



2nd International Symposium on Work in Agriculture

Thinking the Future of Work in Agriculture

March 29th – April 1st, 2021

Workshop 1 - Employment

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Labour is obviously a key production factor of farms. While it is usually regarded as fixed in the short-term, it is variable in the mid- to long-term.

In developed countries, general trends show a sharp decrease in agricultural employment at the macro level, which enabled an enlargement of farms and an increase in the apparent productivity of labour through large-scale mechanisation (big tractors and combine harvesters, robotization of livestock breeding, etc.) and economies of scale (specialization of farm in few products). This substitution of labour by capital translated into an overall decrease in the weight of agriculture in both employment and GDP, until arriving into a “World Without Agriculture” as in OECD countries today, where agriculture accounts for no more than 3 % of employment and 3 % of GDP. After this canonical ‘modern growth’ or ‘structural transformation’, farmers are often no longer the majority group in low-population-density rural areas.

Conversely, in most developing countries, the number of farmers has increased during the past decades due to population growth and less labour-intensive non-farm industries than in the past (‘jobless growth’). In land-squeezed countries such in Asia, this led to a fragmentation of the farms, an overuse of the modern inputs of the Green Revolution (irrigation, chemical fertilisers, pesticides, genetics...), a financial and ecological over-indebtedness and, overall, an increase in the labour productivity gap between farm and nonfarm workers, partially compensated by circular migration, casual and informal non-farm activities, and rural employment guarantee schemes.

Simultaneously, at the farm level, empirical evidence reveals a decline in the absolute or relative levels of family labour input, with an increasing share of hired labour and a tendency to replace internal farm labour by external work provided by contracting enterprises. This also translates into a non-negligible share of farmers having another occupation outside the farm, in the agricultural sector or outside, and an increasing share of farmers’ partners working outside agriculture. On the other hand, there are growing concerns about how to reshape agricultural policies in order to support agricultural and/or rural employment. For instance, discussions emerge on granting European CAP subsidies on a per workforce unit rather than per hectare basis in order to favour more labour-intensive agricultural production practices; in other countries, the expected role that could be assigned to policies would rather be to help maintaining people in agriculture and/or rural areas to hamper intra- or international migrations.

The workshop therefore aims at investigating such questions as the factors driving the transformation of the labour-mix at the macro and farm levels, the impact of the change in the cropping and animal breeding models and practices on labour input and labour type, the impact on employment and generation renewal of such policies as those aiming at supporting farm income or orienting farm entry and exit, etc. Recent productive, technological and market dynamics push discussions on sustainability in rural labour and employment in developing and developed countries. Global market competition has impacted the definition of strategies in agricultural value chains. The need to balance the search for cost efficiency and standards warranty pushes the decisions of employment strategies. Thus, value chain governance drives labour governance in a global context.

In that context, different perspectives of labour and employment comprise issues such as:



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- Labour-related data collection issues (defining the perimeter of people who are considered as actually working in agriculture, accurately measuring farm labour input, measuring direct and indirect labour, etc.);
- Global division of labour;
- Labour governance;
- Structural transformation in land-squeezed countries;
- Labour supply (shortage/overabundance, education...);
- Profitability and indebtedness between large scale and micro-farms;
- Productivity and labour costs between large scale and micro-farms;
- Contract labour and contract farming;
- Labour insecurity, informal and flexible labour;
- Migration (rural-urban or circular);
- Gender, child labour among others;
- Impact on employment and labour productivity of alternative sociotechnical regime such as agroecology, of payments for environmental services (pes), etc.;
- Direct and indirect impacts of agricultural, environmental and trade policies on labour;
- (re)designing policies in order to support agricultural and/or rural employment.

We welcome case studies, empirical data, methodological and theoretical papers.

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