

Title: Work in agriculture: its measurement and remuneration. Methodological issues and contributions to thinking about the evolution of agricultural models

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Topic:

The attractiveness of agricultural work is a subject of public debate in several countries. Often, both the questions of the remuneration of farm labor and the amount of work (work load, working time) play an essential role in this debate (Finger and El Benni, 2021). Evaluations of agricultural work and incomes are also used to discuss the emergence or disappearance of agricultural models—understood here in a broad sense as types of enterprises (family farming, agribusiness, etc.) and production practices (e.g., organic farming, agroforestry, plantations, monoculture, ranching, etc.) (Dumont and Baret, 2017, Scott and Visser, 2022, Bainville et al., 2025). Furthermore, discussing work evolutions through its metrics allows to contribute to a better understanding of long-term historical dynamics such as capital accumulation, labor concentration or relations between labor and capital (Jakobsen, 2021).

Yet, measuring labor and income in agriculture raises significant methodological challenges, which partly explains why research on this issue remains limited. Various methods exist for assessing farmer's income, some of which rely on accounting data that, often collected for tax purposes, is not designed to assess labor remuneration. The challenge becomes even greater when linking income to the quantity of work performed. Most studies focus on counting the number of people involved for farmers or family workers and the total full-time equivalents for waged workers. However, they rarely capture actual working time distribution (e.g., days per month or hours per day) or their distribution throughout the year. Assessing the contribution of family labor adds another complexity by requiring distinguishing between farm work and domestic tasks. For the hired workers, measuring their contribution require to evaluate the work actually done rather than legal declarations and the wage actually received, which include informal income and/or social security coverage (Barham et al., 2020).

Overall, these challenges in measuring agricultural work and income affect all types of agricultural workers, independent and salaried. Both the South and North national agricultures and their specificities are affected by global transformations such as increased international labor division, work migrations, and capital concentration (Christiaensen et al, 2021). As such, the need to build tools to try to build precise and factual evaluations of agricultural labor remuneration become increasingly central.

Aims:

Drawing on both field studies and statistical approaches based on databases, this session will explore these methodological challenges and seek to address the following questions: How can agricultural labor be quantified? Which productivity indicators are most relevant for different purposes, and what role should labor productivity play? How can indicators of labor remuneration and work quantity be adapted to different types of agricultural enterprises (family farms, employer-run farms, agribusinesses, agricultural contractors, etc.) and agricultural workers (farmers, family workers, waged workers, independent or salaried subcontractors, etc.)? How to adapt indicators to consider disparities in labor between productions and countries?

The session will also use these analyses to reflect on broader changes in employment and agricultural models: Is physical labor productivity still increasing? Should it be? How to compare work and income done by workers under different statuses? Do farm workers work as many hours as other workers?

What are the different working time patterns for different types of workers? What are the implications of agroecological and agribusinesses practices for labor requirements and remuneration? What respective shares should be given to public subsidies and product prices in farmers' and farmworkers' income? How to compare their incomes to wages prevailing in other economic sectors? How to measure impacts of agricultural policies on labor and incomes?

Format:

Several sessions of 1,5 hours organized per geographical area or per sub-topic depending on the submissions received.

References

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