



## **Assessing the effects of Sello Manos Campesinas (Peasant-Hands Seal) on smallholders participating in the programme**

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### **Abstract:**

*The ‘Sello Manos Campesinas’ programme aims to make peasant farming visible by certifying four attributes that consumers recognise as proper from peasant farmers: i.e. originated from peasant farmers, artisanal production, healthy, and fostering local development. Two years after beginning operations, we collected information from focus groups in regards to the motivations of farmers for participating in the programme. With this information, we constructed a survey to evaluate those motivations and assess the effects and changes brought about by the seal on farmers businesses. This survey was applied to 100 farmers throughout the country. We identified three motivations for applying to be certified under the programme: improving sales, valuing the product and the production process, and receiving a personal recognition. However, for all practical purposes, their motivations were mainly for trading: raising product value, access new sales channels, and selling more products at a better price. Our results show that farmers actually use and promote the seal and that sales figures are promising, in spite of the scarce promotion of this seal to consumers. This situation could be explained as this seal makes customers trust the product, hence transforming their purchasing intentions.*

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# Assessing the effects of Sello Manos Campesinas (Peasant-Hands Seal) on smallholders participating in the programme

## 1 Abstract

The '*Sello Manos Campesinas*' programme aims to make peasant farming visible by certifying four attributes that consumers recognise as proper from peasant farmers: i.e. originated from peasant farmers, artisanal production, healthy, and fostering local development. Two years after beginning operations, we collected information from focus groups in regards to the motivations of farmers for participating in the programme. With this information, we constructed a survey to evaluate those motivations and assess the effects and changes brought about by the seal on farmers businesses. This survey was applied to 100 farmers throughout the country. We identified three motivations for applying to be certified under the programme: improving sales, valuing the product and the production process, and receiving a personal recognition. However, for all practical purposes, their motivations were mainly for trading: raising product value, access new sales channels, and selling more products at a better price. Our results show that farmers actually use and promote the seal and that sales figures are promising, in spite of the scarce promotion of this seal to consumers. This situation could be explained as this seal makes customers trust the product, hence transforming their purchasing intentions.

Keywords: rural family farming, peasant-hands seal, certification scheme, peasant-farmer product, trust

## 2 Introduction

Productivity growth in agriculture has enabled farmers to produce a greater abundance of food at lower real prices. Lower prices and rising incomes, have allowed consumers to spend a smaller share of their disposable income on food purchases (Fuglie y Rada, 2012). Over the last

60 years, Total Factor Productivity (TFP) for Latin America and the Caribbean has grown at average rates of 1.40%, in spite of some setbacks (e.g. Peru in the 70s, Argentina and Venezuela in the 80s and Paraguay in the 90s). The main drivers of this growth has been scale-enlargement, intensification, specialisation and a strong trend towards industrialisation within some sectors of agriculture (van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2000). Yet, this has brought about a paradox, as rural exodus became the inevitable outcome of this model; an exodus precipitated by declining farm numbers and a sharp drop in employment opportunities. Overall, this situation reflects that the raw value of agriculture has grown less than the costs associated to greater production, which in turn has reduced farm gross margins. In other words, all the efforts made by many agricultural economists and other experts, ended up harming a major part of farmers. For example, 61% of dairy farms in Chile that had less than 100 cows disappeared between 1997 and 2007. Other countries, such as United Kingdom, New Zealand and Ireland showed similar situations. This development model is characterised by an increased productivity and especially by intensification via external supplies and genetic improvement. It has been an advantageous model for farming, but it has also created tensions with other areas in regards to landscape, nature, environment, and product quality. The conflict with societal expectations from agriculture is evident and likely to increase. Even sizeable segments of farmers themselves are questioning the validity of this model, in light of their own interests, prospects and perspectives (van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2000).

In this scenario, exploring ways of increasing product value becomes an interesting option to increase income over costs. This would imply giving another meaning to rural development, which currently implies the creation of new products and services, and the establishment of new markets (van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2000). Increasing product value of agricultural enterprises requires building links with markets that farmers cannot currently access or have no connections with. These markets have emerged as a consequence of the feeling of distrust that make consumers wary of products traded within conventional, globalised circuits, and results in a direct connection between farmers and consumers that creates new conventions about quality. Numerous names have been coined to identify these new markets, including alternative food networks, alternative food supply chains, and short supply chains. Though those names mean somewhat different things, they do have some common attributes that set them apart from traditional and industrial channels. First, their consumers are reflective, conscious and

critical players, that buy and consume in an ethical, aesthetic, and political manner. Second, farmers and consumers share common knowledge about food and how it is produced, creating a link between subject-matter and its meaning. Finally, they are not opposite but an alternative to dominant circuits (Goodmann *et al.*, 2012). In these markets, trust is simply a set of socially constructed criteria and product quality is not defined by formal standards, but by a range of socially constructed food quality criteria (Marsden, 1998). These criteria, originated from face-to-face communication between farmers and consumers, are a set of civic, domestic, and respect conventions (Kirwan, 2006). In specific markets (e.g. organic), formal or institutional conventions may also play a role (Migliore *et al.*, 2015).

The idea of implementing seals, as means to make noticeable those products and services related to smallholder farming in each country, was boosted in various instances of the Mercosur, back on 2007. Hence, Brasil launched the programme '*Aquí tem agricultura familiar*' (Portuguese for 'Here, you have family farming') on 2009, Argentina the seal '*Producido por la Agricultura Familiar*' (Spanish for 'Produced by family farming') on 2015, Chile the '*Sello Manos Campesinas*' (Spanish for 'Peasant Hands Seal', Figure 1) seal on 2015, and Paraguay the '*Chokokue Rembiapo*' (Guaraní for 'farmer's work') seal on 2017. Even though all these programmes follow the original principle of highlighting the work of small-scale farming or family farming, each one has fundamental differences in regards to their origin, operation, and purpose.

**Figure 1: Official 4-colours version of "Sello Manos Campesinas"**



The 'Sello Manos Campesinas®' Seal (SMC) has three fundamental differences with programmes from those other countries mentioned above, and these differences somehow set what effects could be expected from it. One difference is that this seal is focused on consumer demand for peasant-farmer products. A previous study by Köbrich *et al.* (2014) identified that consumers willing to buy peasant products or committed to support the development of family farming demand a seal should certify that products are effectively from peasant origin, of artisanal production, healthy, and promoting local development. The second difference is that the seal certifies both the product and the farmer; therefore, it is not enough for the farmer to fulfil its requirements. The third difference is that its design and management is in charge of a Technical Committee that comprises representatives from peasant-farmers organisations, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the University of Chile. The purpose behind these appointments is to guarantee its transparency and objectivity, while also avoiding that this Seal becomes an policy instrument.

More than two years after starting up the programme, we were curious about the effects that this seal has had on the participant farmers, especially those that entered the programme before 2017. In the study that laid the foundations of the SMC, farmers said that this kind of seal could help them grow their sales, access new markets, position their products, open opportunities in farm tourism, and for some of them it may even mean procuring better prices or reducing the middlemen (Köbrich *et al.*, 2014). Having that in mind, the aim of this study was to assess the changes triggered by the SMC programme in certified farmers. In particular, we determined their motivations and expectations that led them to participate in the programme, as well as characterising any changes that the SMC brought into their lives.

### **3 Material and Methods**

This research comprised two stages. The first was an exploratory stage that aimed to construct hypotheses for the kind of effects that the SMC might have on farmers. To this end, we convened a focus group comprised of 13 farmers in the Valparaíso Region, and another one comprised of 8 farmers in the Maule Region. We chose these regions because they have the largest number of farmers participating in the SMC and a great diversity of product types. After collating the qualitative information provided by the focus groups, we were able to define three hypotheses regarding the effects of the SMC programme. The first hypothesis proposed that the SMC

programme improves sales of peasant-farmer products, by either increasing the amount of products sold, raising product prices, gaining access to more markets, or accessing better ones instead. The second hypothesis proposed that the SMC programme is a distinction for both the product and the production process followed by farmers. Lastly, the third hypothesis proposed that the SMC programme is a personal distinction for farmers themselves; hence, it would raise their own confidence and self-esteem.

On the second stage, we determined validity and strength of our hypotheses by measuring business outcomes of farmers awarded with the seal. To collect primary information, we designed a survey, including both open- and close-ended questions, structured around three major topics. The first topic revolved around motivations, expectations and how farmers used the seal. The second topic comprised sales, trade visibility, and access to new markets. The last topic grouped valuation of individual labour, appreciation by peers, and appreciation by third-persons. Before applying this survey though, we applied a pilot survey via phone calls to five randomly chosen farmers, endeavoured to detect any problems in our questions regarding readability and wording. Finally, we proceeded with collecting production information, and on September of 2017 we contacted all 180 farmers that entered the SMC programme in 2015 and 2016. From this universe of participants, we received 100 validly answered surveys, which represented a reply rate of 55.5%.

Variables were analysed using contingency tables and descriptive statistics. Significant differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) were established by using Chi-Squared and Somers' D tests for sex, geographical zone, and product type. In addition, farmers were analysed regarding SMC programme adoption rate and their satisfaction with it. To evaluate adoption rates, we constructed an index adding the values of three variables related to the SMC use: '*Farmer uses the seal*', '*Products where the seal sticker is used*', and '*Farmer directs the attention of customers to the SMC Seal*'. For the variable '*Farmer uses the seal*', a value of 0 means no, 0.5 means that farmer was not able to do it, and 1 means yes. For '*Products where the seal sticker is used*', values ranged from 0 for none to 100% for on all products. Lastly, the variable '*Farmer directs the attention of customers to the SMC Seal*' had values 0 for never, 0.25 rarely, 0.5 occasionally, 0.75 generally, and 1 always. Consequently, the *Adoption Rate Index* could show values ranging from 0 to 3. We built a typology of four farmer profiles to analyse Farmers' satisfaction with the seal, using *K-means* and variables reflecting farmer satisfaction with the seal. The seven variables,

which compared actual (with seal) with previous season results (i.e. with and without SMC), were:

- *Amount sold*: -2 means much less; -1 means less; 0 means the same amount; 1 means more; and 2 means much more
- *Sale price*: -2 means much less; -1 means less; 0 means the same price; 1 means more; 2 means much more
- *New customers*: 0 means no; 1 means yes
- *New sales channels*: amount, values ranged from 0 to 3
- *New contacts*: 0 means no; 1 means yes
- *Sought new customers*: 0 means no; 1 means yes
- *Effects on the farmer*: -1 means 'the SMC it was a bad idea', 0 means that 'it had no effect', or 1, 2, 3, or 4 which means the seal had, 1, 2, 3, or 4 positive effects.

## **4 Results and discussion**

Of all surveyed farmers, 32% sold fresh foods (mostly produce), 30% processed foods of both plant and animal origin (e.g. jams, pickles, dairy, honey), 34% non-food products (mainly handicrafts), and 4% alcohols (e.g. wine, spirits, and beers). In this survey, 59% of the respondents were women, with a significant relationship between sex and product type. Overall, three women for each man sold processed foods, handicrafts, or alcohols. On the other hand, there were three men for each woman in the case of fresh foods. Respondents were from all over the country; 6% were from the North Zone, 18% from Central Chile, 28% from the Central-South, 45% from the South, and 3% from the Southernmost Zone. We could not find differences in the distribution of sex and area according to each zone.

The main motivation of participants for entering the programme was to improve trading conditions of their products, whether it is making clients appreciate or commend the quality of these products (50%), opening new trading channels (19%), or simply increasing their sales and at a better price than before (7%). Another 11% of our respondents pointed out that the seal would be a recognition of their own value, as a farmer. These results are consistent with what farmers declared in the study that supported the creation of SMC (Köbrich *et al*, 2014).

programme. Back then, they stated that having a seal in their products represented the chance to differentiate their own products from those of their competitors and, therefore, the possibility to access new markets and sale opportunities. Some of them mentioned as well that the seal should be paired to better prices. Another interesting finding was that opinions varied depending on the sex of respondents, and consequently, also among product types. Whereas women assigned relatively more importance to highlight the product itself and valuing themselves as farmers, men gave greater importance to having more market channels and improving their sales results. Fulfilment of those expectations seems to have been quite high, at least from the perspective of sales results. In fact, 51% of respondents declared having had better sales than the previous season, and 39% did so at greater prices, as well. Some farmers, though, reported that they had less sales (17%) or that they sold their products at lower prices (8%), mostly due to situations outside of their control, such as a greater competition or because of a fall in product demand.

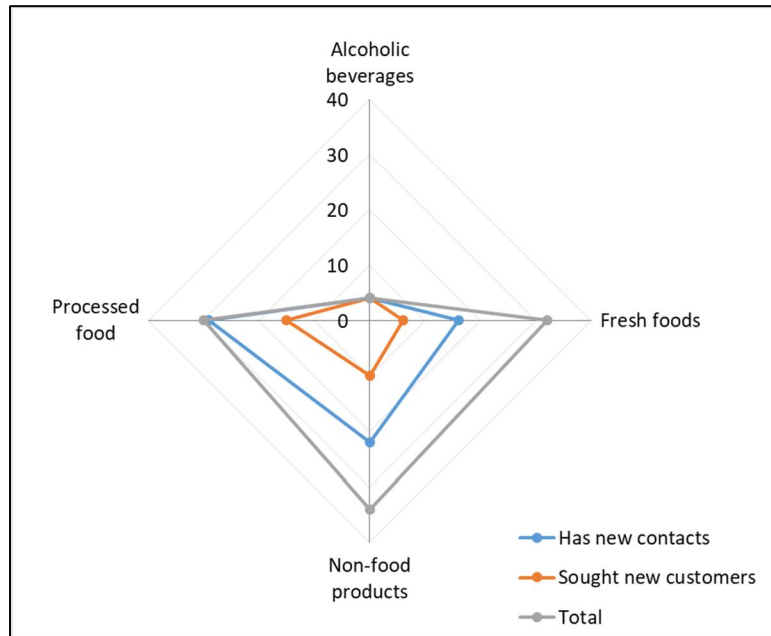
As for the differences among product types, the greater improvements we observed occurred in the price of non-food products, the price of products sold by women, and in the amount of processed products that were sold. The SMC programme played an important role in the improvement of those sales. Specifically, half of the farmers that sold more products, and a third of those who sold them at better prices, stated that it happened because of the seal. Another third reported that they sold at a better price due to improvements in the quality of their product; it is not quite clear though, whether said improvement was influenced by the seal or not.

On the subject of sales channels and clients, we found strong contrast (Figure 2) between the situation of those who made new contacts and those who sought for them. On one end, every producer of alcoholic beverages sought and found new contacts, while on the other less than half of fresh-food farmers was contacted by new customers and only a few actively sought for them so to enhance their sales. Similarly, whereas almost every producer of processed foods had new contacts, less than half made an effort to find new customers. These findings make evident that, though the SMC programme would increase the visibility of farmers before potential customers, it is not enough to change the willingness of producers to engage in seeking for new clients. These results also suggest that it is necessary to explore more carefully which are the current sale channels and if product types determine which channels are used. Knowing



the answers would allow to design an appropriate programme to improve marketing skills, complementary to the SMC programme. Such programme that should take into account the requirements and of each product type, especially for fresh foods and non-food products, which have more difficulties finding new clients.

Figure 2. Number of farmers, farmers that had new contacts and farmers that sought new customers according to product type (n)



These results are quite interesting, considering that the promotion of SMC to buyers has been rather limited. To this date, promotion and advertisement of the seal has been restricted to a reduced number of fairs and events that cater to consumers and companies, but it has not been made widely known to the public through mass sale channels. Although no studies have explored this assumption, it seems evident that knowledge of meaning and guarantees offered by the seal is very limited. In spite of that, buyers could recognise SMC as sign of quality and, therefore modify their shopping behaviour based on that perception. Surely, trust plays an important role in this change (Giampietri et al., 2018). Trust was mentioned in a previous study by Sáez *et al.* (2013), where 90% of consumers stated that the presence of a seal in peasant-farmer products is an important attribute to reinforce trust in them. An extreme example of such situation was reported by a flower farmer, who told how the seal was the crucial factor for

one customer to decide on buying her products for the export market. These results agree with a study about the impacts of the Fair Trade Seal on the business operations of coffee farmers (Dragusanu y Nunn, 2017), who indicated that exporting their crops was the main goal for using that seal in their products.

Analysing the adoption of the SMC programme, we found that half of the respondents achieved a score of 2.5 or higher, which means that they performed two entire promotion activities plus another partial one. The most performed activities were always using the seal (though only in 60% of their products), and informing the customer that they were granted such seal. Only 8% of the respondents performed barely one partial activity. Unsurprisingly, these farmers were the same ones that did not report good sales results. They explained their behaviour by declaring that prices had fell slightly, that they did not dare to seek new customers, and that they regarded the seal as a personal award. In contrast, those farmers that had a higher adoption rate (23%) also had sold more products, had more customers, and more channels available to sell them, and they attributed these results to the seal. Furthermore, the farmers belonging to the 50% that showed a very high adoption rate reckoned that customers value the seal. They also reported that they had larger sales, at a slightly higher price, as well as being contacted by more customers and having secured new channels for selling their products. In summary, farmers recognise the positive effects brought about by SMC, and in this case the greater adoption rates were found among women and producers of processed foods and non-food products.

Lastly, the typology represents groups of farmers whose satisfaction differences are evident. One type are the farmers who are *pleased* with the programme (6%). They advertise that they have been awarded the SMC and sell more products and at better prices. They highlight the seal on their products and to the customers, who they reckon value knowing that the farmers are certified by the programme. Another farmer type felt just *satisfied* about the programme (20%). They declared using the seal in many of their products, having improved their sales figures, but selling at the same price. This group cares about the SMC programme, but they reckon that consumers do not place that much value on it. Overall, farmers in this group are satisfied with their results though not delighted with them, and on their final comments they credit the programme for some positive effects on their businesses, even to the point of recommending that it should be promoted more widely so to increase its potential value. The following farmer

type (29%) showed *unfulfilled expectations* about the programme. These farmers used the SMC and reckoned that customers do value it, which does have some positive effects. However, they reported that their sales have not improved and that they had not been contacted much, as well as not daring to seek for new customers. The last farmer type (45%) were those *indifferent* about the programme, and reported that they are not using much the seal. They have sold less products and believe that customers do not care about the seal, which is why they have not highlighted their certification in this programme. The typology presents some differences based on sex of the respondents and the product category. In particular, every farmer of the *pleased type* and three quarters of those in the *satisfied type*, were women. Meanwhile, 53% of all men belonged to the *indifferent type*, among them 62.5% sold fresh products such as fruits and vegetables, which is the product category that showed the programmes' lowest adoption rate.

## 5 Conclusions

The SMC programme was fostered jointly by small farmer organisations, the Ministry of Agriculture and the University of Chile. Unsurprisingly, it has progressed slowly, something that could be expected according to the scientific literature on this subject (Kneafsey *et. al.*, 2013). Since its establishment back on 2015, the programmes' Technical Committee has focused on setting technical regulations, designing operational procedures and incorporating small farmers. However, due to strategical reasons, promotion of seal "Sello Manos Campesinas" to customers and development of sales channels to offer their products had to be delayed, even though the latter is especially important. In spite of the above, results of this work show that SMC has actually triggered changes that are recognised by participant farmers, even though these changes may not be important yet. Analysing our results, we observed that farmers entered the programme having expectations of improving their commercial development, mostly by enhancing the value of their products, as well as increasing their sales figures and the price of their products. Remarkably, 51% of farmers declared having improved their sales and half of them believed this success was due to the seal. The fact that customers may prefer seal-bearing products, either by buying more products or by paying better prices, implies that the SMC has brought about a change on the perception they have regarding these products. This is an important finding for a seal that is rather unfamiliar to customers. In the actual scenario, the only reference that customers is the seals' logo and an explanation delivered by the farmers

themselves, who may not understand its real meaning. In fact, more than half of these farmers did not know that the seal embodied four attributes (peasant farmer, healthy, artisanal, and fostering of local development). This situation brings to mind the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which states that a precise behaviour depends on the intention to perform an action and that this intention is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. If that theory is correct, then trust must play a role in the farmer-customer relationship as suggested by Giampietry *et al.* (2018). According to farmers, SMC confers confidence and security to customers at the time of purchasing or consuming any product or service sourced from rural family farmers, as this programme certifies the production processes as well as the product itself. Such a vision is not far removed from reality as the presence of a seal in peasant-farmer products is an important attribute of trustfulness (Sáez *et al.*, 2013).

Looking at the different product types, we found that farmers who were less keen on using the seal were those selling produce and fresh-food products. We are not aware though if that situation happened because of factors that are inherent to those products (e.g. perishability, seasonality, low production volume) and are therefore difficult to change. Or, it could also be due to factors are linked to customary trading operations, such as selling their products to middlemen or at wholesale volumes. Thus, studying those elements would be important to learn how to tackle trading strategies for seal-bearing products that could favour selling them on places such as rural markets, or maybe to the government through public purchases systems. Nonetheless, the fact that produce and fresh-foods farmers show greater difficulties for finding new customers points in the direction of structural problems related to the product itself.

Results showed that women adopted the programme to a greater extent than men. This finding hints that women are more optimistic when facing changes and feel more in control of their business than men feel. They also are more skilled and show a positive attitude towards the seal. A patent example of those traits is the fact that the 'pleased' group is entirely composed of women.

Based on the above information, we can conclude that the '*Sello Manos Campesinas*' programme has effectively set in motion positive changes for farmers, especially for those who work with processed products and handicrafts. These participants have been able of selling more products, as well as adjusting their prices against competitors, and feeling recognised not only by their peers or families, but also by potential customers.

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