



SWEET FRUITS BITTER LIVES



THE STORY OF WORKERS
BEHIND THE FRUIT WE EAT

Inequalities in Brazil have multiple origins and serious consequences when it comes to safeguarding rights and guaranteeing sustainable development and social justice. Income concentration is one of the drivers of these inequalities. Among the low-income population, rural workers' situation is dramatic, especially seasonal labourers (those who only work during harvest season). Fruit growing in North-East Brazil is a vibrant industry that supplies products to the world's major markets, such as Europe and North America, as well as Brazil's major state capitals. However, most women and men who work in the production of those fruits are not paid living wages and experience vulnerable conditions, being unable to provide decent lives for their families. The largest supermarkets in Brazil and in the world have increased their economic power within food chains and play important roles, especially in fruit supply chains. Supermarkets should recognize the conditions of vulnerability faced by rural workers and take the lead in working with their suppliers to make sure that the fruit sold to consumers is grown and harvested in ways that contribute to the dignity of those who produce it.

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Cover Photo: Hands of a farm worker in Petrolina – by Tatiana Cardeal/Oxfam Brazil

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Vineyard in Petrolina (PE, Brazil)
Photo: Vitor Shimomura / Oxfam Brasil

INTRODUCTION

*The A b c of fruit
Say it's ok, say it's ok
Say it is
Avocado is strong, açaí from the north
Nobody refuses them. Plum, acerola
Cherry guava and blackberry, hazelnut and so
Who's going to peel that pineapple*

(The ABC of Fruit, a song by Moraes Moreira)

Translation note: "to peel the pineapple" is a Brazilian expression referring to a difficult problem that no one wants to handle

This is a story about food and the fruit we like to eat in our daily lives. But it is not a beautiful story, nor is it fun. It is about facing hardship and overcoming it, about the lives of women and men who work in fruit production in Brazil.

When we go to the supermarket to buy fruit for our families, we expect quality products, and that is usually the case for the taste and appearance of what we find. But it is often a different story for the life of those who produce it.

Fruit production in North-East Brazil is a vibrant industry that supplies the main markets in the world and in Brazil. At the same time, it is pervaded by structural problems that prevent thousands of working men and women from living a decent life.

Supermarkets are among the main places where fruit is bought. For fruit to be on consumers' tables, thousands of people work on growing, harvesting and processing them. If the fruit we eat is sweet and beautiful, it is because someone took care of it and made sure it would be just the way we liked it. But the lives of many people who grow, harvest and process these fruits are not as beautiful and sweet. On the contrary, many of them live in poverty, risking starvation and pesticide contamination. They are unable to dream and are afraid of the future.

Behind the fruit sold by the three largest supermarkets in Brazil – Carrefour, Pão de Açúcar and Grupo Big (formerly Walmart Brazil) – are thousands of workers who, year after year, are hired by large producers for short periods, laid off at the end of the harvest season and then rehired – or not – by the same farms, living in uncertainty about their futures.

Seasonal workers are usually hired for periods varying from 30 days to 3 months or even 6 months. Few alternatives remain once they are laid off at the end of the season, since that work is one of the few options – if not the only one – in the rural areas where they work. It is even worse for women because their contracts are usually shorter as they work on packing and cleaning fruit – which requires less time during the year. In addition, women have the unpaid workload of taking care of their children and their homes. With no other job options in the area, they seek work in the fruit industry. They are hired and laid off several times a year – in a vicious circle of expectation, anguish and insecurity.

Neither women nor men earn enough to support their families. Melon, mango and grape workers in the states of Bahia, Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Norte receive, on average, only 56% of what would be considered a living wage by the International Labour Organization (ILO).¹ They live in conditions of high vulnerability due to their insecurity and the dependence on fruit companies. In addition, these people are exposed to high risks of pesticide contamination and do not always find the best working conditions. They are at the beginning of the fruit supply chain, and it is a harsh truth to learn that this is where fruit's path to consumers' tables starts.

At the other end, supermarkets are increasing their influence on supply chains of fresh food products such as fruit. Carrefour, Pão de Açúcar and Grupo Big control 46.6% of the industry² and are known for their sustainability³ efforts. They could take the lead in reshaping working conditions in their suppliers' growing, harvesting and processing activities by implementing policies and practices.

Fruit producing companies, which supply supermarkets in Brazil and abroad, are major exporters in Brazilian agribusiness and fruit production generates almost R\$ 40 billion a year⁴. However, Oxfam studies⁵ show that in recent decades the world's largest supermarkets have been getting a growing share of the value generated by fruit and vegetables they sell. Food supply chains are increasingly concentrated (Figure 1), creating power imbalance and placing rural workers in a more vulnerable situation.

FIGURE 1: CONCENTRATION IN FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS



i Bayer-Monsanto, Dupont-Dow, and Chem-China Syngenta. Source: Friends of the Earth Europe, Heinrich Boll Foundation and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. (2017). Agrifood Atlas: Facts and Figures about the Corporations that Control what we Eat. ii S. J Lowder, J. Scoet, T. Roney. (2017). The Number, Size and Distribution of Farms, Smallholder Farms and Family Farms Worldwide. *World Development*, 87, 16-29. UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. (2008). The State of Food and Agriculture 2008. Rome: FAO. iii Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus Co. Source: Friends of the Earth Europe, Heinrich Boll Foundation and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. (2017). Agrifood Atlas: Facts and Figures about the Corporations that Control what we Eat. Op. cit. iv Friends of the Earth Europe, Heinrich Boll Foundation and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. (2017). Agrifood Atlas: Facts and Figures about the Corporations that Control what we Eat. v Ibid.

Source: A Hora de Mudar, Oxfam 2018.

Between 2018 and 2019, Oxfam Brasil went to the field to hear what these women and men who work in fruit production had to say, and the result was alarming.⁶ If there is wealth in fruit supply chain, why do workers say they are not well? This is an example of how inequality works. The suffering of these people provides faces and voices to those who lose with inequality in Brazil. They are examples of the poorest 20% of the country's population, who live without basic rights, on an average monthly income of about R\$ 680.⁷

Brazil is the world's third largest fruit producer and is becoming one of the major exporters. In recent years, fruit exports have generated about US\$ 800 million annually – approximately R\$ 3.5 billion.⁸ In the second half of each year, the country becomes the leading supplier of tropical fruit to Europe and the United States, exporting products such as mango, papaya, melons, grapes and watermelon.⁹

Large-scale fruit production in the North-Eastern region of Brazil is only possible through irrigation projects developed since the 1950s, both in the São Francisco River valley, on the Bahia-Pernambuco state border, and in Rio Grande do Norte and Ceará. Establishing these irrigation hubs was successful commercially and economically, but it was also marked by a process of exclusion of family farmers who used to live there and by land and water conflicts, some of which persist to this day.¹⁰

Nowadays, the states of Pernambuco and Bahia produce 62% of Brazilian mangoes and 35% of grapes while Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte account for 75% of the country's melon production.¹¹

About 25 people are employed for every 10 hectares of fruit. In comparison, soy employs only one person per 10 hectares on average.¹² That is to say that fruit creates more jobs in rural areas of the country, particularly in the North-East, where jobs are scarcer. In 2017 alone, mango, melon and grape production created some 88 thousand jobs. However, about 45% of them did not last more than six months in the year,¹³ as shown in Figure 2.




* * *

“IF THE PROFIT MARGIN IS SO HIGH, WHY NOT INCREASE WAGES? WHY NOT IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS? I GUESS IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE. WHY DO THEY HAVE TO DESTROY NATURE WITH PESTICIDES? WHY NOT CHANGE IT A LITTLE TO USE LESS POISON? I BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE TO PRODUCE WITHOUT USING A LOT OF POISON AND VALUING WORKERS MORE.”

* * *

Jocelino Dantas -
Agricultural Policy Secretary
- Union Federation FETARN
(RN)

FIGURE 2 – FORMAL JOBS ACTIVE AND TERMINATED BY DECEMBER 31, 2017

FRUIT	NO. OF JOBS CREATED	NO. OF JOBS STILL HELD BY YEAR-END	NO. OF EMPLOYEES DISMISSED DURING THE YEAR	VARIATION
 MELON	22,790	12,053	10,737	47%
 MANGO	22,172	10,310	11,862	53.5%
 GRAPE	43,507	21,805	21,702	49.8%

Seasonal harvest work prevents people from supporting their families with dignity. With periodic layoffs, many come to rely on relatives, odd jobs, and government cash transfer programs.

This study also found poor working conditions and some cases of abuse, even by certified producers, indicating that much remains to be done to establish relationships that respect the rights of rural workers.

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights¹⁴ established companies' responsibility to conduct due diligence in their supply chains in order to identify, prevent and mitigate any cases of workers' rights abuses. The Principles clearly state that companies must adopt a "know-and-show" stance towards respect for human rights¹⁵ and share responsibility for what happens in their supply chains: "business enterprises may be perceived as being "complicit" in the acts of another party where, for example, they are seen to benefit from an abuse committed by that party".¹⁶ Thus, situations experienced by workers in fruit production also concern companies that buy what they have grown, harvested and processed.

An additional element in this context is poor transparency in the fruit supply chain, which makes it more difficult to identify suppliers who do not respect human rights. Some efforts are being made by Carrefour, Pão de Açúcar and Grupo Big to ensure traceability for the fruit they sell. In their stores, consumers can see that some fruit already have QR Codes¹⁷ showing the farm where they were produced. But what the QR Codes do not show is what are the living conditions of those workers – if they are able to provide housing, food and education for their children and live decent lives.

This Briefing Note is not intended to damage supermarkets' reputation, but rather to encourage them to improve policies and practices regarding their fruit supply chains. And that is not so hard to do: there are good practices in North-East Brazil's fruit growing industry. Some companies pay their workers more than what collective bargaining agreements provide for, while others subsidize transportation and food, offer better working conditions and seek to protect pregnant women, nursing mothers and recent mothers. The idea that "it is better to have a job with few rights than no job at all" does not fit in a world or a country where wealth continues to be generated.

This document is divided into four sections. The first section shows the socioeconomic situation of the workers and its connection with inequality in Brazil. The second section addresses local development in the main North-Eastern municipalities where the fruit industry is important. The third section provides accounts and stories about these workers' lives and the difficulties they face. Finally, the closing section provides recommendations for supermarkets, producers and government.

* * *

"SUPERMARKET CHAINS, LIKE ANY GREAT CORPORATION, EXERCISE STRONG POWER WITHIN SOCIETY AND SHOULD USE THAT POWER TO DO GOOD."

* * *

Ileana Neiva Mousinho –
Labour Prosecution Office
(RN)



Hands holding a mango.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

1. CALLUSED HANDS AND MARKED FACES: THOSE WHO LOSE WITH INEQUALITIES IN BRAZIL

RURAL WORK IS A VECTOR FOR INEQUALITIES

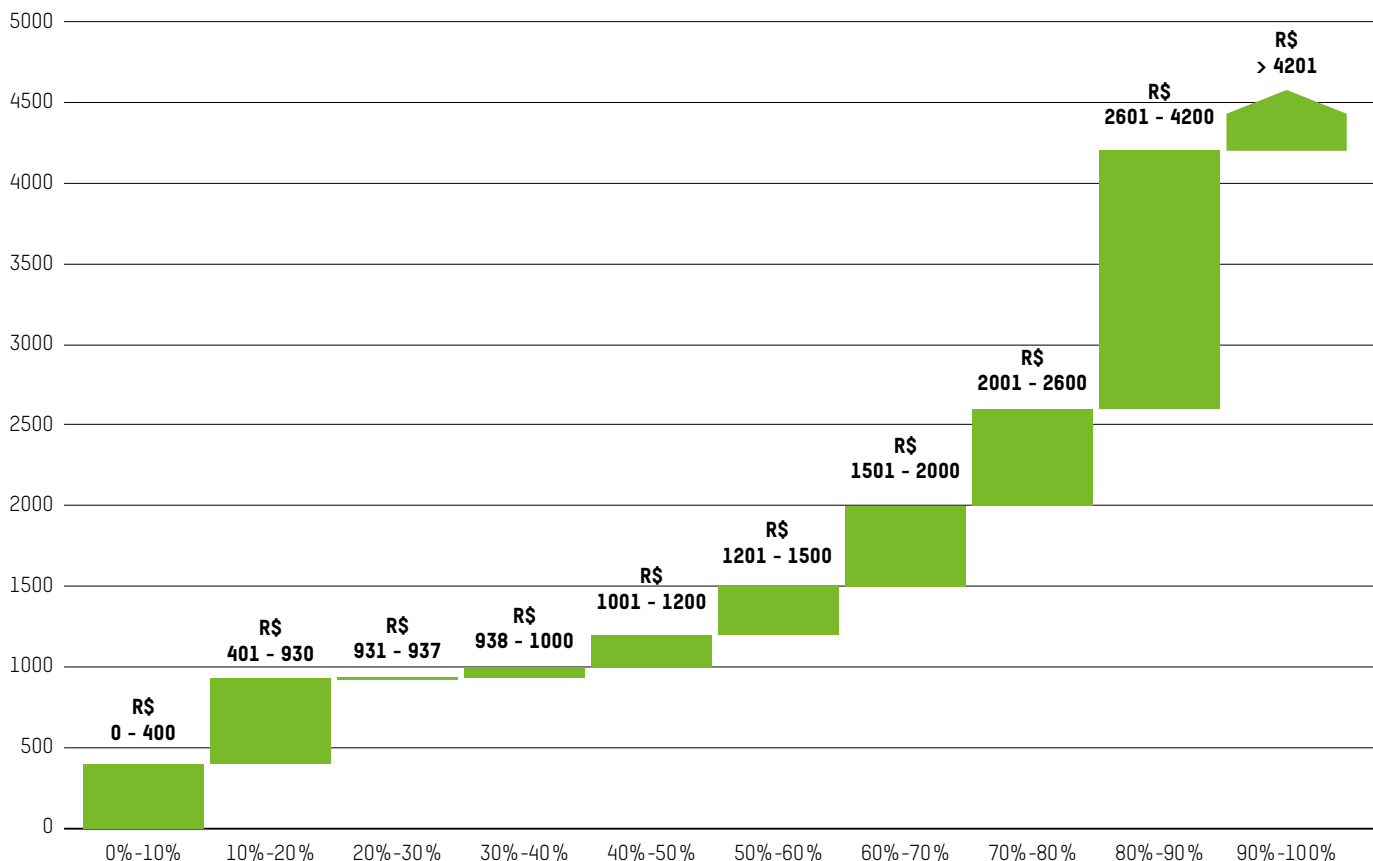
Unfortunately, Brazil is still one of the most unequal countries in the world. About 8% of our population lives below the extreme poverty line established by the World Bank.¹⁸ The poorest 20%, in turn, live on an average family income of R\$ 682.¹⁹

However, between 2002 and 2016, the minimum wage increased by almost 80% in real terms. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), such increase can have an effect on reducing inequalities that is twice as large as cash transfer programs.²⁰

“WE SAY THAT FARM WORKERS EAT ONLY FOR 15 DAYS. BECAUSE WE CAN’T GET TO THE END OF THE MONTH ON WHAT WE EARN. IT’S THE BILLS, MEDICINES, SHOES. IF MY SON GETS SICK IN A MONTH, WE’LL GO HUNGRY, BECAUSE I WON’T LET MY SON BE SICK.”

Robson – Worker – São Francisco Valley

FIGURE 3 – INCOME DECILES OF BRAZIL’S WORKING POPULATION. 2017



Source: IBGE, PNAD Continua 2017. Calculation by Oxfam.

Work is the most important source of income for most families in Brazil and the world.²¹ However, having a job no longer necessarily means escaping poverty. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that one out of three workers in developing countries lives in poverty.²²

This is the situation of many people who work in production of fruit such as melon, mango and grape in North-East Brazil. Since many jobs in fruit growing are temporary, people remain employed only during harvest season – usually three to six months a year. This is not enough to secure an average annual income that provides a decent life for workers and their families. About 50% of people working with these three fruits have been hired and fired in the same year.²³

For instance, a hypothetical melon seasonal worker from the North-Eastern state of Rio Grande do Norte²⁴ is the main provider in her family, but her contract is only for 3 months. For her work in that period she will receive R\$ 4,127.25 on average (not counting any discounts or benefits). If that is her only occupation in the year, her average monthly income will be R\$ 343.94.

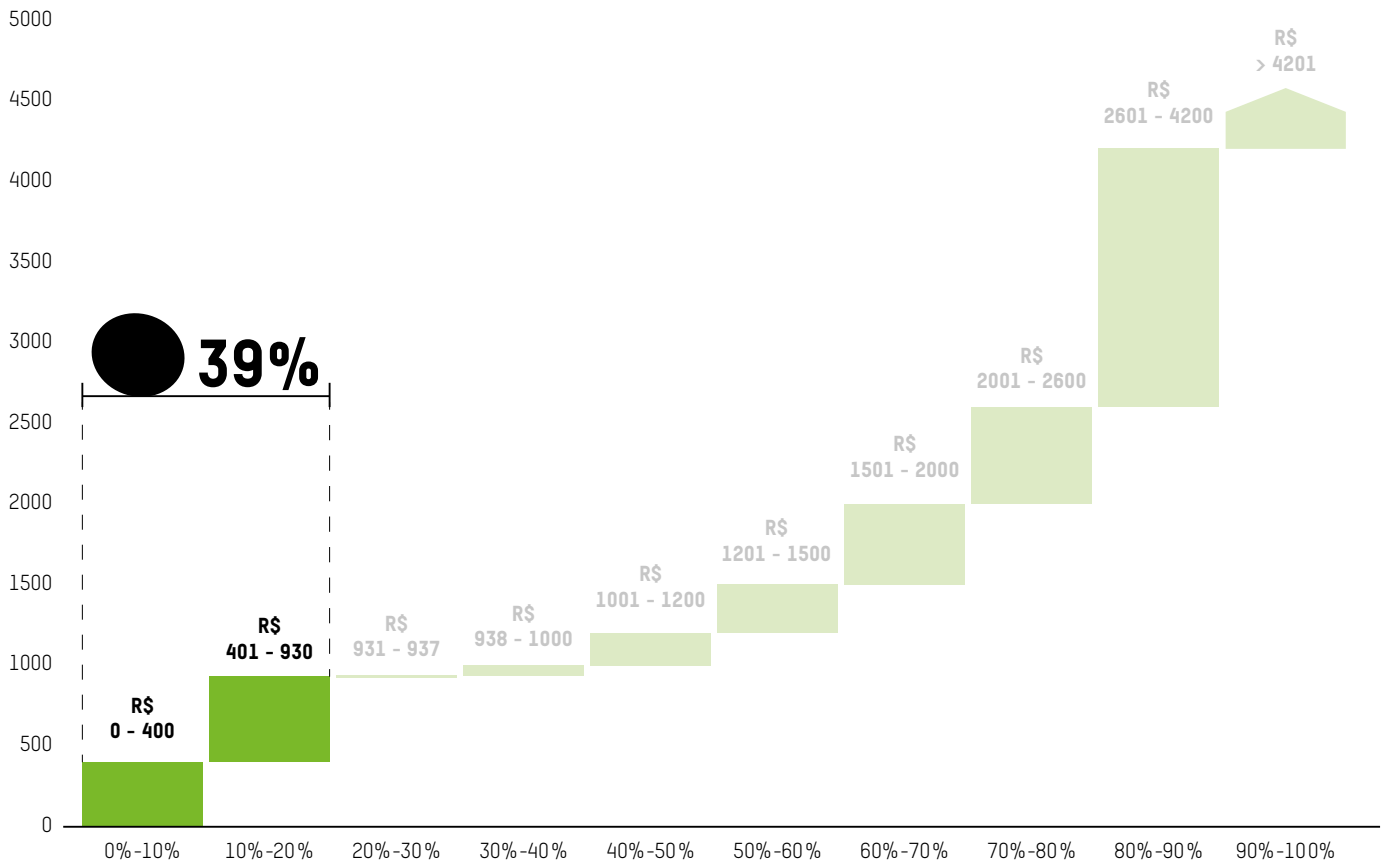
“THE PROBLEM OF SEASONAL HARVEST WORKERS IS VERY COMMON IN THIS STATE. THAT’S VERY COMPLICATED BUSINESS BECAUSE WORKERS ARE HIRED FOR A PERIOD OF THE YEAR BUT THEY DON’T KNOW IF THEY’LL COME BACK NEXT YEAR. THE PROCESS CREATES HIGH VULNERABILITY.”

Jocelino Dantas –
Agricultural Policy Secretary
– FETARN (RN)



Hands holding a melon.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

FIGURE 4 – DECILES OF BRAZIL’S WORKING POPULATION BY INCOME, 2017.
MELON INCOME



Source: IBGE, PNAD Contínua 2017 and RAIS/Ministry of Economy based on the number of active and inactive employment contracts as of December 31, 2017. CNAE Subclass (IBGE): 0119-9/07 Melon cultivation. Calculation by Oxfam.

If her job in melon growing lasts six months in the year, the same person will have received R\$ 8,254.50 for the period worked. If she has no other income in that year, her average monthly income will be R\$ 687.88 – not considering possible discounts or benefits.

These figures show that the income from working in melon places that worker among the poorest people in Brazil. If she gets a three-month contract, she might be at the lowest income distribution level (10% poorest in the country). If the contract is for six months, she will be at the second lowest level. In melon production, 39% of workers remained hired for up to 5.9 months.²⁵

MELON WOMEN: MATERNITY AND UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE

Eridenes Cândida de Lima is a 40-year-old mother and a seasonal worker in Rio Grande do Norte's melon growing. For four seasons she has lived under the expectation of being hired at harvest time and the anxiety of knowing that she will be fired at the end of it.



Eridenes (on a grey shirt), a melon worker from Rio Grande do Norte with her mother and daughter.

Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

When Eridenes is fired after harvest season ends, she lives off odd jobs. "If you have unemployment insurance, it'll help until they call you. If you don't, you'll have to manage somehow." In addition to the odd jobs, she needs help from her 59-year-old mother Terezinha, who is retired and used to work for local fruit companies as well. "When I'm not working, my mom helps with money."

Carmem Priscilla, a melon worker
from Rio Grande do Norte
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil



For five months a year, 25-year-old Carmem Priscila Silva Souza wakes up at 5 am, says goodbye to her husband and her 4-year-old twins Valentina and Vinícius, and rides her motorcycle to work on a melon plantation in Rio Grande do Norte.

She works in the field under the sun, ensuring the quality and beauty of melons. “People who are not used to work find it hard, very tiring, and they give up on the first day.”

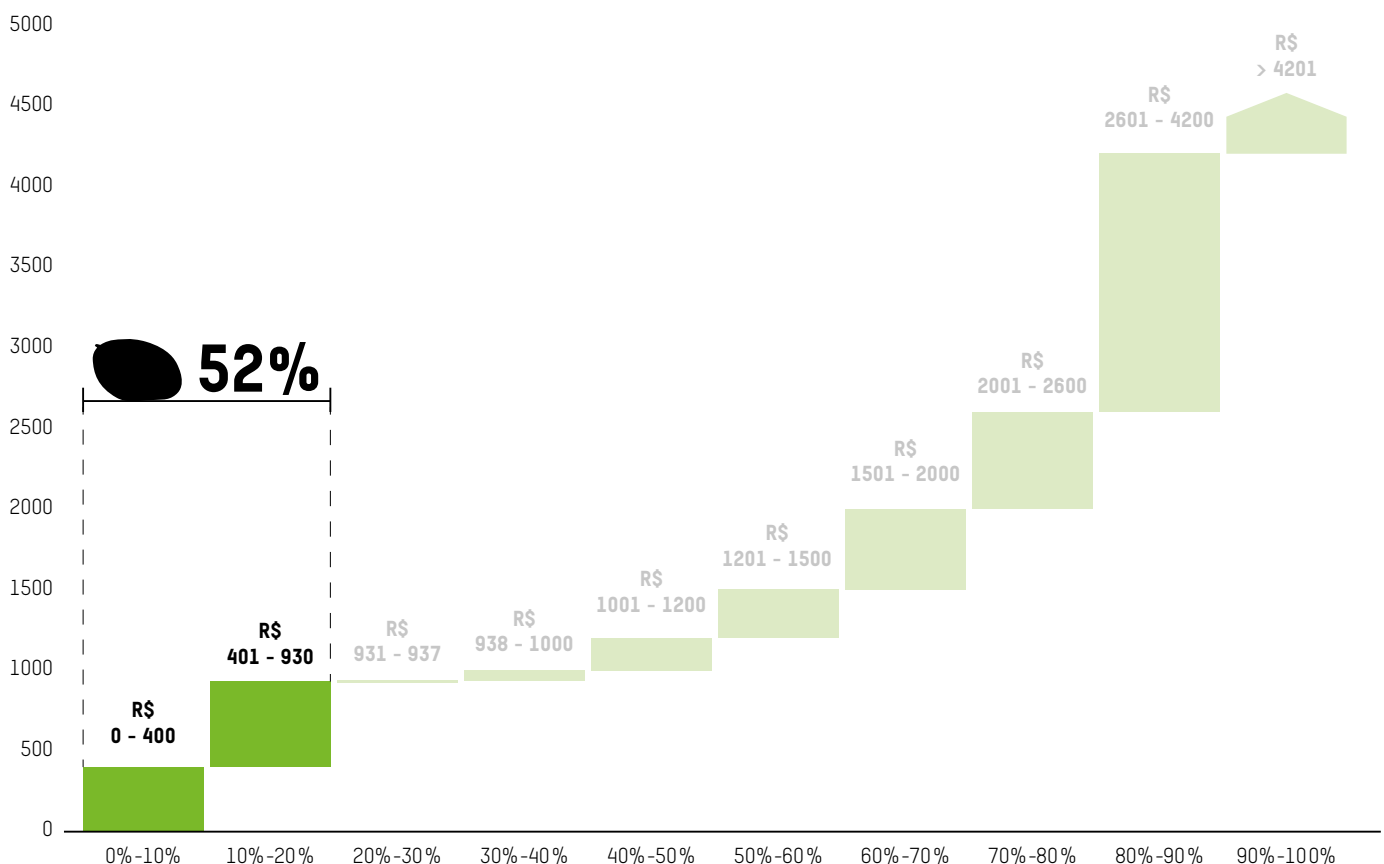
A harvest worker’s life is not easy. “If I don’t get another job, I’ll wait until the next season. Last year I just stayed at home.” When she is employed, Priscila receives R\$ 998. The area is dominated by fruit plantations and there are not many opportunities out of harvest season. “This is very low money for any worker, but it’s better than doing nothing and earning nothing. Jobs here are very scarce.”

Switching from melon to mango, our next hypothetical example is a worker from Bahia.²⁶ He is also his family's main provider, but his seasonal contract lasts only three months. At the end of this period, he will receive R\$ 3,561 on average²⁷ (not considering any discounts and/or benefits). If this is his only income source in the year, he will have to support himself and his family on R\$ 296.75 per month.

If his contract is for six months, at the end of the work period he will have received R\$ 7,122 (not considering any discounts and/or benefits) and if he has no other job in the year, his average monthly income will have been R\$ 593.50.

This average pay for mango workers in the state of Bahia would potentially place him at the lowest level of income distribution in Brazil, the bottom of the inequality scale. Under a six-month contract, they would potentially be at the second lowest level. In 2017, 52% of mango workers were between these two levels.

FIGURE 5 – DECILES OF BRAZIL'S WORKING POPULATION BY INCOME, 2017. MANGO INCOME



Source: IBGE, PNAD Contínua 2017 and RAIS/Ministry of Economy based on the number of active and inactive employment contracts as of December 31, 2017. CNAE Subclass (IBGE): 0133-4/10 Mango cultivation. Calculation by Oxfam.

“THAT WAS NOT WHAT I DREAMED OF FOR MYSELF WHEN I WAS YOUNGER. NOBODY DREAMS OF WORKING IN THESE CONDITIONS. AT 19 I USED TO STUDY, I THOUGHT OF GROWING IN LIFE BY STUDYING, BUT CONDITIONS WEREN'T GOOD. SO, I HAD TO TAKE THIS JOB. SOMEONE WHO WORKS IN THIS AND HAS A CHILD TO SUPPORT WANTS A BETTER JOB.”

Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte



Mango Plantation
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil



Rural worker holding grapes.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam

Going on to grape production, a hypothetical worker from Pernambuco who lives on an average monthly pay of R\$ 1,181.92, for three months will have received R\$ 3,545.76 at the end of her contract (not considering any discounts and/or benefits). If that is her only occupation in the year, her average monthly income over that one-year period will be R\$ 295.48.

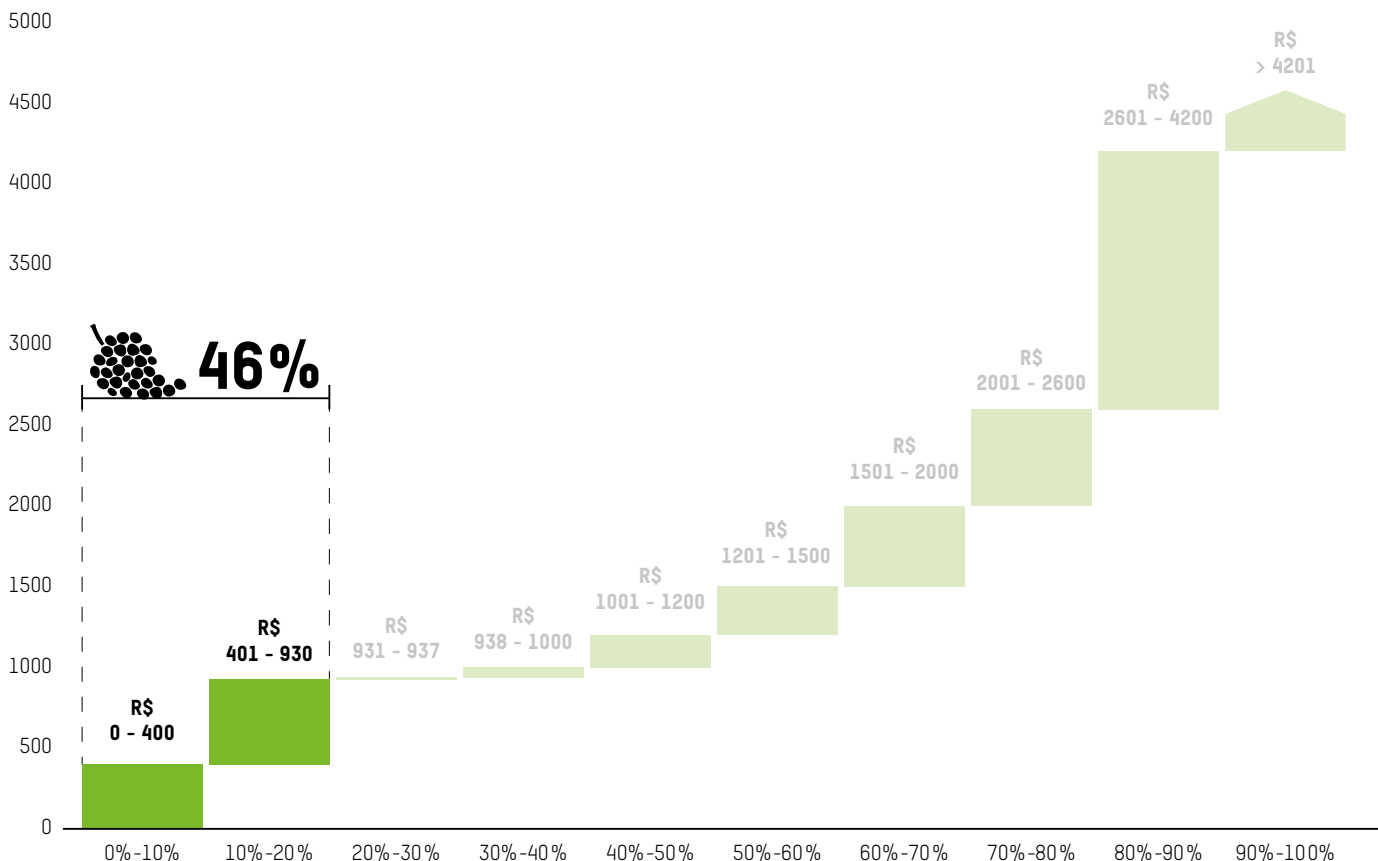
In a six-month contract, she would have been paid R\$ 7,091.52 (not considering any discounts and/or benefits) and, with no other occupation in the year, she would earn an average monthly income of R\$ 590.96.

Considering that three-month contract, the income from working on grape production would potentially place that worker at Brazil's lowest level of income distribution, the poorest 10%. If the contract were for six months, she would potentially be at the second lowest level (poorest 20%). In 2017, this was the reality for 46% of grape workers.

"I FEEL SAD ABOUT MY SALARY. [IF I EARNED MORE] I'D BE ABLE TO PROVIDE A MORE DECENT LIFE TO MY FAMILY. IT'S SAD WHEN THE MONTH ENDS AND YOU HAVE TO DO YOUR SHOPPING, AND WHEN YOU GO HOME, YOU LOOK AT YOUR CHILDREN AND YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE IN YOUR POCKET."

Robson - Worker - São Francisco Valley

FIGURE 6 - DECILES OF BRAZIL'S WORKING POPULATION BY INCOME, 2017. GRAPE INCOME



Source: IBGE, PNAD Continua 2017 and RAIS/Ministry of Economy based on the number of active and inactive employment contracts as of December 31, 2017. CNAE Subclass (IBGE): 0132-6/00 Grape cultivation. Calculation by Oxfam.

RACE AND GENDER INEQUALITIES

Income inequality in Brazil is marked by unresolved structural issues such as racism and *machismo*. In 2017, the average income of a black person was 53% lower than that of a white person while women earned 38% less than men on average.²⁸

Preliminary data from the 2017 Agriculture and Livestock Census indicate that most people employed in rural Brazil – about 53% – are black and brown.²⁹ Using data from the National Continuous Home Sampling Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional de Amostragem Domiciliar Contínua*, PNADC), it is fair to estimate that about two thirds of people working in agriculture in the states of Rio Grande do Norte, Pernambuco and Bahia are black.³⁰ Unfortunately, disaggregated data on the racial profile of fruit workers in Brazil’s North-East are not available.

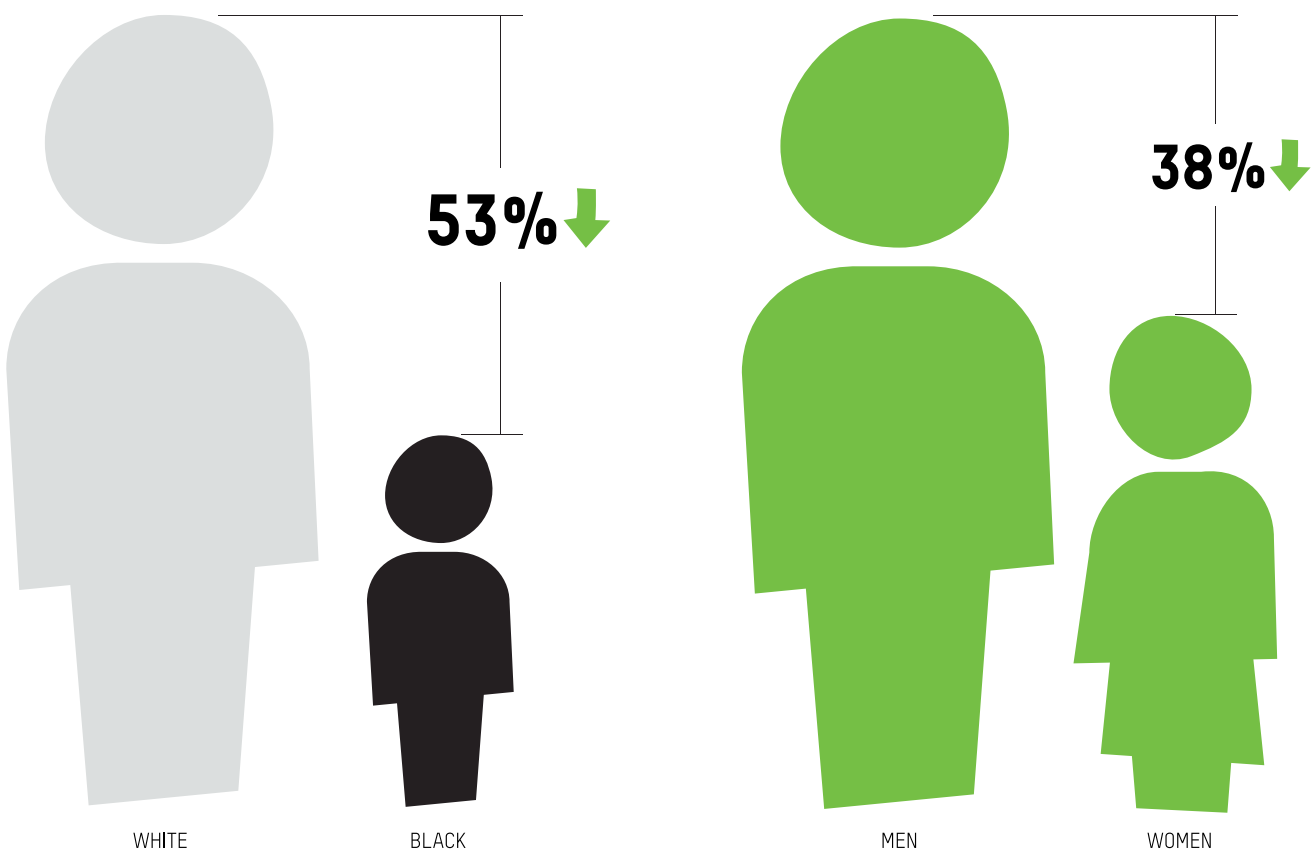
Data from the General Register of Employed and Unemployed People (*Cadastro Geral de Empregados e Desempregados*, CAGED) and the Annual Report on Social Information (*Relação Anual de Informações Sociais*, RAIS) in 2017 show that female melon workers were paid 88% of male workers’ wages while that ratio was 85% in grape. Women working in mango, in turn, earned only 5% less than men. These figures show that while a pay gap marked by gender injustice still exists, the situation in these fruit industries is better than the overall national average. But this should not be celebrated, since receiving 88% of the average male income is no big achievement, especially considering that male income is already very low and is not enough for a decent life. In addition, the number of women working with these fruits, especially melon and mango, is considerably lower than that of men. By the end of 2017, melon growing employed only 12% of women, while female workers were 25% in mango and 38% in grape.³¹

According to a study by Brazil’s Institute of Applied Economic Research (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*, IPEA), most female-headed households in rural Brazil were located in the North-East.³²

“WOMEN DO THINGS THAT MEN ARE ALL FUSSY ABOUT AND WON’T DO, BUT THE COMPANY PREFERS MEN OVER WOMEN. WE ARE THE ONES WHO GET THE JOB DONE AND PRODUCE.”

Eridenes – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

AVERAGE INCOME INEQUALITY IN BRAZIL IN 2017.



THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICIES TO INCREASE THE MINIMUM WAGE FOR REDUCING POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES

Between 2002 and 2016, Brazil experienced consistent increases in the minimum wage. The federal government and Congress ensured raises above inflation as a way of redistributing wealth, reducing income inequality and fighting poverty. That policy was one of the key factors that drove 36 million people out of poverty.³³

Systematic increase in the minimum wage and rural workers' decent lives

Men and women who work to produce food in rural Brazil, at least those formally employed, usually earn around a minimum wage. This is the case of fruit growers in the São Francisco Valley and the state of Rio Grande do Norte.³⁴

Therefore, the minimum wage increase policy has a direct impact on their lives.³⁵ The current government's statements indicate that this policy will not be resumed, which reduces the country's ability to fight poverty and inequality, leaving fruit growing workers even more vulnerable.³⁶

Even though Brazil's minimum wage has increased year after year, it is still far from a living wage. According to the Global Living Wage Coalition, a decent wage *should be "sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the worker and her or his family. Elements of a decent standard of living include food, water, housing, education, health care, transportation, clothing, and other essential needs including provision for unexpected events"*.³⁷

Regardless of government actions, companies that are part of the fruit supply chain can take actions to promote better wages and strive to reach a living wage for workers who plant, harvest and process fruit.

Living wages for workers in fruit growing

The ILO and the *Global Living Wage Coalition* propose that the calculation of living wages should be based on the Anker methodology.³⁸ Generally speaking, it proposes to estimate workers' household expenditures based on a package of expenses: nutritious food, decent housing, other essential needs and a small amount for emergencies. These costs are then divided by the average number of people working full-time in a typical household in the area in question, and potential deductions and taxes are considered.

Some agricultural certifications already address the issue of living wages: The Rainforest Alliance new standard in discussion proposes that farms advance towards living wages, indicating how to calculate them³⁹. The Fairtrade standard is also considering how to establish guidelines for this.⁴⁰

* * *

"IF I EARNED MORE THAN A MINIMUM WAGE, I'D HAVE BUILT A HOUSE. MY OWN HOUSE. I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A HOUSE FOR ME AND MY CHILDREN. TWO BEDROOMS, ONE LIVING ROOM, A KITCHEN, A BATHROOM. A PLACE WHERE I COULD PREPARE MY STUFF TO SELL, BECAUSE I LIKE COOKING."

* * *

Priscila – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte



Rural worker taking care of the wounds on his hands.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

LIVING WAGES

The discussion about living wages, decent wages or minimum wages is supported by Article 7, item IV of Brazil’s Federal Constitution, which states that the minimum wage in the country should “*meet the basic vital needs of a worker and his or her family with housing, food, education, health, leisure, clothing, hygiene, transportation and social security/pension, and undergo periodic raises that preserve its purchasing power*”. Globally, the discussion about a living wage has advanced for workers in agricultural supply chains.

At Oxfam Brasil’s request, DIEESE conducted a preliminary analysis on how to set this figure for fruit growing in Brazil’s North-East using as a reference the Anker methodology.⁴¹ Specific calculations should be made for each locality and the process should be participatory, involving local rural workers’ unions. Companies that are part of agricultural production chains must make progress in the discussion of living wages and living income.

Rio Grande do Norte | Jandaíra

Calculation in Rio Grande do Norte was based on the Anker methodology, using the town of Jandaíra as its reference. The figure obtained was R\$ 1,820.62.

São Francisco Valley | Petrolina and Juazeiro

In the irrigated agriculture hub of the São Francisco Valley, the calculation also followed the Anker methodology and was based on the twin cities of Petrolina (PE) and Juazeiro (BA), with values of R\$ 1,856.25 and R\$ 1,943.17 respectively.



Considering the average wage of mango, melon and grape workers in the states of Bahia, Rio Grande do Norte and Pernambuco, the gap to the living wage based on the Anker methodology will be of 40% for Jandaíra, of 43% for Petrolina, and of 50% for Juazeiro – and of 44% on average.⁴²

LABOUR REFORM, HIGHER RISKS AND FEWER RIGHTS

Many of the protections on which fruit workers depend were put in jeopardy by the Labour Reform passed in 2017, which increased possibilities for outsourcing, even in companies' core business, risking to worsen employment relations in an industry where much of the workforce is temporary (seasonal workers). Added to that is the approval of intermittent employment in which workers are available to the company but are only paid when effectively called on to work – something that could potentially be used during harvest seasons and peak times. Perhaps one of the main setbacks for rural workers was the end of paid commuting time, which in the case of rural workers can be significant.⁴³

Workers' ability to organize and coordinate their demands was also hampered by the Reform. The end of union contributions by payroll deduction without any transitional period left rural workers' unions without the resources to prepare collective bargaining and mobilize their bases. In the rural world, the Reform came at a time when family farmers' and rural workers' unions – called "eclectic" – were splitting and, as a result, many unions had just been created, which made the scenario even more challenging.⁴⁴

When the Labour Reform was announced, the government said that the changes would create jobs and produce economic growth.⁴⁵ One year after its approval in late 2018, the picture was quite different. About 600 thousand people had gone into informality – nearly twice the number of formal jobs created in the period (372 thousand).⁴⁶ That lack of results put Brazil in the ILO list of countries that may be violating labour rights and should explain it to the international organization.⁴⁷ The beginning of the current government has caused new setbacks that are affecting rural workers. The end of the Ministry of Labour and Employment⁴⁸ was a major setback, since it reduced the space for participation and dialogue where those workers could have their demands listened to and met. As a result of budget cuts, inspections on working conditions and modern slavery were reduced. The country already experienced deficit in inspections – according to IPEA, the number of labour auditors would have to be four times higher – from 2,300 to 8 thousand – in order to guarantee ideal enforcement.⁴⁹

These setbacks placed Brazil, for the first time, among the 10 worst countries in the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) list of places where workers have limited access to their rights, are exposed to unfair working practices, face repressive laws, suffer violent response to strikes and demonstrations and their union leaders are intimidated and threatened.⁵⁰

* * *

"WITH THE ADVENT OF LABOUR REFORM, WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN SIGNIFICANT CHANGES BECAUSE A HIGHLY INACCURATE PERCEPTION EMERGED THAT AFTER THE REFORM THERE IS NO LAW ANYMORE. IT'S THE LAW OF THE STRONGEST."

* * *

Calisto Torres – Chief Inspector of the Rio Grande do Norte Regional State Labour and Employment Superintendence



Pesticide being applied to vineyards in Juazeiro.
Photo: Tatiana Cardinal / Oxfam Brasil

2. DEVELOPMENT IN FRUIT-GROWING REGIONS: WEALTH THAT GOES AWAY

INEQUALITIES AND DEVELOPMENT IN TOP FRUIT-GROWING TOWNS

Brazil is an extremely unequal nation. In addition to income, wealth, gender and race gaps, we have regional inequalities.

Fruit growing used to be considered as a major option for regional development in the so-called semiarid region. However, when analysing the situation of the main municipalities producing melon, mango and grape in the São Francisco valley and Rio Grande do Norte states, it does not seem to be the case.

Among the 20 top melon-producing areas in the country, only Mossoró – a large city in Rio Grande do Norte with high economic diversity – has an mHDI (Municipal Human Development Index) above the national average and considered high by the UN Human Development Atlas.⁵¹ The Atlas considers mHDI low in 12 municipalities located in the states of Rio Grande do Norte, Pernambuco, Bahia and Piauí. Information on the Human Development Index (HDI) helps to establish whether the wealth generated by fruit growing is creating local development and contributing to improve the living conditions of the population.⁵²

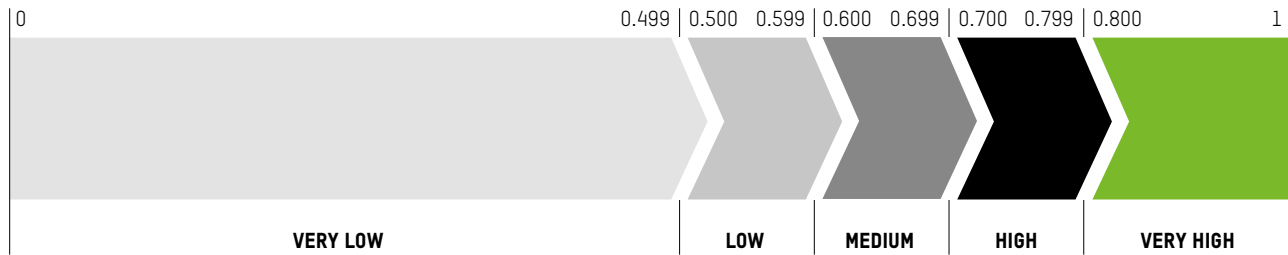
“THERE’S VERY LITTLE WORK IN THIS REGION. IT’S NO USE LEAVING A JOB LIKE THIS AND BEING UNEMPLOYED – QUITTING AND THEN HAVING NOTHING.”

Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte



Village in Ceará
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

FIGURE 7 – MUNICIPAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT RANGES



Source: Atlas of Human Development in Brazil

Among the 20-top mango-producing municipalities, in turn, none of the 11 ones that are located in the North-East has a mHDI above the national average, while five have low mHDI and six have average figures.⁵³

Most of the top grape producers are in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, which accounts for 50% of Brazil’s output. Pernambuco and Bahia, that is, the São Francisco Valley, account for about 35%. But only three municipalities in these two North-Eastern states are among the largest producers. Petrolina (PE) and Juazeiro (BA) have mHDI below the national average, but at the median level; the figure for Lagoa Grande (PE), in turn, is considered low. Importantly, all the other 17 municipalities are all above the national average and have mHDI considered high and even very high.

Beyond mHDI, another socioeconomic analysis of the municipalities with irrigated fruit growing in the São Francisco Valley and Rio Grande do Norte is based on data from social security benefits, which are important for fighting poverty and for income distribution, and contribute to boost the economy of towns in the area. What we observed is that the amounts paid as social security benefits⁵⁴ in the main municipalities producing grapes, mangoes and melons in the São Francisco Valley and Rio Grande do Norte are actually higher than the local agricultural GDP.

“THE MINIMUM WAGE IS VERY LITTLE MONEY FOR ANY WORKER, BUT IT’S BETTER THAN DOING NOTHING AND EARNING NOTHING. JOBS HERE ARE VERY SCARCE.”

Priscila – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

PERCENTAGE REPRESENTED BY RURAL SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS IN MUNICIPALITIES’ AGRICULTURAL GDP			
Largest melon producers in Rio Grande do Norte		Largest grape and mango producers in the São Francisco Valley (BA, PE)	
Açu (RN)	501.4%	Belém do São Francisco (PE)	70.5%
Afonso Bezerra (RN)	141.6%	Lagoa Grande (PE)	35%
Apodi (RN)	153.3%	Orocó (PE)	16.2%
Baraúna (RN)	88.6%	Petrolina (PE)	21.6%
Carnaúba (RN)	91%	Santa Maria da Boa Vista (PE)	41.2%
Governador Dix-Sept Rosado (RN)	253.5%	Casa Nova (BA)	92.5%
Ipanguaçu (RN)	114%	Curaçá (BA)	100.4%
Jandaíra (RN)	97.4%	Dom Basílio (BA)	54.7%
Macau (RN)	79.5%	Juazeiro (BA)	62.4%
Mossoró (RN)	71.4%	Sobradinho (BA)	81.6%

Source: IBGE – National Calculations – Resident Population Estimate – Municipalities’ GDP. Amounts corrected by INPC/IBGE accumulated from January 2017 to December 2018. Calculation commissioned by Oxfam Brasil to DIEESE
 Source: UNDP, Atlas of Human Development in Brazil

These data show that, in the main cities producing grape, mango and melon in Brazil's North-East, rural social security is as relevant to the economy as the industry itself. Given this scenario, the region's current development model should be rethought. Vulnerable fruit workers live in poverty and without living wages, in underdeveloped cities. They are more dependent on social security than on the economic activity created by agriculture. The model must prioritize pay and stability for these workers, who could potentially boost local economies.

Another factor that may contribute to a better understanding of the economic dynamics and development of the main fruit-producing cities is the number of families benefited by the Family Grant Program (*Programa Bolsa Família*, PBF), one of the main government policies to fight poverty in Brazil. Around 50% of families are beneficiaries in more than half the main municipalities producing grape, melon and mango in the irrigation hubs of Rio Grande do Norte and the São Francisco Valley.

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES THAT BENEFIT FROM THE FAMILY GRANT PROGRAM			
Largest MELON PRODUCERS in Rio Grande do Norte		Largest grape and mango producers in the São Francisco Valley (BA, PE)	
Açu (RN)	34.74	Belém do São Francisco (PE)	66.04
Afonso Bezerra (RN)	55.08	Lagoa Grande (PE)	42.82
Apodi (RN)	47.72	Orocó (PE)	68.77
Baraúna (RN)	37.28	Petrolina (PE)	25.92
Carnaúba (RN)	56.36	Santa Maria da Boa Vista (PE)	63.92
Governador Dix-Sept Rosado (RN)	46.23	Casa Nova (BA)	55.49
Ipanguaçu (RN)	31.71	Curaçá (BA)	56.84
Jandaíra (RN)	50.93	Dom Basílio (BA)	40.48
Macau (RN)	29.64	Juazeiro (BA)	38.97
Mossoró (RN)	19.29	Sobradinho (BA)	41.88

Source: Ministry of Social Development, July 2019. Calculation commissioned by Oxfam Brasil to DIEESE.



Grapevine fertigation in Petrolina (PE)
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

3. DOMINO EFFECT: ONE TYPE OF VULNERABILITY LEADS TO ANOTHER, AND SOON COME THE CASES OF ABUSE

Low wages, lack of opportunities in fruit-dominated areas and extreme vulnerability resulting from seasonal worker turnover create a scenario where people working in fruit production – besides being unable to live and provide a decent life for their families – risk having their rights abused and violated.

Life is highly precarious for those whose livelihoods depend on a few fruit companies, which fire and rehire them every year. Such dynamics puts workers in a situation of heavy dependency and instability, where their futures and their families' futures are constantly under threat.

Cases of workers interviewed during research conducted for this Briefing Note are presented in order to shed light on the lives of seasonal fruit workers and how the nature of their work affects their ability to lead decent lives. The studies clarify what is behind the fruit we eat.

* * *

“YOU HAVE TO GO BY THEIR RULES. THEY SORT OF USE PEOPLE. SINCE THERE’S NOT MUCH WORK, THEY THINK PEOPLE ARE SUBJECT TO THEM, TO THEIR WHIMS.”

* * *

Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

Some names have been changed to protect workers' identities, and the producers they work for will not be named. The stories of workers who are named are related to general problems that affect most people – not bad practices at specific farms.

The stories portrayed here express interviewees' opinion and experiences – not necessarily those of Oxfam Brasil. Furthermore, not all employees' accounts in this Report refer to direct suppliers of Carrefour, Pão de Açúcar and Grupo Big.

DISRESPECT, INTIMIDATION AND WOMEN'S DOUBLE BURDEN

In addition to living in instability, lacking a living income and not being able to provide decent lives for their families, female workers have to deal with a male-dominated work environment. In a country whose social relations are pervaded by structural machismo, the situation of women working in fruit growing is tough. Their needs and particularities as working women, often as mothers, are not considered in a predominantly male environment.

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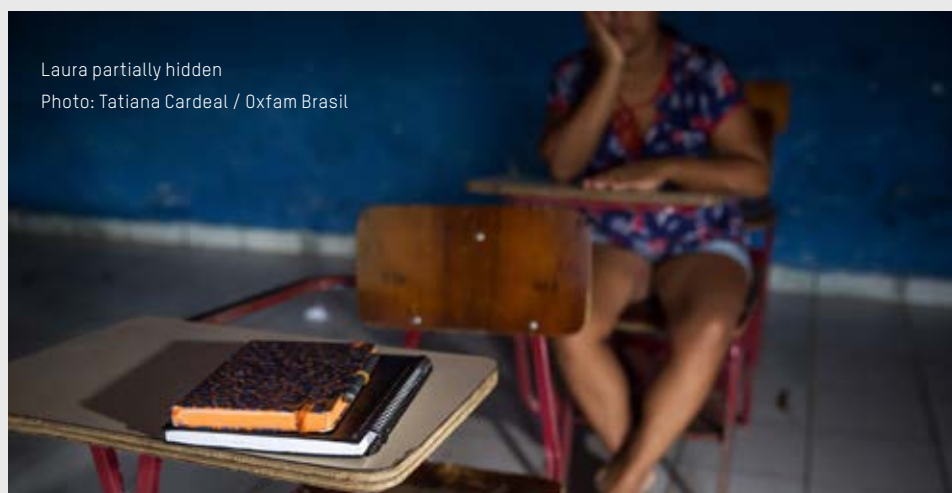
"IF YOU MESS WITH THEM, GO TO COURT FOR ANY REASON, THEY PUT YOU ON A LIST AND YOU WON'T BE HIRED BY OTHER COMPANIES."

* * *

Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

LAURA AND MARIA* – WOMEN IN MANGO: DOUBLE BURDEN AND SHORT CONTRACTS

Laura is 36 years old and has worked for 20 days in the packing house of a mango production company in Rio Grande do Norte. Her contract and those of the other female workers hired in that season were supposed to last 45 days. But then some of them were dismissed without any notice. "They fired some people after 20 days. I went to work and at the end of the day the supervisor told us we were fired. I don't know why", Laura explains. This was her only job in 2018.



Laura partially hidden
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

Working at packing houses is also risky. "When the mangoes go down on the conveyor belt, we select fruit with different sizes and separate them. We wipe the lime powder [Calcium hydroxide] off the fruit with a damp cloth. Our hands get all black because of the mango milk (...) No gloves. Everyone works without gloves. It harms your hands. After a few days, your skin begins to peel off."

At the time, Laura was still nursing her youngest daughter and her routine was tiring. She began her workday at 3:40 pm and finished at 1 am. Her daughter was under her mother's care. Laura recalls one Saturday when she asked to leave work earlier because her daughter was sick with a high fever. At the company, she asked to take her daughter to the clinic. "I had already finished everything, and I asked him to let me go home me earlier. He said: 'No, wait until the end of your hours and then you can leave'. I said nothing and waited. I told him my daughter was sick, that she had a fever, but I had to wait anyway. That really hurt. I cried. I was still breastfeeding my girl. And she was sick, feverish. That hurts any mother", she recalls. "But I had to wait. If you need it, you have to wait. If I didn't need the job, I'd have quit and just left. But we have no job options here."

Mangoes trees with lime.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil



Maria is 28 years old. She has been a seasonal worker for six years at the packing house of a mango company: "I work between three months and 45 days" [per year]. She is in charge of cleaning the fruit that fall from the conveyor belt covered in lime powder. The powder is applied as protection from sunrays. She has worked for the same company during the last 6 years, but she has been repeatedly fired and rehired. And there is no guarantee that she will get the job the following year. Every year she experiences the same uncertainty.

Maria is the mother of an 11-year-old girl. "You only have three months of work guaranteed per year. And pay is low. You can't do everything you want. Sometimes my daughter complains. She is 11 and she doesn't understand much. I keep explaining: 'I can't'."

Maria and Laura also complain about the treatment given to women: "You can drink water, you can go to the water fountain, but they'll be watching", Maria says. "If you take long in the toilet, they'll ask if you have a health problem. Things like that."

* * *

**"I THINK THIS
INTIMIDATION THING
COULD BE BETTER. THIS
CONTROL. YOU WORK
WITH PEOPLE WATCHING
YOU ALL THE TIME."**

* * *

Maria – Worker – Rio Grande
do Norte

Maria partially hidden by a tree.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil



Women working in packing must ask permission to go to the toilet and they also say that their supervisors – always men – control everything: work pace, any talk with co-workers, how many times they go to the toilet and time spent drinking water. "We can go to the toilet only once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Sometimes you ask and they'll let you go 40 minutes, 50 minutes later."

**Fictitious names to protect workers' identities*

POVERTY, EVEN HUNGER

Without stable income and living wages, the lives of families who depend on jobs in fruit growing are very hard. But the reality of these people is even worse as their lives as seasonal workers put them even further away from a minimum income necessary to survive throughout the year. The instability experienced by seasonal workers means that they live under high vulnerability, and any unforeseen event can throw them into extreme poverty and starvation.

Such instability also robs them of their ability to plan for the future or hold any aspirations and dreams of a better life. Every year, they must face the possibility of not being rehired for harvest and this may be the time when they will starve, lose their homes and fall into extreme poverty.

As we saw previously with the rural social security and the Bolsa Familia program, the Brazilian State supports the population in these areas to ensure that they are not forlorn. It is interesting to see how the State supports and maintains these seasonal workers – who are essential for fruit growing – when the industry itself does not provide enough for them to survive all year long.

* * *

“YOU KNOW THAT YOU’LL GET UP TOMORROW AND GO TO WORK, BUT NOTHING WILL BE LEFT FOR YOUR WIFE AND YOUR CHILDREN TO EAT. HOW CAN YOU WORK LIKE THAT? ... SOMETIMES I CRY, HIDDEN FROM MY WIFE AND MY CHILDREN.”

* * *

Robson – Worker – São Francisco Valley



Carlos partially hidden.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

ROBSON AND CÍCERA – FIGHTING FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Robson, 32 years old, and Cícera, 28, have been together for 13 years. They live with their three children in a house still under construction on an squatted plot of land in Curaçá, Bahia. The house's walls are exposed brick, the floor is cement and there are no windows and doors yet, since they weren't able to buy them yet. "We only have money to eat. Still, when the end of the month comes, we have to borrow some money to avoid going hungry", Cícera says.

Robson has been working at the packing house of a large mango-producing company for five years and Cícera has been doing seasonal work for the same company for 3 months or so a year.

Robson, Cícera and their three children.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil



"We have one-month contracts. After 30 days, if we pass the trial period, we go on for another two months. It's four months maximum. Then they fire you and you do nothing for the rest of the year; just wait for the new season", says Cícera.

She looks forward to the months she'll work in harvesting. During that short time of the year, she is able to increase her family's income a little and help pay off the debt to the grocery store where they buy food, often on credit.

With income that is not enough for the couple and their three children, Robson hopes every month that no family member will fall sick and need medicine, for example. "We say that rural workers eat only for 15 days. Because we can't get to the end of the month on what we earn. It's the bills, medicines, shoes. If my son gets sick in a month, we'll go hungry, because I won't let my son be sick", he explains.

A few years ago, Ricardo, their middle child, began to have seizures. Cícera had to go back to her hometown and ask for money in a car with loudspeakers to pay for her son's treatment. "We suffered a lot. We didn't have a house [at the time]. We could either use the money to buy his medication or pay the rent."

Although they no longer pay rent, today they live under the threat of eviction while the plot they squatted is not regularized. Even without paying rent, there is nothing left to build the current family home. The house has no plaster on the walls, its floor is bare, the bedroom where the couple sleeps has no windows, there is not door to close the toilet. The entrance that separates the indoors area from the backyard is improvised with piled bricks and the three children sleep together in a double bed. "If I spend my salary on a door, I won't be able to buy food", Robson says.

"I feel sad about my salary. I'd like to provide a more decent life to my family. It's sad when you get to the end of the month and you have to do your shopping, and then you get home, look at your kids and there's nothing left in your pocket to say 'hey, let's go to the park', because the salary is not enough. Then you choose: either you do your shopping or you have fun", Robson complains.

A sad present and an uncertain future are the feelings that accompany Robson at work. "You know that you'll get up tomorrow, you'll go to work, but nothing will be left for your wife and your children to eat. How can you work like that? ... Sometimes I cry, hidden from my wife and my children".

When Cícera is working, family life gets better. "We can pay the bills, buy more food, we make more out of our salary. In the months she worked, we were able to buy a window and a door. If she worked year-round like me, we'd live in a nicer place, I'd be less worried", Robson says.



Robson, Cícera and their three sons.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

POOR WORKING CONDITIONS

Seasonal fruit workers' vulnerability is linked to their working conditions and lack of opportunities, which makes them highly dependent on those jobs. This may result in violations, which they might tolerate by fear or lack of choice.

Although labour practices are reasonably advanced in North-Eastern fruit growing – which is part of the supply chains of the world's largest supermarkets – abuse and violations persist. It is strange and incoherent to find violations in fruit companies that are known for their good practices in other locations. It is also important to note that many of the large producers hold certifications⁵⁵ such as Global Gap, Rainforest Alliance and Fairtrade. The existence of bad practices shows that certification systems have their failures and that purchasing companies, such as supermarkets, cannot rely solely on them and should make stronger efforts to monitor workers' situations.

* * *

“THE FRUIT ARE WELL TREATED IN THE FIELD, BUT WORKERS ARE NOT TREATED AS GOOD AS FRUIT.”

* * *

Robson – Worker – São Francisco Valley

Farm worker holding a mango
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil



PEDRO AND LUCAS* – DISRESPECT AND HUMILIATION

Pedro is 29 years old and works in the plantations of a large company producing papaya and other fruit in Rio Grande do Norte. He walks down the corridor between the trees in his job applying pesticides to the fruit. Just ahead, a tractor bombards the area with a pesticide solution, leaving the entire environment covered by the substance. Pedro wears protective gear (personal protective equipment – PEE), but he says they are inadequate. He says that when he finishes working, his whole body is wet with the substance, which goes through the clothes that should protect him.

There is no toilet or canteen. Not even running water is available for workers to wash their hands after applying pesticides. “It’s humiliating. We work to make profits for them, but the company doesn’t care about working conditions”, he says.

Without a canteen in the field, they eat in the warehouse, amid work equipment and pesticide and fertilizer containers. “It’s a dirty shed. There are some sinks and taps, but they don’t work. It’s all abandoned. There are some toilets, but they have no water, nothing. They are not good to use. We have to eat under a tree or inside the pump house, along with products like fertilizer and poison. That’s how we eat there”, Pedro says.

According to him, there is no refrigerator to keep the food or a microwave oven to heat it. “I carry it in a bag on top of my motorcycle. I park it under a tree and my lunchbox stays there. There’s no proper place to store meals. Only office staff may use the refrigerator.” The food they bring from home often rots, because workers leave it in the intense heat of the area since when they arrive at work, around 6:30 am. “The food goes bad. When lunch time comes, you can’t eat it. People go hungry.”

Lucas, 25 years old, dropped out of high school and went straight to the papaya fields. When he started at the company in 2013, he worked for 10 months with no formal contract. What he was paid was not enough to support

his wife and baby son. “With that salary, I couldn’t pay the bills. There was always some debt. We’d cover the most urgent expenses such as food and electricity and leave what we couldn’t afford for next month.”

He says that the company did not offered any help. “They used to pay the minimum wage. No benefits, nothing. I was a tractor driver, I worked with poison and they didn’t pay me any hazardous pay or night shift premium, and they should have paid it because I always working on evenings.”

Working conditions in the fields were poor – there was no water, canteen or toilet. “We’d bring lunch and water from home. We used to bring 5 litres of water, which is what we could carry on a motorcycle. If the water runs out, you have to go like that until the end of the day. For lunch, we bring what we can prepare at home in the morning. They don’t have a canteen.”

Fear of unemployment is constant in the lives of fruit workers. “Companies take advantage. They say it to your face: ‘If you don’t work here, where are you going to work?’ I went to ask the company for improvements, to see if they could provide water at least. They said they couldn’t give us water because they couldn’t bring it. I said: what if we asked to leave? They said: ‘That’s up to you. Jobs are scarce in this area and you are going to face the consequences.’”

Disrespect marked the working relationship: “I feel humiliated working like that, with no proper conditions for us. I work because I really need it. Everyone used to complain. We even had a meeting with them, but it came to nothing. They just made promises. We had a meeting with the general manager, but he’s always slipping away, saying he didn’t have much time.”

** Names have been changed to protect workers’ identities*

HEALTH AND CONTAMINATION

According to the latest data available, Brazil is the world's largest consumer of pesticides.⁵⁶ At the same time, almost half of the active ingredients licensed in the country are banned in the European Union.⁵⁷ This scenario raises concerns among consumers and rural workers who are exposed to these substances on a daily basis.

Between 2007 and 2017, the Ministry of Health recorded about 111 thousand cases of people exposed to or poisoned by pesticides in Brazil.⁵⁸ But the problem is that such exposure is underreported. Rural workers seek health services, but many doctors refuse to acknowledge their problems as results of contamination. According to Ileana Neiva Mousinho, a federal labour prosecutor at the Rio Grande do Norte office, "Social Security has been granting benefits under code B31, that is, for problems related to welfare rather than work accidents. (...) the Federal Labor Prosecutor's office has pointed out is the need for both the National Institute of Social Security (*Instituto Nacional de Seguridade Social*, INSS) and the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde, SUS) to look into the links of issues with pesticide use".⁵⁹ Daniel Araújo Saldanha, Environment and Occupational Health director of the Petrolina Rural Workers Union, sees a similar problem to that reported by the Prosecutor. According to him, few doctors will include contamination in diagnosis and the tests used are not the most appropriate because contamination is a result of substance accumulating in bodies over time: "Medical practice does link it to pesticides. Not even the cholinesterase⁶⁰ test that is often conducted indicates pesticide in workers' blood. Its level is 3 thousand to 11 thousand; if the result is 7 thousand or 8 thousand, the person is not intoxicated. There is accumulation, but they are not intoxicated yet. This is the view from the cholinesterase test, which I don't think it's the indicated to show that there is pesticide in a worker's blood".⁶¹

THE BOLSONARO ADMINISTRATION AND PESTICIDES

Of the 290 products licensed between January and July 2019, 41% would be highly toxic and 32% had already been banned in the European Union. This is a record number of permits and it increases uncertainty about the potential for contaminating workers, the environment and consumers.⁶²

In addition to the number of products approved, the government has proposed a new way to classify and label pesticides in Brazil. Regardless of which system is ideal, in practice, this change lowers the risk classification of many pesticides that were previously considered extremely toxic – 34% of the total. In the new list released by the National Health and Sanitation Surveillance Agency (*Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária*, ANVISA) only 2.2% of pesticides are now classified as such.⁶³

"WHEN WE FINISH APPLYING [PESTICIDES], WE DON'T HAVE A PLACE TO WASH OUR HANDS, TO TAKE A SHOWER. WE FINISH APPLYING IT, TAKE OFF OUR OVERALLS AND WAIT TO BEGIN AGAIN. THERE IS NO PLACE FOR YOU TO TAKE A SHOWER, DRINK WATER, RELIEVE YOURSELF. IF YOU NEED A TOILET, USE THE WOODS. THE WATER ... IF YOU WANT TO WASH YOUR HANDS, IT'S THAT BOTTLE WATER YOU DRINK. THEY WON'T GIVE YOU SOAP, JUST WATER."

Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

"LOCAL DOCTORS ARE AFRAID OF SAYING THAT THIS IS CAUSED BY USING OR BEING EXPOSED TO PESTICIDES. WE SEE AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CASES OF WORKERS WITH CANCER IN HOSPITALS. IT MIGHT BE A RESULT OF INDISCRIMINATE USE OF PESTICIDES."

José Manoel dos Santos
– Director – Union of Rural Workers of Juazeiro (BA)



Carlos shows injuries on his back.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

There is no consensus about the long-term effects of constant and intense use of pesticides on the health of workers, people living near plantation areas and consumers. This is a hot topic in debates about the use of these substances. Regardless of the evidence on the risks of pesticide use in Brazil, the country's current policies do not follow the precautionary principle, which is provided for in several international treaties to which it is a signatory.⁶⁴ According to the precautionary principle, lack of scientific certainty due to insufficient evidence should not be used as justification for not taking preventive measures.

Nevertheless, some research has provided evidence on the consequences of pesticide use in Brazil. A study conducted by the Federal University of Mato Grosso and Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) documented contamination of breast milk in 100% of samples collected in Lucas do Rio Verde, a municipality in Mato Grosso state – all samples contained residues from one to six active agrochemical ingredients.⁶⁵ In the state of Ceará, researchers related precocious puberty in children up to six years of age to pesticide contamination,⁶⁶ as well as high incidence of cancer among children and adolescents.⁶⁷ The areas studied in Ceará were irrigation hubs with strong presence of fruit production.

According to Daniel Saldanha from the Petrolina Rural Workers Union, one of the challenges is that contamination is not felt by people. When it happens, “workers don’t feel it at first. What makes them realize it? The number of times they repeat it [return to contaminated area]. Then it starts showing as cancer. The diagnosis usually points to cigarettes and drinking rather than pesticides”.

“I USED TO WEAR GLOVES, THOSE PLASTIC ONES. IT DOESN’T WORK BECAUSE SOMETIMES A HOSE BURSTS, THE PRODUCT ESCAPES AND GETS ON YOU ALL OF A SUDDEN. ONCE A HOSE BURSTED AND I WAS JUST THERE, SITTING ON THE PRODUCT. A POOL OF CHEMICAL PRODUCT. I COULDN’T LEAVE. I SAT ON THE POISON AND THEN I RAN TO TAKE A SHOWER.”

Carlos – Worker – São Francisco Valley

CARLOS, LUCAS AND PEDRO* – HEALTH AT RISK



Carlos partially hidden.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

Carlos, 58 years old, is embarrassed to go out. The few friends who still visit him do not stay long and do not get too close. With his body covered in marks, people are afraid of him. Carlos works as a grape fertirrigator in Petrolina (PE), mixing fertilizers in tanks, and checking and maintaining the hoses on the irrigation system that spray the mixture over the vineyards.

For four months, Carlos has been suffering from itching, open wounds and stains all over his body. "At first it was itching. After 15 days it all started to burst. My hair fell out. I went to the doctor, and look how it got", he explains, showing his arms covered in wounds.

Diagnosed with atopic dermatitis, Carlos believes his problem is a result of contamination. "First, I got an eight-day sick leave. When I came back, I worked two days and the wounds burst again. Then the doctors gave me another 14-day leave. After I came back on the third day of work, the wounds were all over my body again. I ran to the doctor. They gave me 15 days. Then the same thing happened: it all would come back as soon as I returned to work."

According to Carlos, handling fertilizers has its consequences, even for those who wear protection. "When you pour [the powder] into the box, it releases dust. It gets in your body. Some irrigation workers have no hair left on their arms. Others had theirs turned white. Your hair gets white. I just lost everything. I have no body hair left. Eyebrows, everything. It must be because of the fertilizers", he says. The São Francisco Valley Collective Labour Agreement provides for investments in research by employers and trade unions to try and determine how hazardous the fertirrigation practice is for workers.⁶⁸

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"THEY NEED TO GIVE US MORE RESISTANT IPE; THESE ARE VERY WEAK."

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Carlos – Worker – São Francisco Valley

Pedro is 29 years old and works applying pesticides in Jandaíra (Rio Grande do Norte). At lunchtime, he needs to let his pesticide-soaked jumpsuits dry out in the sun, hanging over the tractor or on some tree limb. “When we finish applying [pesticides], we don’t have a place to wash our hands, to take a shower. We finish applying it, take off our jumpsuits and wait to begin again. There is no place for you to take a shower, drink water, a place for you to relieve yourself. If you need a toilet, use the woods. The water ... If you want to wash your hands, use water from that bottle where you drink. They won’t give you soap, just water”.

Pedro wearing his jumpsuit for pesticide application.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil



* * *

“THERE IS NO CANTEEN. WE HAVE TO EAT UNDER A TREE OR INSIDE THE PUMP HOUSE, ALONG WITH PRODUCTS LIKE FERTILIZER AND POISON. THAT’S HOW WE EAT THERE.”

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Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

* * *

“WE CAN’T HAVE BREAKFAST THERE BECAUSE OF THE POISON. THEY’LL LET YOU DO IT BUT IT’S NOT APPROPRIATE. WE WAKE UP, HAVE BREAKFAST AT HOME, PUNCH OUR CARDS AND GO TO THE FIELD. JEANS, BOOTS, LONG SLEEVES. HAT, PROTECTOR, GLOVE, CAP. THEN WE GET SULPHUR ALL OVER BECAUSE OF THE POISON THEY USE. BECAUSE WE WALK AMONG THE FRUIT, BRUSHING, THE SMELL OF SULPHUR STAYS IN OUR CLOTHES.”

* * *

Priscila – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

Twenty-five-year-old Lucas worked applying pesticides on fruit in Jandaíra (Rio Grande do Norte) until 2019, but he has given up. After work, Lucas had no place to take a shower. “You couldn’t even wash your hands before eating. There was no water and no soap. There was no proper place to leave my clothes; I had to wash them at home”, he explains.

Lucas feared what exposure to pesticides might do to his own health and that of his one-year-old son. “I told them about it several times, to see if they improved their PPE (personal protective equipment) and they never said anything. They only said it was not easy and that only in the future they would be able to improve working conditions. I went to the safety supervisor and the manager and told them I had looked up online for information about that poison (glyphosate), that the way we worked there was wrong, and they said the poison we used was weak, it was not a case of hazardous pay, and that we didn’t have to worry about it, that we would be no risks for our health. They were lying all the time.”

**Fictitious names to protect workers’ identities*

**“A TRACTOR OPERATOR
SPRAYS AND CUTS THE
EARTH. HE WORKS WITH
POISON, PESTICIDE, ALL
DAY. THEY GAVE US THE
EQUIPMENT, BUT IT WAS
NO GOOD, SPECIALLY
THE OVERALLS. WE
WOULD WORK AND
WHEN WE FINISHED IT,
IT WAS ALL WET WITH
POISON. AND THEN,
WHEN YOU WERE DONE
THERE WAS NO PLACE
FOR YOU TO TAKE A
SHOWER OR WASH
YOUR HANDS BEFORE
LUNCHBREAK. AND THEN
THE SAME: WHEN IT
WAS TIME TO GO HOME,
WE HAD NO PLACE TO
LEAVE OUR CLOTHES
AND WASH THEM. WE
HAD TO BRING THEM
HOME.”**

Lucas - Worker - Rio Grande
do Norte

Pedro partially hidden.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil



Workers in a mango field.
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

4. CHANGE IS POSSIBLE: GOOD PRACTICES FROM THE FIELD

Seasonal harvest workers do not enjoy many protections even under international conventions. ILO Convention C184 provides for health and safety in agriculture and recognizes that “temporary and seasonal workers [should] receive the same safety and health protection as that accorded to comparable permanent workers”.⁶⁹ Acknowledging is important, but not enough. The nature of seasonal work and workers’ vulnerability should have more space in agricultural policies in both the public and private sectors. Even with little progress, some emerging initiatives aim to protect seasonal workers: *The Ethical Trading Initiative*, which seeks to discuss companies’ best practices for protecting workers in their supply chains, is testing guidelines for supermarkets and food companies regarding migrant and seasonal workers in the Italian tomato chain;⁷⁰ the *Rainforest Alliance* certification is revising its standards and currently is open as to whether or not workers can be employed for up to three months without formal contracts.⁷¹

Field research for this Report found companies with positive practices. Although these initiatives are somewhat isolated and do not mean that those companies have robust and consistent approaches, some of them are worth mentioning.

“WE HAVE GOOD, ESTABLISHED COMPANIES THAT INVEST AND TAKE A CAREFUL APPROACH, BUT MANY OTHERS DO NOT ASSUME THAT RESPONSIBILITY, AND THEY USUALLY GET TO PLACE THEIR PRODUCTS ON THE SAME SHELVES AS THE OTHERS.”

José Manoel dos Santos
– Director – Union of Rural Workers of Juazeiro (BA)

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES ADOPTED BY PRODUCERS

In the state of Rio Grande do Norte, some fruit companies provide workers with daily meals free of charge – breakfast, lunch and dinner with a varied menu. Others provide free transportation with several schedules and routes. Ideally, workers should be paid living wages and decide how to spend them. However, the *Rainforest Alliance* standard, for instance, proposed a protocol to calculate living wages.⁷² It considers that, when food is free of charge and exceeds what workers would have to spend to prepare their own food and bring it to work, the allowance can be included in the calculation of living wages. The same applies to transportation provided by the companies. These are examples of practices that some companies already adopt and contribute to decent wages.

Workers at one company reported that their protective clothing and equipment were kept at the company, which washed them safely to avoid contaminating their home environments with pesticides. This practice shows respect for workers and consideration for their realities, their families and the risks of contamination inherent in rural work.

In the irrigation hub of the São Francisco Valley, some companies pay salaries above the value established by the collective bargaining agreement. In another case, a few companies offer six-month maternity leave to ensure longer breastfeeding periods and avoid contamination risks to the new-borns. Some workers mentioned one company that provided air-conditioned resting areas with wireless internet connections.

Living wages, workers' protection from contamination, transportation, food, comfortable facilities for breaks, and specific conditions for women are aspects that companies must consistently and systematically incorporate into their policies and practices.

* * *

“THE FEW PEOPLE WHO HAVE JOBS FEEL PRIVILEGED. BAD EMPLOYERS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT AND STIFLE THEM IN A WAY THAT THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE A VOICE. WORKERS OFTEN HIDE THE TRUTH WHEN LABOUR INSPECTORS COME TO THE COMPANY. THEY ARE AFRAID.”

* * *

Calisto Torres – Chief Inspector of the Rio Grande do Norte State Labour and Employment Superintendence



Vineyard in Petrolina (PE)
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

A COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT THAT POINTS THE WAY TO DECENT WORK

In the São Francisco Valley, the collective effort made by several labour unions and federations in two states secured a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with provisions that could be replicated in other rural areas. The collective bargaining process included rural workers' unions from Pernambuco (from the cities of Petrolina, Lagoa Grande, Belém do São Francisco, Inajá, Santa Maria da Boa Vista), and Bahia (Juazeiro, Abaré, Curaçá, Sobradinho, Casa Nova and Sento Sé), as well as Sintagro, Conatar, Fetae-PE, Fetag-BA and Fetar-BA. This is the only Collective Agreement in Brazil that covers two states and benefits about 130 thousand workers.⁷³ Despite its fewer items, the Agreement for the fruit growing industry in Rio Grande do Norte covers Açu, Apodi, Baraúna, Caraúbas, Jandaíra, Macau and Mossoró.

As mentioned earlier, after the Labour Reform, today's scenario does not favour rural workers unions.⁷⁴ For this reason, the example of the work conducted in the São Francisco Valley is even more relevant. For instance, the CBA guarantees elected union delegates on farms with more than 15 workers, and their number increases with the number of workers. These delegates reinforce workers' action and their connection with unions.⁷⁵

Even with interesting items, the Collective Agreements in the São Francisco Valley area, as well as in Rio Grande do Norte's fruit growing industry, are still far from guaranteeing living wages. The basic salary for 2018-2019 under both CBAs was R\$ 997 and R\$ 978 respectively.⁷⁶

However, the CBA in the São Francisco Valley includes items aimed at mitigating workers' vulnerability, for instance: a person cannot work under seasonal contracts for more than five months; after that period, if that person is still working, he or she must have a permanent employment contract, that is, for an indefinite period.⁷⁷ The provision does not solve the problem of seasonal workers but it is a step forward.

Other important items address pesticide contamination. For example, the prohibition of working on plantations during rain and shortly after it, to prevent potential harm to workers' health. Or the item establishing that no worker will perform "activities involving handling and application of any type of pesticides for more than six months, and they can only return to these tasks after three-months", or the obligation to provide a place for showering and changing clothes for those who have just performed tasks involving pesticides.⁷⁸

With regard to female workers, the São Francisco Valley Agreement includes provisions to guarantee a half-hour break for breastfeeding during each work shift and crèches for infants or service agreements with private crèches or yet the possibility that breastfeeding mothers take paid leaves if these conditions cannot be provided.⁷⁹

These examples show how broad that CBA is. It would be interesting for fruit companies in other regions to be open to provide the same conditions.

Still, even in the São Francisco Valley, the Collective Bargaining Agreement is often not enforced. And even in an area where unions have been able to secure broader agreements, the basic salary is still far from a living wage.

* * *

"WHAT SHOULD BE IMPROVED? TO TAKE US OUT OF THE SUN. THE COMPANY IS GOOD BUT WORKING IN THE SUN IS BAD."

* * *

Priscila – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

* * *

"DESPITE THE LARGE AMOUNT OF PESTICIDES AND THE HIGH NUMBER OF WORKERS IN THE INDUSTRY WHO ARE IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THESE PRODUCTS, WE LACK RESEARCH AND STATISTICS SHOWING HOW THE POPULATION OF THE SÃO FRANCISCO VALLEY IS DOING, SPECIALLY WORKERS."

* * *

José Manoel dos Santos
– Director – Union of Rural Workers of Juazeiro (BA)



Photo: Shutterstock

THE CONNECTION WITH SUPERMARKETS

As explained in Oxfam’s 2018 report *Ripe for Change*, large supermarkets play a key role in promoting good and decent working conditions in food supply chains.⁸⁰

Tropical fruit produced in the São Francisco Valley and the state of Rio Grande do Norte, such as grape, mango and melon, can be found on the shelves of major supermarkets in Brazil and around the world.

The UN Guiding Principles address the need for companies to exercise due diligence in their supply chains to determine the risk of violating rights and to establish mitigation and remedy. The Principles point out that there may be perceived complicity about companies benefiting from violations committed by others, such as suppliers.⁸¹ The ISO 26000 standard on social responsibility described complicity on three levels: direct complicity, when a company contributes to the violation; beneficial complicity, when a company indirectly benefits from violations committed by others; and silent complicity, when a company benefits from systemic situations without taking the steps to contribute to their solution. Whatever the reference is, the largest supermarkets in Brazil and in the world need to strengthen their responsible management of the products they receive, considering the structural problems present in North-Eastern fruit growing, and contribute to finding solutions.

Besides dominating the industry with 46.6%, Brazil’s largest supermarkets – Carrefour, Pão de Açúcar and Grupo Big – are major corporations that compare to others in the world. Their supply chain responsibility commitments and practices must be compatible with that status.

Carrefour is the largest supermarket chain in Brazil. Originally French, it has operated in the country since 1975 and controls brands such as Carrefour Hipermercado, Carrefour Bairro, Carrefour Express, Atacadão and Supeco. It has taken some initiatives related to food supply chains, such as: it is a member of the Institute for the National Pact to Eradicate Slave Labour (InPacto); it has made a commitment to zero deforestation and animal welfare; its website mentions the use of the Rainforest Alliance seal for the beef chain⁸² and the RSPO seal for palm oil used in its own⁸³ products. It also mentions the “Taste and Quality” initiative, which aims to ensure sustainability and development of farmers and areas for specific products.⁸⁴ Its 2018 sustainability report briefly mentions fresh produce chains, including fruit, pointing to joint planning between suppliers and Carrefour, and stating that 35% of its fruit and vegetables come from suppliers located within 500 kilometres of its stores. A pilot project for its store in Pinheiros, São Paulo includes the date of harvesting and a photo of the supplier on product displays.⁸⁵

Carrefour seems to invest a lot in traceability, which is an important step. The company is a signatory of the Brazilian Association of Supermarkets’ (*Associação Brasileira de Supermercados*, ABRAS) Food Tracking and Monitoring Program (*Programa de Rastreamento e Monitoramento de Alimentos*, RAMA),⁸⁶ which seeks to trace and monitor the use of pesticides in fruit and vegetables. In addition to RAMA, Carrefour reports which private label items undergo social auditing.⁸⁷

However, there are no specific policies and provisions in place for fruit suppliers that include guidance on rural workers’ conditions, especially seasonal workers.

* * *

“I THINK SUPERMARKETS DON’T KNOW WHAT OUR LIFE IS LIKE AS WORKERS. BECAUSE IT IS SOME KIND OF SLAVE LABOUR. I THINK THEY SHOULD BE INFORMED TO TRY TO IMPROVE OUR SITUATION.”

* * *

Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

* * *

“SUPERMARKETS, THE CHAINS THAT BUY AND RESELL THESE PRODUCTS, THEY NEED TO MONITOR WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE PRODUCTION OF THESE FRUITS HERE IN THE SÃO FRANCISCO VALLEY MORE EFFECTIVELY.”

* * *

José Manoel dos Santos
– Director – Union of Rural Workers of Juazeiro (BA)

Pão de Açúcar, the second largest group, was originally a Brazilian company and is now controlled by French supermarket chain Casino. The Pão de Açúcar group has several brands: MultiVarejo, ASSAÍ Atacadista, Viavarejo, Extra, Minuto Pão de Açúcar, MiniExtra, Barateiro and Compre Bem. It has taken actions focused on supply chain responsibility and places their transformation as a priority, to be implemented through monitoring and under socio-environmental criteria for choosing suppliers. Some examples of these actions include: specific socio-environmental policy for beef, where it undertakes to identify the source of 100% of the meat it sells;⁸⁸ commitment to animal welfare in egg supply;⁸⁹ and supply of community products under the “Caras do Brasil” seal. The company works with a quality assurance program for fresh produce such as fruit, called QDO, which monitors products, performs audits and develops action plans. The program works on a voluntary basis and it is not clear whether it includes the situation of fruit workers.⁹⁰

Even though Pão de Açúcar does not specifically mention how fruit supply chains monitoring works for human rights and workers’ condition, it has a Chart of Ethics for Suppliers that addresses wages:

“Aware of the crucial importance of payment for its employees and the people under its responsibility, the Group expects Suppliers to consider the legal minimum wage not as an end in itself but as a limit not to be complied with but to be exceeded; the ultimate goal is that this payment exceeds the employee’s basic needs.”⁹¹

Interestingly, Pão de Açúcar mentions this guideline for its suppliers, in line with the discussion about a living wage and the concerns raised by this Briefing Note about workers in fruit growing. Certainly, this item should be a focus of the company’s due diligence policy.

Grupo Big, formerly Walmart Brazil, came to the country in 1995. In 2018, 80% of its control was bought by the Advent International⁹² investment group and in 2019 it decided to change its brand from Walmart Brazil to Grupo Big.⁹³ Brands under its control include: Big, Hiper Supermercado, Bompreço, Mercadorama, Nacional, Todo Dia, Maxxi and Sam’s club. Grupo Big has initiatives focused on the supply chain, for example: it is a member of InPacto;⁹⁴ it has a commitment to animal welfare in egg supply⁹⁵ and it monitors 100% of beef coming from the Amazon or Cerrado to ensure that no slave labour, deforestation and invasion of indigenous lands or protected areas are involved in it.⁹⁶ In addition, through its Producers Club, Grupo Big says it promotes smallholder farmers and improves working conditions in the field.⁹⁷ It has a Supply Chain Code of Ethics (Responsible Procurement) and a Supplier Agreement, both including guidelines to guarantee good social and environment practices. Grupo Big also claims to conduct audit programs such as “Responsible Procurement, where [they] assess supply chain risk and monitor its conditions through audits and investigations, in addition to providing training and tools for [their] employees and suppliers”.⁹⁸

Grupo Big has a Supplier Standards Manual – a broad document that covers many topics but few specifics for distinct supply chains. In the wage section, it reads, among other things, that suppliers “are encouraged to pay salaries and provide benefits that are sufficient to meet employees’ basic needs and provide employees and their families with free income”.⁹⁹ The inclusion of this item is positive but the language used – “encouraging” – when it comes to wages that “are sufficient to meet [...] basic needs” – seems far from ideal. The manual also addresses health and safety but it does not provide specific guidance on the use of pesticides in fresh food chains such as fruit. Finally, we did not find any specific guidelines for fruit seasonal workers’ status.

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“IF A SUPERMARKET CHAIN IS INTERESTED, PROTECTION TAKES PLACE AT THE ORIGIN. WE’VE HAD EXPERIENCES IN FRUIT GROWING IN WHICH FOREIGN, EUROPEAN BUYERS WOULD PAY A QUICK VISIT TO A FARM FROM WHICH THEY BOUGHT AND WOULD TRANSFORM THOSE CONDITIONS IN NO TIME. THE MESSAGE WAS VERY SIMPLE: ‘EITHER THERE ARE CHANGES OR WE ARE NOT BUYING HERE’.”

* * *

Calisto Torres – Chief Inspector of the Rio Grande do Norte Regional Labour and Employment Superintendence

The assessment of publicly available policies and reports¹⁰⁰ of the three largest supermarkets show that they need to do more about the conditions of fruit supply chain workers. Clear actions need to be taken to protect workers, especially seasonal ones. They must commit to ensuring decent lives for the people who work in fruit production. These actions and commitments must be public and available on their website. Supermarkets should also establish a direct dialogue with these workers, seeking to improve their due diligence and create a process of social dialogue.

Rural workers' unions want to be actively involved in supply chain governance processes, which means understanding and participating in certification processes, whether they are implemented by third parties or by supermarket companies themselves. Social and environmental monitoring should not be conducted only among supermarkets and their suppliers.

Supermarkets also need to improve transparency. The trend towards more transparent and responsible corporate practices in supply chains should lead them to disclose their suppliers from farm to store.¹⁰¹ In addition, social and environmental policies guiding product supply, as well as the results of monitoring processes in the supply chains and reporting channels, must be public.

Progress in transparency regarding pesticides is necessary and urgent. Current efforts at traceability are positive but should include more information and more disclosure. One of the challenges faced by rural workers and their unions is knowing exactly which pesticides are being used and whether they comply with legislation and requirements by customers and certifications. It is important for supermarkets to start publishing and demanding that producers disclose lists of all pesticides used in fruit.

As major players in the fruit supply chain, supermarkets can and should contribute to increasing society's knowledge of risks posed by pesticides by supporting research about their consequences for workers, nearby communities, the environment and consumers.

* * *

"IT'S HUMILIATION. WE WORK TO MAKE PROFITS FOR THEM, BUT THE COMPANY DOESN'T CARE ABOUT WORKING CONDITIONS."

* * *

Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

SUPERMARKETS IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES

In addition to the largest Brazilian supermarket companies, the fruit industry in North-East Brazil also supplies large supermarkets in Europe and the United States. Oxfam is also demanding that supermarkets improve their policies and practices for fruit suppliers in England, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and the United States.

Some supermarkets assessed and campaigned upon by Oxfam in other countries include: Ahold, Albertsons, Aldi, Aldi South, Costco, Edeka, Jumbo, Kroger, Lidl, Morrisons, Plus, Rewe, Sainsbury, Tesco, Walmart and Wholefoods.



Mango plantation
Photo: Vitor Shimomura / Oxfam Brasil

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to reduce inequalities, contribute to social justice, respect for rights and sustainable development, large companies must assume their responsibilities and take steps to improve working conditions in their supply chains. Large supermarkets play a key role in the fresh food supply chain – including the fruit production in Brazil’s North-East – and therefore have special responsibility.

They must commit themselves and get directly involved in building solutions, ensuring that they are undertaking appropriate due diligence processes and contributing to the respect of human rights and local development.

In addition to large supermarkets, other actors must work to help the women and men who grow and harvest the fruit we eat to have decent lives.

Large local producers must assume their share of the responsibility and take proactive and open stances, paying living wages and ending seasonal workers’ extreme vulnerability. The Brazilian government must also assume its responsibility and resume the policies that sought to value rural workers and ensure respect for human rights.

Other businesses that source fruit from the region, such as food and beverage companies, banks and investors that fund fruit production etc should also read this Briefing Note, consider their responsibility and take action to help improve the situation. Next, Oxfam Brasil presents a set of initial recommendations to large supermarkets and fruit producers.

SUPERMARKETS

Supermarkets should:

- Commit publicly to the dignity of workers who grow, harvest and process fruit crops.
- Include specific provisions on living wages for fruit supply chain workers and seasonal workers’ vulnerabilities, especially women, in their policies for sustainability, human rights, responsible sourcing or others.
- Improve transparency in their fruit supply chains by annually publishing supplier lists up to farm level, by fruit, including farm name and location/address.¹⁰²
- Engage directly in a social dialogue process with fruit unions in North-East Brazil that informs companies’ due diligence on human rights. Promote women’s participation in due diligence and consultation processes with rural workers and their unions.

“BECAUSE OF THAT INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY, IT IS INADMISSIBLE THAT THEY LOOK THE OTHER WAY WHEN IT COMES TO THE EFFECTS OF RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THEIR SUPPLY CHAINS. THEREFORE, THEY CANNOT ESCAPE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY IN THE PRODUCTIVE CHAIN.”

Ileana Neiva Mousinho
– prosecutor – Labour
Prosecution Service (RN)

“IF [SUPERMARKETS] ARE BUYING THE PRODUCT, THEY SHOULD LOOK INTO IT, TO KNOW HOW THINGS WORK. BECAUSE EVERYTHING ARRIVES PERFECTLY TO THEM OVER THERE, BUT IT’S THROUGH US, WITH OUR EFFORT AND SWEAT.”

Eridenes – Worker – Rio
Grande do Norte

- Provide training to rural unions on certifications and supplier audit processes, as well as their respective complaint mechanisms, allowing proper participation of rural workers' unions in these processes; promote women's participation in training and information-sharing processes.
- Support independent academic studies on the consequences of pesticides for rural workers, including the use of fertirrigation on grape. Such studies should consider specific impacts on women.
- Annually disclose on their websites the list of pesticides used in each type of fruit sold at their stores and require that their suppliers to do the same.
- Undertake an independent human rights impact assessment focusing on seasonal fruit workers, especially women, and whether their jobs allow them to lead decent lives; publish that study on their website.
- Promote the right to collective bargaining and free association in agricultural supply chains and require collective agreements as a condition for doing business, even for suppliers from supply chains from outside Brazil.

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"IF MAJOR SUPERMARKET OWNERS AGREE TO SAY THAT 'YOU SHOULD IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS, OTHERWISE WE WON'T BUY', I THINK IT WOULD IMPROVE."

* * *

Pedro – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

PRODUCERS

Fruit producers should:

- Engage with unions in constructive negotiations about wages, working conditions and permanent employment, including living wages in fruit growing; engage with unions in monitoring how these measures are put into practice.
- Establish negotiating tables with trade unions to discuss solutions to mitigate seasonal workers' vulnerability.
- Map and replicate the best practices used in the industry, especially replicating the provisions of the São Francisco Valley Collective Bargaining Agreement in other states.
- Annually disclose the list of pesticides used for each type of fruit produced.
- Support independent academic studies on the consequences of agrochemicals, including the use of fertirrigation on grapes.

* * *

"I'VE WORKED FOR MANY YEARS AND I'VE NEVER SEEN LABOUR PROSECUTORS THERE. THEY SHOULD BE MONITORING IT TO SEE WHAT LABORERS' SITUATION IS LIKE, IF IT'S ALL ACCORDING TO THE LAW. BECAUSE WHEN YOU HAVE AN INSPECTION, THEY ORGANIZE IT ALL VERY WELL. YOU HAVE TO COME BY SURPRISE TO SEE WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE."

* * *

Eridenes – Worker – Rio Grande do Norte

GOVERNMENT

Governments should:

- Resume the policy for real increases in the value of the national minimum wage.
- Ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 87 on freedom of association and protection of the right to organize.
- Establish a moratorium on licensing of new pesticides and review recent licenses granted in Brazil to ensure proper protection against risks to workers' health, the environment and consumers.



Farm worker holding a mango
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

NOTAS

- 1 On August 31, 2011, the ILO published *Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 29 Estimating a Living Wage: A Methodological Review*. It became known as the Anker methodology (after its author). Using this methodology at Oxfam Brasil's request, DIEESE calculated the living wage for the cities of Jandaíra in the state of Rio Grande do Norte (Anker value of R\$ 1820.62), Petrolina in Pernambuco (Anker value of R\$ 1943.17) and Juazeiro in Bahia (Anker value of R\$ 1856.25). The average value was calculated based on data from RAIS/Ministry of Labour, considering the number of active and inactive employees on December 31, 2017. CNAE Subclass (IBGE): 0119-9/07 Melon growing; 0133-4/10 Mango growing; 0132-6/00 Grape growing. Average wages in mango, grape and melon in Bahia, respectively: R\$ 1,187.00, R\$ 1,257.52 and R\$ 1,119.19; in Pernambuco, mango, grape and melon respectively: R\$ 1,312.01, R\$ 1,181.92 and R\$ 1,236.44; in Rio Grande do Norte, mango, grape and melon respectively: R\$ 1,464.17, R\$ 1516.49 and R\$ 1,375.75.
- 2 Calculation based on the Brazilian Association of Supermarkets' (ABRAS) Yearbook published by *Superhiper* magazine in April 2018. To request a copy, please contact: <http://www.abras.com.br/superhiper/>
- 3 The three companies have already received several sustainability awards, for example: Grupo **Big** (ex-Walmart Brasil) <https://exame.abril.com.br/negocios/exame-elegewalmart-empresa-sustentavel-ano-511672/>; **Pão de Açúcar** <https://www.akatu.org.br/noticia/pao-de-acucarconquista-premio-de-mais-sustentavel-do-varejo-nobrazilian-retail-week/>; **Carrefour**: <http://www.abras.com.br/clip.ping.php?area=31&clipping=67644>
- 4 According to the Municipal Agricultural Production (*Produção Agrícola Municipal*, PAM) survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE/2017. The PAM analyses 23 fruit products, three of them classified as temporary crops (pineapple, watermelon and melon) and 20 considered as permanent crops (avocado, açaí, banana, persimmon, cashew nuts, coconut, fig, guava, orange, lemon, apple, papaya, mango, passion fruit, quince, walnut, pear, peach, tangerine and grape). The sum of production values for these products was R\$ 38.9 billion.
- 5 A Hora de Mudar, Oxfam 2018. Available at: <https://oxfam.org.br/setor-privado-e-direitos-humanos/por-tras-dopreco/hora-de-mudar/>
- 6 In 2018 and 2019, Oxfam Brasil conducted about 57 in-depth interviews with workers and experts in 11 municipalities where fruit growing is concentrated: Baraúna, Mossoró, Apodi, Ipangaçu, Macau, Jandaíra and Natal (Rio Grande do Norte), Limoeiro do Norte (Ceará), Petrolina (Pernambuco), Juazeiro and Curaçá (Bahia). Oxfam Brasil hired NGO Papel Social (<http://www.papelsocial.com.br/>) to help with investigative journalism. DIEESE took part with research on labour and economic data. Dutch organization Profundo (<https://www.profundo.nl>) was also hired to conduct research on the connection between Brazil's fruit chains and European markets.
- 7 According to PNAD Contínua 2017 (IBGE). Calculation by Oxfam.
- 8 Source: Associação Brasileira de Produtores Exportadores de Frutas e Derivados: <https://abrafrutas.org/2019/05/09/exportacoes-brasileiras-de-frutas-janeiro-a-dezembro-2018/>. Last accessed September 11, 2019
- 9 European and North American supermarkets buy tropical fruit from different countries throughout the year. Producers wait for the second half of the year to increase their production and seize the opportunity when Brazil, due to climate conditions, becomes the only country able to serve these markets. For example, throughout the year only 7% of mangoes imported by the US come from Brazil, but the figure increases to 48% in September and October (based on the 2016-2018 average). Sources: National Mango Board (2019) Three-year trends of US Mango Imports by Country & Month, 2016-2018 https://www.mango.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/3_Year_Trend_16_18_Eng.pdf. Last accessed August 22, 2019. The cycle for the national melon and grape is similar to that of mango.
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- 11 DIEESE (2019), A produção de frutas no Brasil – produtos selecionados.
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- 102 A similar level of detail is required by the Sustainable Palm Oil Roundtable (RSPO) <https://rspo.org/>



Farm workers at lunch break
Photo: Tatiana Cardeal / Oxfam Brasil

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