or by the producer's family), and where consumer goods are exchanged for money which will be used to provide the main part or means for family subsistence...' (Buttel 1982).

When Buttel considers the factors which allow the family farm to adapt in periods of economic instability, he emphasizes an element which we can consider to be indicative of the motivation or logic of the farmer: the preservation of a way of life that comes from the farmer's strong connection or ties to the land and their love for rural work.

At the same time, Buttel argues that the permanence or survival of this form of agrarian production, in particular the near universal prevalence of the 'family farm' cannot only be explained by cultural or ideological factors. We can conclude that according to this author, there are inherent tendencies in agriculture that cause domestic production to be or converts itself into a 'normal' form even in the advanced economies where the oligarchical form of production prevails in all of the sectors of production (Buttel 1991).

⁸ According to data compiled by INTA in 1998, the program reached 1,915 groups throughout the country, representing a total of 20,560 producers. In fact, this program endorses the activities of INTA, which in the past was being considered as a candidate for privatization. The crisis brought about by the new economic model among many of the agricultural producers does not permit them to afford private assistance or consultants. This fact has slowed or impeded the plans to deactivate INTA.

From this perspective any agrarian economic unit can be described as ‘a system’ which can be defined as ‘the quantitative and qualitative way of combining land, labour force and capital...’ (Chayanov 1974).

Therefore we will consider different forms of organizing the production process by combining the following factors:

a) Resources: in the broad sense, includes land and water in quality and quantity.

b) Capital: provides the tools or means of production by which resources are worked.

According to Chayanov the formation and renewal of capital in the family economic unit depends on the degree to which the basic needs of the family are satisfied. “When the fundamental needs are far from being satisfied it is impossible to think of limiting consumption and dedicating a considerable amount to the formation of capital” (1974: 238).

In Buttel’s analysis of the family farm, he emphasizes that their capital “is in part consumption capital and in part production capital” (1982). The homestead, the truck, and the garden production are obvious examples of consumer goods. On the other hand, the land and other production capital have utility as consumer objects by the fact that this type of work is a business and a way of life “ (1982).

c) Labour: of the members of society who obtain a product, utilizing the variety of means of production. Labour is one of the organizational elements of the production process.

Furthermore, in order to analyze the family economic unit we must consider **the volume of economic activity**. Economic activity includes all the forms of economic activity carried out by the family, including farm activities (agriculture, gardens, livestock, etc.) as well as those activities which imply a complementary income (work in other farms, work with machinery, etc.).

3.3. Methodology

As already expressed, family forms of production survive and seem to maintain themselves in almost all types of society, including the Pampa agrarian region.

This fact can be explained by certain structural tendencies intrinsic to agricultural production to which family forms of production tend to adapt (Buttel 1991).

An explanation which would complement the previous one needs to be pursued in the actors themselves, actors who have generated and maintained family forms of organizing production that respond to these structural tendencies of agricultural production and which give them the great capacity to adapt in today’s changing situations.

My objective is to shed light on the motivation or logic that this form of economic activity represents to the farmers. This objective will be achieved through the analysis and interpretation of farmer’s decisions, concrete behaviour, and their multiple relations and activities.

This approach demands that the researcher immerse oneself in study environment for an extended period of time, with the objective not only of collecting information but above all **making sense** of that information.⁹

The unit of analysis is the farmer and their family. The economic production unit is the farm, which may consist of one or more parcels of land located in different regions and with different attention regimens. Parcels may also be either leased or owned. Groups which operate family farms will be given a relational focus. This means that we take into account ties with other social actors and socioeconomic sectors (commercial, work, financial, union, etc)

Through the use of quantitative and qualitative techniques (i.e. non-structured and structured observation, semi-structured and open-ended interviews and structured surveys) we have included in the study a random sample of 65 farms drawn from the Agricultural Survey of the Province of Buenos Aires. In 1989-1990 we carried out a structured survey, while in the following years we followed the trajectory of the farms, of the producers and their families using open-ended interviews and participant observation.

The last phase of our study, presently in progress, is the implementation of a structured survey in the same sample of farms¹⁰. By the end of this research project we should have a comparative diachronic analysis of the situations of the farms during the period 1987-1999.

4. Family Form of Production and their Characteristics in the Local Context.

4.1. Livestock Model

According to our theoretical-methodological position outlined earlier we will categorize the farmers according to the way they organize the different production factors and follow diverse strategies.

⁹ This approach has been facilitated by our geographical proximity to the area of study.

¹⁰ The results of the 1999-2000 survey are not incorporated into this work.

In order to facilitate the understanding of both this process and the selection of indicators that we use to categorize the farmers we will briefly describe the livestock model, since this is the predominant activity in the region which we are studying.

For livestock breeding the diffused technological models include pasture rotation management. The finality of this practice is an augmentation of the receptivity of animals per hectare, the retention of animals for the greatest amount of time possible while maintaining and controlling weight gain, and control over all of the sanitation factors which can influence the finality of a strong and healthy animal. A group of these techniques implies a larger proportion of investment per hectare. This is the case for things like the implementation of artificial pasture, feed, fertilization, watering tanks, corrals, etc. Other techniques consist of the breeding methods such as the seasonalizing of birthing, early weaning, etc.

These models were diffused equally to all of the producers without considering the characteristics of the producers or their exploitations, nor the existing relationships among them.

In the zone where we carried out our field work one finds cattle breeders, pure feeder producers (those who carry out the fattening process only), cattle farmers who work the complete cattle breeding and fattening cycle and farmers who practice both cultivation and livestock activities.

The different stages of the livestock production cycle require lands of different aptitude. The first stage is calf breeding, which is generally practiced on the poorest quality lands. The pure breeder sells calves at weaning when the calves are about 9 months old and have about 170 kilograms to other cattle farmers who continue their fattening.

Cattle farmers who are able to keep their livestock for more time because they have pastures or higher quality grasses practice "recria". These farmers raise animals until greater weights are reached, usually 240-260 kilograms in 18 months.

These calves are generally acquired by "invernadores" (feeder cattle producers) who raise them on permanent pasture or best apt lands to a weight of more than 400 kilograms (according to the breed) in 28 months.

In the case that due to the characteristics of their exploitation the cattle farmer is able to carry out a complete cycle, they are both the breeder and feeder producer of their own production.

The farmer who possesses lands apt for feeder production generally practices cultivation as well.

4.2. Characteristics of farmers and their farms.

We would like to recognize the heterogeneity of the types of situations that the concept of 'family farm' may involve. Although family farms may share certain characteristics in how they function, these may differ according to objective conditions of production, surface area, degree of mechanization, and financial capacity. Depending on these factors, the reproductive capacity and the capacity to develop and adopt better means of production of individual family farms will vary, and will have considerable effect on their possibility of survival in the present socio-economic context.

With the objective of analyzing and categorizing farmers according to the way in which they organize production we will operationally define the concepts which we introduced in the theoretical framework, and will apply these concepts to our case study.

Resources: Extension and aptitude of land: we distinguish four levels of extensions among the sample according to the number of hectares of diverse livestock aptitude. Since we had to consider farms with different proportions of soil quality, in order to standardize this measurement¹¹, we assumed that in livestock activities the generation of a surplus is more related to the possession of animals than surface area. The cut-off levels for each level or category are established in terms of animal ownership, using "cow equivalent" (C.E.) as a unit. The obtained values are still expressed in terms of surface area, and in this model we consider that one livestock hectare is equivalent to 0.73 C.E. and one cultivation (non-livestock) hectare is equivalent to 2 C.E.

By categorizing exploitation extensions in this manner we are not only taking into account the number of hectares but also the quality of land. This is essential in order to compare exploitations with a diverse soil aptitude. The categories which we defined were as follows:

Table 1: Sample Composition according to Extension (Standardized according to Soil Aptitude)

Livestock/Agriculture/C.E. Hectares	Number of Exploitations	% Sample
E1: 360 ha. or less	39	60%
E2: 361 ha. - 850 ha.	13	13%
E3: 851 ha. - 1680 ha.	8	12%
E4: 1681 ha. or more	5	8%
Total	65	100%

Capital: in order to differentiate farms according to their capital we examined: Improvements, Livestock and Permanent or artificial pastures.

¹¹ We followed criteria utilized by the Department of Economy of the National Institute of Agriculture Technology in Balcarce in order to estimate the capital assets of the economic units according to extension or soil aptitude.

We select those indicators because its are related with the technological models for cattle production

Improvements: Normalizing index (0 - 10) elaborated according to the property of the improvements considered elementary for cattle production. We distinguish four levels, 0-4; 4,1- 6,9; 7-10.

Livestock: Cow Equivalent is a normalizing index of the different types of animals which are possessed in their value in "equivalence to cows". = C.E.

Permanent or artificial pastures: We distinguish four levels according to the percentage of land with permanent or artificial pastures: 0- 10%; 11-30%; 31-50%; 51% to +

Labour: In terms of **farm labour type** we distinguish those farms whose physical labour and control/administration are in salaried hands L3; from those where a member or members of the family are involved in the farm operations L2; and from those where the majority of the domestic group is involved in the farm L1. There is a group of exploitations that due to the loss of all of their capital or because their owners are so old that they can no longer work have been leased in their totality. We have labeled these L0.

Chart 1. Farms distribution according factors of production

	E1				E2				E3				E4			
	C1	C2	C3	C4												
L0	7															
L1	10			15		8										
L2				7			4	1				6	1			2
L3										1					3	
	17			22		8	4	1		1	6	1		3		2

Pampeana Region, Argentina 1990

We consider family farms to be those in which at least one member of the family is involved in the physical work, control and administration tasks of the farm (L2); and those where the majority of the domestic group is involved in the farm (L1).

Farms whose physical labour and control/administration are in salaried hands (L3) are not considered to be family farms.

Farms which have large capital investment, C3 and C4, are considered to have an intensive production strategy.

Note that in Chart 1 there are farms with large parcels of land and high levels of capital that are organized as a family form of production.

In the fieldwork we found cases of large family owned farms (i.e., more than 1000 has.) and with a great capacity for the accumulation of capital which, faced with situations that signified a decrease in the actual family participation in the exploitation, considered the abandonment of the activity. The decision is explained in the following statements:

“The land needs to be worked by oneself, because one must be dedicated to what he possesses” (ownership signifies dedication)

“when my son was finishing highschool I asked him what he was planning to do. If he decided to go to University, I already knew what to do with the land, because nobody takes care of what is not theirs...”

“When I went to University, one day my old man phoned me, he told me that I had to come back because he needed me to work the land...”

One often encounters the use of the categories “small or medium producers” in literature dealing with agricultural production in Argentina, and these categories can be understood to mean “ family farmer” or a producer who carries out a family form of production.

It is important to note that ‘small and medium’ producer is a statistical category and not a theoretical concept (Buttel 1991). As Buttel argues, this category does not address the social relations involved.

We consider that these ‘large’ land owners organize the family form of production independently from the extension of their farms. We want to emphasize that the family logic in the management of their farms is not associated to the size of the farm.

If we correlate the production factors carried out by the farmers (Chart 1) with the activities carried out by the family in general, which would constitute the **volume of the family economic activity**, we would have a better understanding of the heterogeneity of the situations in which family farms exist in the local context.

These activities are:

- The livestock activities (cattle, pigs, sheeps); breeding, feeder.

Indicators: Livestock: C.E.; Livestock: C.E./Ha; permanent pasture %; Area rented from others for

- The cultivation activities.: Indicators: Cultivated area (%); Area rented from others for agriculture

- The homestead production.
 - activities that provide income through the use of some of the production factors but not in agricultural production itself, including:

- the land factor : rent or lease portions of the farm to others
- self-exploitation of family labour by working on other farms for income or exchanging labour for goods such as land or machinery
- investment of capital in machinery, working with own machinery for a fee or sharing (percentage).
- Work on other farms or in urban centers by some members of the family.

These activities are destined to fulfill and achieve certain objectives as determined by the family. These objectives are referred to as the logic or motivation of these family farmers.

We have categorized farms according to the previously mentioned as follows:

Category a. The group which we call *Family Companies* consists of farmers who work more than 850 hectares, and invest a high level of capital. Usually, this land belongs to two or three siblings who have not divided the land and work on them conjointly. In occasions, some of them hold urban employment as professionals or businessmen (making them part-time producers) and control the farm together with a family member, who is the full-time producer.

The land on these types of farms is worked and administered by family members. In addition, employees are hired to operate agricultural machinery, particularly when family labour is insufficient. In general, strategies are created to expand the exploitation by 'taking' or leasing land for raising livestock (Table a. Case a 1) or agriculture (Table a. Case a 2). Those who 'take' land for agriculture are 'contractors' of machinery and 'chacareros',¹².

In the last few years family members' participation in the exploitation has increased. This phenomenon can be explained in part by the need to exercise increased control over the production process due to a reduction in profit margins or lack of work in the city. Similar cases have been examined in the Pampa region (Tort 1985; Tort et al. 1991).

Table a. Category a.: Family Companies

Extension: 851 ha. or more	Case a1 (2 farms E4,C4; 2 farms E3,C3; 1 farm E3,C4) Total :5	Case a 2 (1farm E2,C4; 2 farms E3,C3 2 farms E3,C4) Total: 5
Labour type	L2	L2
Agriculture Area owned	90%	50%
Livestock Area owned	10%	50%
Area leased from others	300has + for livestock	400has + for agriculture
Permanent Pasture	30%	30%
Natural Fields	<20%	<40%
Cultivated Area	50% +	30 to 40%
Improvements: ¹³ = 1 a 10	I =6 +	I =8 +
Livestock:C.E. ¹⁴	300 to 500	800 +
Livestock:C.E./Ha	0.80 +	1 +

Pampeana Region - Argentina

Category b. Another group of farmers which we describe *Family farms, mixed farming, intensive production strategy* (Table b), manages smaller exploitations (Case 2b) than the Family companies group above mentioned and involve a high level of capital investment (Case 1b). These farmers are called land 'givers', and 20 to 30% of their land is used for agriculture on a percentage basis (crop-share). That is, these farmers "lend" their land to another producer who possesses a means of production and then the harvest is shared between both parties. In these types of farms, the rest of the land is used for livestock. The family contributes labour in the operation of the farm, however in all the cases the totality of the family group is not completely committed to working the farm and some of the members may live in the nearby cities. In a number of cases these type of producers have developed meat businesses in nearby towns where they sell the produce from their own exploitations. This alternative allows them to increase the profit from their own livestock, rather than selling to an intermediary.

¹² "Chacarero" is the term used to denominate people who carry out agricultural activities on land which they do not own. They work under some form of contract with the owner of the land that can set by a percentage of the harvest or by direct annual rent of the land (crop-share).

¹³I = Normalizing Index

¹⁴C.E. = Cow Equivalent is a normalizing index of the different types of animals which are possessed in their value in "equivalence to cows".

These farmers, in addition to those described in the previous category are the more 'innovative' farmers who believe that producing 'more and better' is a solution, have expressed their disappointment and confusion before the unpredictable and varying market demands over which they have no control. As one interviewee expressed, "I spent u\$s 80,000 to use a 'feedlot', then the processor came to me and said that they didn't want that, that they want pasture fed, light cattle, that the supermarket doesn't like their meat to have too much fat..."

These "innovative farmers" have a critical vision of the advice of experts, but somehow no longer value their own knowledge. This attitude was apparent in the first interviews which we carried out ten years ago. When asked 'how they manage the land', those respondents who had mistakenly identified me as a agricultural technician responded in a way which they assumed I would want to hear. Later, when we developed a relationship of trust, they confided 'they tell me that we can wean at 6 months (referring to the technicians who were doing this at INTA) because if the calf sneezes there are 10 veterinarians who can take care of it. I'm here by myself, in the middle of the pampa, if I have to wait for a veterinarian my calf will die. I still wean at 9 months...', and he was correct, as a number of other experienced veterinarians have confirmed.

Table b. Category b: Family farms, mixed farming, intensive production strategy

Extension: Case b1:300ha or less Caseb2:361ha- 850 ha	Case b1 (7 farms E1,C4) T: 7 farms	Case b2. (4 farms E2,C3) T: 4 farms
Labour type	L1	L1/ L2
Agriculture Area	20% +	11 to 30%
Livestock Area	<80%	70 to 900%
Area leased to others	20% + for agriculture	5 to 30%for agriculture
Permanent Pasture	15% to more	11 to 30%
Natural Fields	Remaining	30 to 50%
Cultivated Area	20% +	5 to 30%
Improvements:I=1to 10	7 to 10	I=4,1-6,9
Livestock:C.E.	150 to +	200 -500
Livestock: C.E./Ha	0.96 to +	0.80 +

Category c. A third type of family farm, *Family cattle breeding farms, household production, self exploitation of family labor* (Table c), are those who have land of inferior quality, but who have invested a high level of capital in order to develop an intensive livestock production (Case 1c). Some of these producers have adopted alternative production initiatives such as pork production (Case 2c).

In the case that the family or at least matrimonial couple continues to live on the farm, subsistence activities such as gardening, and the raising of smaller livestock such as chicken and sheep are continued. When there is a surplus of products from these activities they may be exchanged with neighbours or community stores for other products. Products may also be marketed in community stores or markets.

Table c. Category c.: Family farms, cattle breeding farms, household production, self exploitation of family labour

Extension: 300ha or less	Case c1 (8 Farms E2,C2)	Case c2 (15 farms E1,C4)
Labour type	L1	L1
Agriculture Area	0%	0%
Livestock Area	100%	100%
Area Leased	0%	0%
Permanent Pasture	20 to 40%	41 to 80%
Natural Fields	80 a 60%	60 a 20%
Cultivated Area	0%	0%
Improvements:I=1to 10	I=7 to 10	I=7 to 10
Livestock: C.E.	100 to 150	150 +
Livestock: C.E./Ha	0.71-0.95	0.96 +

In general these family farms revolve around an intensive form of production with a high level of labour supplied by the family. Family members may also work in other exploitations as caretakers or perform odd jobs. Often they operate other producer's machinery or rent and operate their own. The practice of carrying out these types of activities in order to complement the domestic income has been examined in other regions (Mascali 1992). These farmers, like those which we have already described, have developed diverse strategies to confront periods of economic insecurity and crisis as a way of reproducing both the family and the exploitation. In relation to these objectives, most of the producers have incorporated new activities that are outside those promoted by the dominant

economic system. Some of these activities are carried out on a small scale and adapt the technologies advocated by official organisms to fit the characteristics of both their exploitations and their family needs. Strategies such as these are summarized in the following charts.¹⁵

Strategies Developed during Production Factor Imbalance

Problem	Strategy	Objective
LABOR Scarcity of family labor: - due to aging - due to absence of head of family due to generation change - due to the inexistence of family members to continue the operation	Contract external labor, either salaried or bartered Leasing part or all of the property	Continue producing and maintain possession of the land until a generation change occurs
Family labor in excess of farm reproduction possibilities.	Migration/expulsion of non-useful family members Agreements among family members about who stays and who migrates.	Not to compromise the possibilities of the reproduction of the family and farm Maintain family ownership of land
Migration of family members due to structural deficiencies in the country (studies, health, etc)	Participation/labor on weekends and vacations Participate in special and traditional tasks: branding, vaccinations, slaughter, sausage and preserve making, etc. Take part in rural cultural and recreational activities	Socialize and include youth in a rural lifestyle so that they will later return to the country Transmit a cultural heritage
CAPITAL Lack or reduction of initial capital	Leasing out of part of the land	Direct Lease Income towards new installations, animal purchases
LAND Scarcity, need for expansion	Lease land Barter labor for use of land	

When situations of global crisis or adverse economic situations present themselves, the family reorganizes its form of production and shows a great capacity to adapt (F.Buttel 1980, H. Lamarche et al 1992) and undertake a series of activities, labor, etc., in order to compensate the volume of family economic activities (Chayanov 1974).

Problem	Strategy	Objective
	Temporary employment on other farms for some family members, generally male children, working with family machinery, looking after or managing other farm Intensification of production within the subsistence cycle, usually the work of women.	Complement family income Obtain personal income As much as possible provide nutritional necessities of the family Distribute products within the domestic cycle to family members residing in the city Sale of surplus in the city, among neighbours, country fairs, etc, and with this money obtain daily family necessities apart from foodstuffs.

Adaptation of Productive Models and Technological Packages

Model	Problem	Strategy	Objective
Cattle Raising	Activity subject to strong cyclical variation	Compensate with alternative activities	

¹⁵ Villafaña A.G." *Zemedelska Ekonomika*, N° 41, 1995 (10-11) 457-469 Prague 1995.

	Low profitability	Pursue external work (for example contract labor)	
Technological Packages Pasture implementation Forage reserve in the form of bails	Implementation difficulties due to lack of capital Costly loans which compromises possibilities to maintain the land Purchase of bailing equipment not financially accessible	Lease other land for fattening Looking after other farm in exchange for use of pasture Organization of neighbouring producers in order to buy equipment cooperatively	Establish pastures after a few years through obtained income, without having to mortgage land Bail at the appropriate moment and bail for other producers for a fee
Herd management Early Weaning Sale of calves all at once	Increase in the mortality of calves due to the impossibility of constant veterinary control and attention Due to the characteristics of these farms more frequent income is needed	Weaning of calves when they reach 150 kilos (9 months) Sale of calves at weaning Sale of remaining herd at heavier weights Introduce alternative activities.	Compensate low calf prices at weaning with the sale of heavier, more mature calves. Receive more frequent income

Category d. A fourth group which we have identified, 'retired farmers' (Table d) are those who have rented most of their land due to a lack of capital or when the farm owners are older and there are no young people living on the farm to work the land. Generally, the family maintains the central homestead and may raise some livestock. In a few cases we have observed siblings returning to their parents' home due to a lack of employment elsewhere. The consequences of this process have not yet been explored.

Table d: Category d: Retired farmers

Extension 300 ha or less	Case d (10 Farms E1,C1)
Labour type	L1
Agriculture Area	0 %
Livestock Area	100%
Area leased to others	70 to 90%
Permanent Pasture	0%
Natural Fields	100%
Cultivated Area	0%
Improvements: I=1 to 10	I=2 to 4
Livestock: C.E.	0 to 50
Livestock: C.E./Ha	0.10-0.49

Category e. Non-reproducer farms: Are farms which have been leased in their totality and the family has migrated. There are seven farms in this category, L0,C1,E1.

Chart 1.1. Categories of Family Farms according factors of production

E1				E2				E3				E4			
C1	C2	C3	C4												

L0	e.																		
L1	d.			c.															
L2				b.				a.				a.					a.		

4.3. The indebtedness of the farmers.

Earlier we stated that one of the biggest problems in Argentina agriculture is the indebtedness of the farmers.

In the case of the farmers with whom we are working, in 1990 eighteen (18) farmers or 27.7% declared that they had debts.

Considering the categories which we described earlier, the distribution of farmers with debts is as follows:

Chart 2. Distribution of Farmers according to Production Category and Debt

Debts with:	Category a.		Category b.		Category c.		Category d.	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Banks	2	20%	3	27%	3	13%		
Taxes			3	27%	1	4%	2	20%
Both			2	18%	1	4%	1	10%
	2	20%	8	72%	5	21%	3	30%

Pampa Region 1990

One can observe in the chart that both the largest number and highest percentage of indebted farmers is in Category b. As we already indicated there is a group of farmers in this Category who have made large investments in order to carry out improvements, buy more cattle, etc., with an objective of increasing their production. If we take C.E./Ha. as an indicator we can confirm that this objective has been achieved, with an C.E./Ha. of .96, which technicians consider to be very good for this type of farm.

The same can be said for indebted farmers in Category c. These farmers have a high percentage of permanent pasture, an improvement index of 7 to 10, and a cow equivalent/per hectare of more than 0.96.

Therefore the farmers who have the highest C.E./Ha are also the most seriously in debt.

This means that the farmers who (according to the technicians) are most "innovative", are also those who most seriously have the future of their farms in jeopardy.

The indebtedness of these farmers wouldn't be so alarming if the profits which they receive permitted them to pay off their loans. The interest rate in Argentina is commonly 20% to 22% monthly in \$U.S. and a farm mortgage can be acquired for 14,7% monthly interest (Clarín newspaper, 2/1/99).

Between January of 1991 and December of 1994 the relation between the agriculture index and wholesale prices varied 79%, while during the same period the cost of financial intermediation was 380%. In concrete examples this means that a bank debt which in March of 1990 signified "a truckload of steers" in February of 1994 signified "9.7 truckloads", more than 339 steers, or ten times the value of an identical product.¹⁶

These circumstances have forced farmers to sell either portions or their entire farms to other actors.

4.4. The new rural actors

Through our fieldwork and in the work of other researchers (Lombardo and Tot 1999; Craviotti 1999, just to indicate few) we have observed the emergence of a new sector of 'small and medium' land owners which is not related to "family farmers". This new sector consists of professionals, businessmen, and politicians who, with capital generated from their activities, have managed to purchase the land from those who, strangled by their economic situation, were forced to sell.

In the case of the sample which we are presently studying, the seven exploitations "Non-reproduced farms" and the three farms indebted. category d. Chart 2., have been purchased by this new class of rural actor. The 'new rural actors' who do not make use of family labour are located in the chart in E1, C1, and L3.

The main sources of income of these new land-owners is not agricultural exploitation and they continually invest capital obtained from their principal economic activities. This greatly determines their chances of continuing as agricultural producers as well as the way in which they organize production, the productive strategies which they adopt and the extent to which they can implement technological innovations.

Chart 1.2. Farms distribution according factors of production

L0	E1				E2				E3				E4			
	C1	C2	C3	C4												

¹⁶Suplemento Agropecuario, newspaper La Nación, March 1996.

L1	7			15			8											
L2				7				4	1				6	1				2
L3	10										1					3		
	17			22			8	4	1			1	6	1		3		2

Pampa Region. Argentina. 1999

5. Conclusions

We have made reference to the critical situation which some producers are now facing. The state has recognized this crisis, as their implementation of the “Rural Change” program implies. Researchers of rural issues (Renold and Lattuada, Obstachatko, Tort and Lombardo, just to name few) have also identified the current crisis facing producers, and have debated about alternatives which producers might encounter. In general, however, this debate often digresses to one related to the processes of ‘reconversion’ and of ‘technological change’.

We would like to put an emphasis on the importance of the organizing efforts of the ‘family form of production’ in the permanence of farms, in particular *small scale farming systems*, in a globalized context.

This context has been described in the second section of the paper. However, we would like to emphasize the following elements that characterizes it: an unregulated economy, non-protectionist policies, a lack of subsidies, and a high loan interest rates.

In general we can argue that the family form of production is subjected to profound modifications, which in turn are the result of a number of processes. Therefore, we can not limit ourselves to a concept of a family form of production in which the entire domestic group is associated to the productive work, since such a description would conceal a series of fundamental transformations in present day agricultural activities, such as the emergence of new types of associations, ‘part-time’ producers, etc. (these situations have been examined in various studies on the family form of production, see Billaud 1987; Buttle F. 1991; Lamarche H. et al. 1992)

At the same time in the current context the farmer is not only a producer of food. Nowadays ‘pluriactivity’ and diverse strategies of subsistence related to the domestic realm are common. Furthermore in both the realm of the ‘exploitation’ and in the ‘domestic’ dominion, activities which are not directly related to agriculture are emerging. An example would be a ‘rural tourism’ enterprise, where income from agriculture may not constitute the only or principal source of farm family income.

In the context referred to here, farms that seem to be able to reproduce and expand are those with low levels of indebtedness, where the family controls the production process, constantly invest capital, and have natural resources that allow them to develop mixed strategies of production and achieve high productivity. These farms sell their products to the highest income sectors of the internal and external market. The farms placed under Category A possess these characteristics.

Those farms who lack natural resources either in quality and/or quantity, but whose objective is to obtain high productivity, make large capital investments in order to apply required technologies and experience good results. That is to say that for these farmers ‘technological change’ appears to be a relevant factor. The farmers described under Category B have these characteristics. However these are also the farmers who experience the highest levels of debt, as expressed in Chart 2. This debt would not be a problem if profits allowed them to make loan payments, but the high interest rates (14.7%), low commodity prices and a lack of market controls have put a number of these farms in critical situations.

The family is losing control over their farms not only due to their state of indebtedness, but also by the uncritical adoption and application of some technologies such as the ‘feedlot’ which demand the hiring of salaried employees on farms where the ‘labour force/number of animal’ ratio was previously appropriate. Furthermore, the practice of fattening cattle more rapidly with grains signifies a waste of fields¹⁷, and constitutes an inefficient use of production factors.

Those farmers who find it impossible to modify themselves in order to remain in the market, either due to a lack of capital or labour or because they remain dependant on their original production models, will disappear as independent producers.

¹⁷ Informe Ganadero 458, Bs.As. 22/10/99

Farms which have neither quality nor quantity of natural resources but make investments in order to maintain capital goods have a maintainable level of indebtedness according to the farm's capacity will remain or survive. These farmers commercialize their products at the local level. In addition to cattle they sell pigs, sheep, chickens, eggs, etc. They satisfy local demands, and the local demands have different characteristics¹⁸ than the demand of the high income sectors of urban centres or the external market. They also have a n organizational form of production in which the domestic group is very involved and as a result are able to implement diverse strategies such as those described in Category C. In these strategies one can observe how the farmer's knowledge of farming is conserved and utilized, and has allowed them to find their own alternative solutions. They provide their family members with not only economic heritage but also cultural heritage, a "way of life" which has helped them make decisions and find alternative solutions when faced with the diverse demands and challenges of the present day context.

The experiences of the family farm in a global context, a global context which is presented by the dominant system as being unstoppable and the only option being adapt to it or disappear, should remind us that globalization is a socially constructed process, and that survival into this global context depends on the social actor's capacity to react and to implement adequate responses.

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¹⁸ See section 2

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