

**CONTROVERSIAL**

issue

**COUNTERPOINT**

necessary

Deconstructing narratives  
about the production of  
tobacco in Brazil.





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**“ It is important to learn how to stop being annoyed by opinions that differ from your opinions, but be willing to understand how they arose. If after having a grasp of them they still seem false to you, then you can fight them with more efficiency than just remaining shocked. Lots of men make the mistake of replacing knowledge with the affirmation that what they desire is true ”**

*British mathematician and philosopher (1872-1970)*



## about facts and perceptions

Facts exist. And, about them, perceptions. It has always been like that. In a digital society, the volume and the speed at which information is disseminated, besides the superficiality with which a great part of these pieces of information are understood, make it easy to manipulate them into false conclusions. When, in spite of available information, perceptions override facts, we are facing a difficult and embarrassing situation – which could induce us to mistakes and wrong decisions.

People responsible for public policies know that facts do not always prevail. This is what is now happening with the discussions about the production of tobacco in Brazil, the top global exporter of this century-old agricultural product that generates, on average, US\$ 2 billion in annual revenue from the Brazilian exports, cultivated by 130 thousand smallholders, in rural holdings in the South of the Country, spread across 490 municipalities in the South Region.

The debate, still restricted to a group of historically inflexible persons in their fight against tobacco, gets even more enraged on occasions like COP 10. In February 2024, Panama was the venue for the Conference of the Parties of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (COP 10). At the international meeting, held every other year, the debates are about how to reduce the consumption and limit or extinguish the production of tobacco.

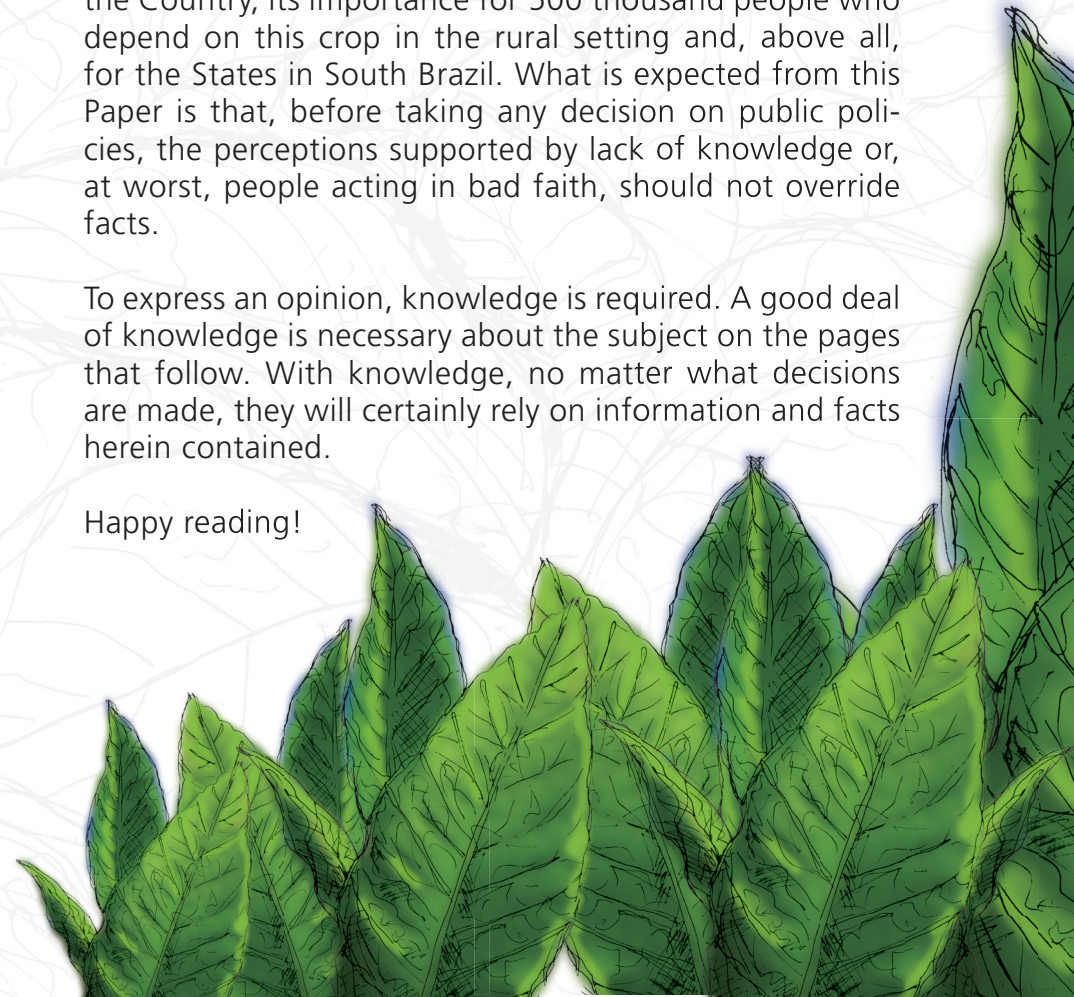
At such moments, the Brazilian representatives who attend the meeting have to endure the pressures. With ar-

guments that blame the production of tobacco in Brazil for limiting the production of food crops, thus contributing towards global hunger. No matter to what extent they lack logical and real support, such narratives are made known to society as objectives and realities in paid advertising campaigns, in most cases, sponsored by international organizations.

For believing in the healthy exercise of ample debate and in decisions supported by real facts, this paper was produced. In it, you will see the facts, data, numbers, and the economic relevance of the sector for the economy of the Country, its importance for 500 thousand people who depend on this crop in the rural setting and, above all, for the States in South Brazil. What is expected from this Paper is that, before taking any decision on public policies, the perceptions supported by lack of knowledge or, at worst, people acting in bad faith, should not override facts.

To express an opinion, knowledge is required. A good deal of knowledge is necessary about the subject on the pages that follow. With knowledge, no matter what decisions are made, they will certainly rely on information and facts herein contained.

Happy reading!





# context

## **tobacco is agro**



The tobacco supply chain is one of the most organized and developed in Brazilian agriculture. Thanks to the links created among producers, companies and class entities, through the Integrated Tobacco Production System (ITPS), which goes back to the early 20th century, the cultivation of tobacco in South Brazil is one of the safest and most sustainable activities.

The sector is a pioneer in such practices as diversification, soil conservation, areas for reforestation and reverse logistics regarding the empty pesticide containers used in the cultivation of the crop. Healthcare needs for the farmers is also an essential premise: it is the only organized supply chain that provides free technical assistance, and advises the farmers on the correct use of PPEs and proper harvest clothing – created exclusively for this type of worker.

Even so, tobacco is frequently viewed as a marginal crop in Brazilian agribusiness. This document is aimed at demystifying and providing the necessary counterpoint to those who insist on denying the obvious: tobacco is agro!



# the history of tobacco in Brazil

In Brazil, everything starts with the indigenous people. With tobacco it was not different. When the first Portuguese set foot on the ground, on this side of the Atlantic, tobacco was grown by almost all indigenous tribes. The plant had a sacred character, and was used in rites and for medicinal purposes, as a cure for injuries, migraines and stomachaches. The Indians consumed it in different forms: they either ate, drank, chewed, inhaled or smoked it.

From a medicinal plant to an export type product, everything happened in a flash. Tobacco was one of the first products exported by the country. As early as in the first century of Brazil's history, the surpluses of the crop cultivated by the Portuguese peasants, for their own consumption, were shipped to Europe. During the 17th century, tobacco became one of the main Brazilian products traded by the Portuguese Empire. The fields, which initially were concentrated between Salvador and Recife, particularly in the region known as Recôncavo Baiano, gained momentum only after the Declaration of Independence, in 1822.

As soon as the first European immigrants began to arrive, at the turn of the 19th century, the cultivation of tobacco soon started in the South of the country, and was particularly cultivated by German immigrants. Over the 20th century, the crop began to shift from the Northeast, which produces dark tobaccos, to the South, which opted for light-colored leaf tobacco. Both types have always been exported, but as production and

quality of tobacco in the South improved, its share in exports increased accordingly.

The foreign sales began to soar in line with international demand. In the period after the First World War, there was an expressive increase. After the Second World War, sales grew even more expressively, in particular, due to the industrialization process and the modernization of the factories that deal with the byproducts of the tobacco supply chain. On the other hand, all agricultural practices have evolved, resulting into increasingly sophisticated raw material. It was only in the 1970s that Brazilian tobacco definitely conquered the world.

## **THE GROWTH OF BRAZILIAN TOBACCO**

In the 1970s, a political crisis in the country then known as Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, generated more demand for the tobacco produced here. When dictator Robert Mugabe seized power in Zimbabwe, he sent away all British tobacco farmers, practically putting an end to the production of tobacco in that country. Having similar soil and climate conditions, Brazil naturally filled the gap left behind by Zimbabwe, thus turning into a reference for international clients.

The crisis in Zimbabwe, now again a relevant tobacco producer, and the smaller crops in the United States were relevant ingredients for Brazil to reach the top position of global leaf exporter, in 1993. Along with this, the continued evolution of the sector, from production modernization to foreign investments in industrialization, as well as initiatives focused on economic, social and environmental sustainability, which have been developed over the past five decades. All these efforts contribute towards the country's well-known position regarding international tobacco businesses, where Brazil has been the leading exporter to date.



# the top global exporter

Brazil has been the leading tobacco exporter in the world since 1993. Now the country is the second largest producer, after China. Behind the numbers and the conquests, there are 125 thousand farmers who support their families and maintain a healthy lifestyle thanks to this century-old crop. They are spread across nearly 500 municipalities in the States of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná and have, in this work, passed on from generation to generation, a per-capita income more than twice as big as the average in Brazil. Together they earn income that exceeds the considerable amount of R\$ 10 billion at every crop year.

In 2023, when the sector completed 31 years as leading exporter, 512 thousand tons were shipped to 107 countries, bringing in revenue of US\$ 2.73 billion. Belgium, our leading buyer for years now, imported amounts that reached US\$ 605 million. China, the largest tobacco producer in the world, and the United States, another relevant producer, are equally important purchasers of Brazilian tobacco. Indonesia, the Arab Emirates, Vietnam and Turkey are also major destinations of the tobacco produced in 2023.

Over the years, the number of the countries that import our tobacco has expanded greatly. Historically, more than 100 countries import tobacco from Brazil, annually, and the European Union is the biggest buying bloc. As top global exporter, the contribution of the sector to the Brazilian economy gets more consolidated and recognized year after year. The share of tobacco in our national exports is nearly 1%, but in Rio Grande do Sul, it exceeds 10%.

## MAIN DESTINATIONS

Historically, Belgium has been the leading buyer of Brazilian tobacco. The tobacco arrives at the Port of Antwerp, the main one in Europe, and is sent to other destinations throughout the European Union. Having said this, we can affirm that China is the country that imports the biggest amount of tobacco from Brazil. Although being the largest producer in the world, with a crop volume three times as big as the Brazilian crop, that country imports a huge portion of our tobacco. One of the reasons, in addition to the great demand in the second most populated country in the world, lies in the quality of our tobacco.

## THE EXPORT NUMBERS

(average 2015-2023)

- + 100 importing countries
- + US\$ 2 billion in revenue a year
- + 500 thousand tons



*Get to know the main markets of the tobacco produced in Brazil.*



# counterpoint

All over the world, tobacco farming represents the livelihood for millions of farmers. For decades now, these tobacco farmers operate within stricter and stricter regulatory limits that represent a threat to their source of income. Greedy denigrators of the sector dream of implementing a substitution for the crop, something that has already been the subject of meetings held by the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

However, if Brazil quit producing tobacco, its major competitors, like the United States, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania would take its place. After all, demand for the tobacco supply chain's byproducts would not cease to exist. What would cease to exist is the work that guarantees a good lifestyle to these farmers in South Brazil.

On the pages that follow, we assembled a compilation of narratives the sector has got accustomed to hearing. For each of them, the facts.





## debt

According to Tânia Cavalcante, who was the executive secretary of the Framework Convention for 19 years: "The farmers are kept in a type of modern slavery, isolated, stuck in debt, under productive pressure of intensive labor and under ideological pressure from agents of the tobacco supply chain. The denunciations, including academic, about the situation are old". [Excerpt from the report published *The Chaff and the Wheat*, on 29 June]

# income

In South Brazil, it is not uncommon to come across families and various generations who have derived their livelihood from tobacco. Considering that the farmers are exploited, why do they continue to grow tobacco? In 2023, a survey conducted by the Center for Studies and Administration Research of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (CEPA/UFRGS) responded: the income derived from the production and guaranteed sales are major attractions for the farmers to continue growing the crop. The same survey also ascertained that, on average, the tobacco farmers have been in this activity for 22.7 years.

The first number that attracts attention in CEPA's survey has to do with the average per capita income. Considering that the average monthly per capita income of the tobacco farmers in the South Region of Brazil reached R\$ 3,540.75 in the year in question, the average income of the Brazilian people remained at R\$ 1,625.00 (IBGE, 2022). In practical terms, it means that **80% of the tobacco farmers fit into classes A and B, while the general Brazilian average in these strata barely reach 25%.**

The research also attested that nearly 92% of the interviewees said they were satisfied in their agricultural activities – 84% feel good about producing tobacco and 83% intend to continue in this activity. When asked for a reason in continuing to grow tobacco, 87% declared that, in the first place, because it is a profitable and lucrative crop and, in the second place, because of the guaranteed sales of the crop, as it is a clause of the contract signed in accordance with the Integrated Tobacco Production System (ITPS) between the farmers and the dealers.

Other reasons include free technical assistance provided by the companies, crop insurance provided by the Tobacco Growers' Association of Brazil (Afubra) and a negotiated price table, were some of the justifications presented by the farmers, as these benefits encourage them to continue to grow tobacco. Lots of farmers admitted they already have a successor (68%) and 71% declared that "the income makes it possible for the family to lead an easy life".

## AVERAGE PER CAPITA INCOME

**R\$ 3,540.75**

Tobacco grower  
South region

**R\$ 1,625.00**

General in Brazil  
(IBGE, 2022)

## FAMILY INCOME

Average household size = 3.32

**R\$ 11,755.30**

it is the average monthly income  
of a tobacco growing family

## SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Social Strata

**A**

General Brazil  
(IBGE, 2022)

Tobacco grower  
South region

2.9%

6.7%

more than twice  
the Brazilian average

**B1**

5.1%

6.1%

more than 4 times of  
Brazilian people

**B2**

16.7%

67.6%

**C1, C2, C3, D**

75.3%

19.6%

75.3% of the Brazilians  
are in classes C e D

80.4% of the tobacco  
growers are in classes  
A e B

Source: UFRGS research

Complete research available at [www.sinditabaco.com.br](http://www.sinditabaco.com.br)



## EXTRA INCOME

Of all the persons interviewed, 36% also derive income from agricultural activities other than tobacco. Furthermore, 37% said they had other income sources like retirement pay, permanent or temporary job, self-employment jobs, rent, lease or revenue for financial applications. Only 5% said they are entitled to a government social benefit, like nourishment or education allowance.

The study also presents details on the tobacco farmers' homes. These homes are equipped with heated water, potable water, electric energy, septic tank for the sewage. The majority (72%) have three bedrooms or more, and 72.8% are brick houses. Access to consumer goods is attested by the number of household appliances and electronic devices possessed by most of them, such as flat TV sets (90%), smartphone (85%), washing machine (97.2%), vehicle (84.8%) and pickups (23.4%). Thirteen percent of them have a second house (in town, at the seaside or somewhere else).

Access to machinery and farm equipment for planting or harvesting crops exceeds the average of the other farmers in the country. More than half of the interviewees (58.7%) have an agriculture sprayer machine, 80.9% have a tractor of their own and 13.4%, a micro tractor. The majority of them get free technical assistance from the associated companies and buy certified tobacco seed.

In summary, the main point the study brings to light is that, **without the cultivation of tobacco, the level of income and the living conditions would be quite different from the current scenario**. In fact, they would be similar to the average lifestyles of the Brazilian small-scale farmers, relying on lower income and a less comfortable family environment. That is to say, the tobacco growers in South Brazil belong in the context that is the exact opposite to "modern slavery", mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

“ Should someone want to stop the tobacco farmers from growing tobacco, it would require hard work. They are not willing to stop and the income derived from the activity is not a discouraging factor. ”

Professor Dr. Luiz Antônio Slongo [CEPA/UFRGS, 2023]





## monoculture

In a publication in VEJA magazine, the ONG's ACT and the international Vital Strategies state in an announcement: "The tobacco industry suffocates the production of healthy food crops. Less tobacco, more food".

# diversification

The cultivation of tobacco, as previously mentioned, is carried out in smallholdings. This information, in itself, destroys the argument that it is monoculture, as is the case of soybean and sugarcane. These smallholdings are not exclusively dedicated to the production of tobacco. In terms of family farming, crop diversification is synonymous with food safety and income security.

Since 1985, the tobacco sector has been encouraging the cultivation of grain and forage crops. The initiative, known as 'Corn, Bean and Grazing Land after Tobacco Harvest' represents a chance for a second source of income for the farmers, besides improving soil quality, which remains covered all year round. Historically, extra income derived from crop diversification remained at an average of R\$ 700 million a year.

Reforestation is also an activity used for diversification purposes while protecting the environment. Encouraged since the 1970s, tree planting gained prominence as a source for supplemental income, besides preserving native forests. Lots of farmers cure their tobacco with fuelwood from their own reforested land.

Diversification is not a problem. The challenge consists in discovering a crop that is as profitable as tobacco in a smallholding. Just to get an idea, the profit derived from seven hectares of corn is equivalent to the income derived from one hectare of tobacco. In the case of the small-scale farmers, this bill does not add up. To put an end to the production of tobacco, without ensuring a sustainable transition to other agricultural crops, will impoverish millions of farmers around the world.

## FARM PROFILE

A great number of the tobacco producing farms in the South Region of the country are no bigger than 15 hectares [number that could increase or decrease at every growing season]. However, considering a historical average, less than one third of the hectares are dedicated to tobacco. No matter how odd it seems, the income derived from this small part of the holding usually accounts for more than 50% of the total income the families derive from their holdings. The remaining portion of the area is used for alternative and subsistence crops, livestock farming and grazing land, native forests and reforested tracts, ponds or water reserves.

## FARM PROFILE

Land Occupation	General Average South Region(%)
Farm crops	<b>41.3%</b>
Native forest	<b>19.8%</b>
Pastures	<b>17.5%</b>
Reforested forest	<b>11.3%</b>
Rest area	<b>7.3%</b>
Ponds / water reserves	<b>2.8%</b>

## IN THE WORLD

As a matter of fact, tobacco farming occupies small space in the farms, in general. All over the world, tobacco occupies only 0.25% of all arable lands. As a result, the area devoted to tobacco is not an obstacle to the cultivation of food crops. Society is well aware of the fact that in Brazil hunger is caused by structural problems, like income inequality and the lack of public policies focused on this question.





## deforestation

According to WHO sources, it is estimated that 1.5 billion hectares of forests have been lost to tobacco farming, since the 1970s; now, 200 thousand hectares of forests are destroyed every year for this purpose”, Fiocruz said. “In many countries, native forests are still being cut down.” [Excerpt from an article published on 31st May 2022, at site Poder360: Tobacco destroyed 1.5 billion hectares of forests, Fiocruz says).

## reforestation

There is no long-range vision for an export type agricultural crop like tobacco without soil and environment preservation policies. That is why the need for preserving native forests was already a concern for the sector back in the 1970s, with the creation of the program that encourages reforestation with exotic tree species, like eucalyptus. The idea was to make the tobacco farmers self-sufficient in their energy needs for curing their tobacco.

The work reflects on the high rate of forest areas in the holdings of the tobacco farmers. According to a survey conducted by CE-PA-UFRGS (2023), on average, forests cover one third of the area, of which, 19.9% are native forests and 11.3% reforested tracts of land to meet the fuelwood needs of the farmers.

In 2011, on the basis of a pioneer agreement with SindiTabaco, Afubra, Ibama and the Ministry of the Environment, the evolution of the forest cover started to be monitored by satellite. Conducted by the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM), 2,737.65 km<sup>2</sup> were monitored, in line with this agreement, and the total area comprised 21 municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul. The latest report attested that deforestation and the expansion of forests had reached a balance over the period surveyed.

Even so, the companies are constantly concerned about the subject and require the farmers to sign a contract that sets forth they will only use fuelwood from legal origin. They always act in a manner that keeps the farmers aware of the need of preserving the environment, a move that involves from technical guidance to the distribution of primers that contain information on the subject.



## FOREST SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

In an article published in the magazine 'Observatorio De La Economia Latinoamericana', jointly authored by researchers from the Forest Engineering Department of the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) and under the coordination of professor Dr. Jorge Antonio de Farias, leaves it clear that there is a sustainable relation between the tobacco supply chain and the environment.

According to Dr. Farias, like every productive sector, tobacco faces challenges inherent to its production particularity. Besides its dependence on edaphoclimatic conditions, the producers depend on the availability and accessibility of raw material from forest origin for curing Virginia type tobacco in curing barns, also known as Flue-curing barns..

**“The availability of a planted forest, without any phytosanitary problem and highly productive, represents energy security for the farms, and energy security is the basis for the delivery of the production. In addition to these factors, high quality wood also has an impact on complete combustion, thus improving the stability of the curing process, which could have reflections on leaf quality (color and humidity) and in the reduction of the emission of greenhouse gases, just another target of the sector”.**

Professor Dr. Jorge Antonio de Farias comments.

At UFSM, the professor coordinates the program known as Actions towards Forest Sustainability in Tobacco Farming, a complementary approach to what the sector itself has been implementing in order to comply with the goal to stop deforestation and the use of native wood – with actions that involve the training of technical assistants and extension agents, technical visits to the Integrated Tobacco Production System, provision of seedlings of exotic species (eucalyptus) for the establishment of energy forestry plantations, monitoring of the use and source of firewood on properties, purchase of tobacco only if free from deforestation, among other strategies.

Through the program, the development of extension tools, like demonstration units and technical videos on forestry production within the context of tobacco farming, are moves with a significant potential impact upon the entire tobacco supply chain, but particularly on the farmers' every day activities.

## WOOD CONSUMPTION BY THE TOBACCO FARMERS

- 38.8% purchased wood of legal origin from third parties;
- 61.6% utilized wood from their reforested tracts of land.

*Source: Socioeconomic profile of the Tobacco farmers in the South Region of Brazil (CEPA/UFRGS, October 2023).*



*Watch the video 'Actions towards Forest Sustainability in Tobacco Farming', in partnership with the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM).*





## old practices

WHO report published in 2022 and titled Tobacco: poisoning our planet?, and accuses tobacco farming as one of the main causes of deforestation, excessive use of water, air and soil pollution in several regions across the world." (Article: WHO campaign warns about harms caused by Tobacco to the environment. Brazil Agency, 31 May 2023).

## good practices

Every farmer knows that if they stop caring for the land it could mean the end of their subsistence, as a result, the farmers themselves do their best to prevent this from happening. The Tobacco farmers use good agricultural practices, especially rotation with other crops, so as to avoid damaging the land, which is their main asset.

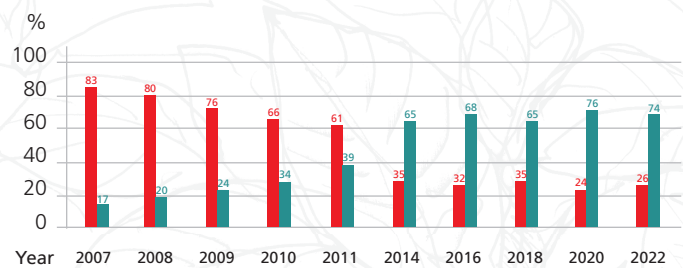
Conservation-oriented practices have made strides over the past 20 years among the tobacco farmers. A survey of the tobacco industries, conducted by SindiTabaco, attested that 74% of the farmers use conservation practices like planting in the mulch or minimum tillage, which is an indicator of water preservation, besides soil protection.

In minimum tillage, soil is minimally disturbed and remains protected by remnants from the previous crop. In Tobacco, planting on ridges with mulch was validated by Embrapa as a conservation practice. Besides protecting and preserving soil, this practice also favors the water infiltration process.

The great change in attitude of the farmers regarding the cultivation model, encouraged by technical assistance, has been a determining factor for soil conservation. Year after year, conservation-oriented planting is gaining more followers and contributes towards a more protected and healthier soil ensuring the sustainability of tobacco farming.



## CROPPING SYSTEMS



■ Conventional farming

■ Conservationist farming

Fonte: SINDITABACO

## IN PRACTICE

(the tobacco farmer)

- 90.6% had their soil analyzed over the past three years;
- 81.8% adhered to crop rotation systems to avoid pests, diseases and weeds;
- 85.4% applied lime for soil correction purposes;
- 85.7% use green fertilization or cover crops;
- 79.1% use High Wide Ridges;
- 62.3% have adhered to minimum tillage or planting in the mulch;
- 48.4% use contour farming or terracing to protect soil.

Source: Socioeconomic profile of the tobacco farmers in the South Region of Brazil (CEPA/UFRGS, October 2023).



Good agricultural practices are also the subject of a series of videos which guide the farmers during the different cultivation steps, from soil preparation to curing. Access on: [youtube.com/sinditabaco](https://youtube.com/sinditabaco)





## slavery

“On top of that, the Integrated Tobacco Production System establishes an asymmetric relation between farmers and companies, getting many families into debt and generating serious social problems like child labor and slave-like labor.” (Excerpt from article “The painful portrait of tobacco farming”, published at the ACT blog Health Promotion).

# integration

The Integrated Tobacco Production System (ITPS) is a relevant pillar for the tobacco farmers. Due to this system, those who grow tobacco are assured of selling their produce - unlike in other sectors, where the fragile link between farmer and industry often results in the former losing their harvest.

Created in 1918, ITPS ended up turning into a part of the ecosystem of tobacco farming, establishing a link of partnership and credibility between all the agents of the tobacco supply chain: farmers, companies and clients.

Besides guaranteed sales, the farmers have access to seed produced and developed in research centers of the industries associated with the system, necessary inputs for the field, free technical assistance, financial assistance co-signed by the companies in case of loans and investments, and free transportation of the crop from farm gate to processing plants.

The countless advantages provided by the Integrated System also include traceability and control over the use of agrochemicals and unwanted materials, differences that provide clients with quality assurance.

Awareness and research-oriented campaigns on new technologies for the production of clean and unblemished tobaccos are constant concerns for companies, thus ensuring competitiveness in the global market.

History that has followed the tobacco farmers for more than a century, the Integrated Tobacco Production System has never stopped improving and contributing towards professionalizing the sector, bringing the companies closer to the rural communities and creating a permanent dialogue which results into environment and social partnerships, thus turning our national tobacco farming increasingly sustainable. This happens because the ITPS makes it possible for the farmers to implement the best agricultural practices, through technical guidance.

## TRAINING AND INFORMATION

- 95.6% have already attended courses on safe pesticide handling.
- 50.2% have already attended courses on correct soil management.
- 46.4% have already attended a course on organization or rural property administration.
- 98% consider themselves well informed about safe tobacco harvesting techniques.
- 96% of the farmers get technical assistance from the companies.

*Source: Socioeconomic profile of the Tobacco farmers in the South Region of Brazil (CEPA/UFRGS, October 2023).*

## ITPS ADVANTAGES

### Producers

- Technical Assistance
- Financial Assistance
- Transportation of the Tobacco Crop
- Guaranteed Sales of the Crop

### Companies

- Crop Planning
- Product Quality
- Product Integrity
- Guaranteed Supply

### Clients

- Regular Supply
- Guaranteed Quality
- Guaranteed ISO Certification
- Traceability



## use of agrochemicals

Research works present a list of health risks from prolonged exposure to agrochemicals used by the sector. (Excerpt from the article "Tobacco produced in the South of the country uses agrochemicals banned internationally", from Brazil Reporter, of 2/22/23).

## conscious demand

Tobacco is a crop particularly resistant and can be cultivated in adverse conditions. Therefore, the use of agrochemicals is lower compared to other crops. The recommendation for the use of agrochemical is up to the extension agents, and the recommendation is only given if there is a real need. The chemicals prescribed will always be low-toxicity products and properly registered with the authorized governmental agencies for use on tobacco crop.

One of the basic pillars of the Integrated Tobacco Production System is product traceability. The companies keep the product under great control, as they export the crop to more than 100 countries, and these countries have their own legislation regarding the ban or liberation of any active ingredient.

Despite the ever-increasing use of biological inputs and integrated pest management practices, the use of agrochemicals is necessary at certain moments. A fact that for decades has not prevented the companies of the sector from investing in research works and studies in search of manners to reduce the use of these chemical agents.

Four different research attest to the low use of agrochemicals in tobacco cultivation. The latest of them conducted by professors from the Luiz de Queiroz College of Agriculture, a division of the University of São Paulo (Esalq/USP), based on data furnished by the National Union of the Plant Protection Products Industry (SINDVEG), shows that tobacco is one of the commercial crops that uses the least amount of agrochemicals, with 1.01 kg of active ingredient per hectare. By comparison, tomato crops occupy the first position regarding the amount of they require, with more than 46 Kg of active ingredient per hectare.



Please access the research works on the amount of pesticides required by the main agricultural crops

### SAFETY AND AWARENESS

<b>99.6%</b> of the tobacco farmers possess Personal Protective Equipment to apply agrochemicals	<b>98.9%</b> of the tobacco farmers return their empty agrochemicals containers
<b>97.5%</b> have a specific agrochemicals storage	<b>95.6%</b> of the tobacco farmers are certified by Regulatory Standard 31, on Correct and Safe Application of Agrochemicals.

Source: Socioeconomic profile of the Tobacco farmers in the South Region of Brazil (CEPA/UFRGS, October 2023).



## Agrochemicals: myths and facts

Please read the interview by Iro Schünke, with a degree in Agronomic Engineering, president of the Interstate Tobacco Industry Union (SindiTabaco).

**Is it true that the tobacco crop is the one that uses the highest amount of agrochemicals?** This is one of the reasons that justify communication as one of the pillars of SindiTabaco. To demystify myths like this one has been one of our major objectives. Brazilian tobacco is one of the commercial crops that uses the smallest amounts of pesticides, according to four different studies. The latest of them, conducted by professors from ESALQ/USP, based on data furnished by SIND-VEG (2016), indicates that tobacco crops utilize, on average, 1.01 kg of active ingredient per hectare, a quantity significantly lower than other crops that utilize up to 45 times more active ingredients per hectare. In other words, it is not true that tobacco crops utilize big amounts of pesticides.

**Why do you believe that the above premise is still being erroneously disclosed?** As tobacco's final product is controversial, the tobacco supply chain is vulnerable to attacks. That's why we have increasingly invested in the communication of our accomplishments, because the tobacco sector, in fact, is setting an example to other sectors, not only in terms of health and safety, but also in social and environmental areas. When we emit an opinion on a specific subject, we've got to have information based on facts, with updated data and official sources. This is the behavior that we follow, but unfortunately not followed by everybody. There are also certain cases in which we detect a certain confusion or ignorance about the theme in question. An example is when we hear that a certain sector utilizes "n" liters of agrochemicals. What determines

the toxicity degree of a agrochemical is the composition of the product [the so-called active ingredients] and not the volume applied, following the same line of logic of such medicines as paracetamol: the same capsule could contain 250mg, 500mg, 750mg or even 1g of the active ingredient. If you look at agrochemical as a type of "medicine" for the agricultural crop, it could demystify all this: prescribed in the correct dosage, it can cure; in the wrong dosage and without the necessary precautions for its application, it can indeed become a poison.

**Are the pesticides used on tobacco more toxic than the ones used on other crops?** Another myth. When we consider the Toxicological Classes of the products used on tobacco, almost in their entirety they are registered in the MAPA and classified by Anvisa into categories 4 and 5, that is to say, low toxicity products and unlikely to cause serious damage (both blue stripe chemicals) and product category not classified (green stripe). No red stripe products – the most toxic ones – is recommended by our associate companies to the tobacco farmers.

**Researches associate the use of organophosphate products to health problems. How does the sector deal with the problem?** Organophosphate products consist of a type of insecticide no longer recommended for tobacco crop, for many years now. There is need to mention that pesticide poisoning only happens if the farmers neglect to wear personal protective equipment (PPEs) or disregard safety guidelines.

**Do you believe that the tobacco farmers still avoid wearing PPE?** The correct use of PPE when handling or applying agrochemicals is of fundamental importance, but it still generates resistance among some farmers. Primers, media

campaigns and awareness seminars are an integral part of the investments made by the industries to reinforce the technical guidelines in an attempt to change the cultural question that there is no need for protection. It's worth noting that the tobacco sector is the only productive chain that is organized and provides the farmers with free technical assistance, along with guidelines intended to keep the farmers aware of the need to correctly wear PPE. Research conducted by the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), focused on the tobacco farmers in the South Region of the country, ascertained that in 2016, 85% of them had already attended a course on safe pesticide handling (NR 31). Furthermore, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is mandatory and is set forth in the contract with the integrating companies, and this protective equipment is available to all farmers at cost price.

**With regard to the environment, do the chemical products used in tobacco farming have the potential to cause soil and water contamination?** All agrochemicals have the potential to contaminate. That is why the companies launched a reverse logistics program in 2000, even before legislation that regulates the return of the empty agrochemical containers was enacted, in 2002. The truck of the Empty Pesticide Containers Collection Program picks up the empty agrochemical containers at 1.8 thousand collection points in all tobacco producing municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, approximately 380. In the State of Paraná, similar initiatives carried out by local container receiving centers rely on support from the companies associated with SindiTabaco. In 23 years, the program has already correctly disposed of 20 million empty containers, including containers used in other crops, as the majority of the tobacco farmers have adhered to crop diversification systems.

**What has the tobacco industry done to reduce the problems related to the use of agrochemicals?** When the subject turns to agrochemicals, the sector acts on three fronts: farmers' health and safety, making them aware of the need to protect themselves; environmental protection, following on the heels of the previously mentioned example of the Empty Pesticide Container Collection Program, and guidelines on how to correctly store and handle these chemicals; and, finally, innovation, with investments in research intended to reduce the need for agrochemicals. Within this context, the use of good agricultural practices and specific biological agents to keep certain pests under control, could significantly reduce the use of agrochemicals in the production of tobacco.

**How could non-recommended agrochemicals affect the tobacco supply chain?** Besides posing risks to health and the environment, the use of non-recommended pesticides is also harmful to the Brazilian tobacco market. Brazil has been the top global tobacco exporter for 30 years now, and this is, for the most part, due to the quality, physical integrity (free of non-tobacco related materials) and chemical (residues) of the product. Our annual exports are sent to upwards of 100 countries and this requires compliance with national and international criteria. For this reason, the companies also invest in product traceability and in technical assistance, besides adhering to programs that make these cares official, as is the case of IP Tobacco (Certification of the Integrated Production), con-



## Suicide

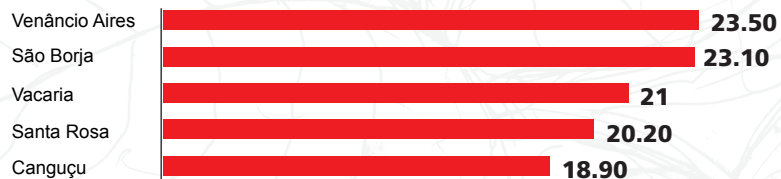
Rio Grande do Sul is home to the highest percentage of self-inflicted deaths, and this has been happening for decades now. The tobacco producing municipalities are among the ones where suicides reach the highest percentages, year after year, that exceed the national average. According to epidemiological data furnished by state organs, in 2017, Venâncio Aires — one of the top tobacco producing region — recorded a rate of 34.67 suicides per 100 thousand inhabitants. In that same year, the average in Brazil reached 6.6. In the past decade, the municipality has always occupied one of the five first positions in the ranking of the top tobacco producing municipalities in the Country” (Excerpt from the article ‘Depression, anxiety and suicides’: the reality of those who cultivate tobacco in Brazil, published by a Public Agency, on 17th January 2022).

## complex problem

The idea to blame suicides on the production of tobacco, on account of the use of pesticides, is an inconsistent affirmation, according to comments by the Ministry of Health. Data disclosed in 2020 clarify that of the five municipalities with the highest percentage of suicide attempts in Rio Grande do Sul — where nearly 50% of all Brazilian tobacco is produced — only in two of these municipalities tobacco is produced: Venâncio Aires and Canguçu. The other three municipalities do not produce any tobacco at all.

### MUNICIPALITIES WITH THE HIGHEST SUICIDE RATES IN RS

The list only includes cities with fewer than 50 thousand inhabitants



Source: State Department of Health and WHO





In what way these cities are connected? What could explain the relation between these municipalities? In an interview to a radio in Lajeado, in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul, psychiatrist Rafael Moreno, gives some clues. According to him, the region in Germany, from where the immigrants of the Rio Pardo Valley Region and other cities in Rio Grande do Sul came from, is also known for its high suicide rate. There lies a well corroborated genetic factor - and it has no relationship whatsoever with the cultivation of tobacco

Still according to the psychiatrist, São Gabriel da Cachoeira is in the Amazon region. Where no tobacco is cultivated, and walks side-by-side with the municipality of Venâncio Aires in the percentage of suicides. What do they have in common? Data disclosed by the Ministry of Health attest that two types of residents endure the highest risk: indigenous people and farmers. For a reason that makes sense: social isolation. This is also corroborated throughout the world. The countries where suicidal behaviors prevail are Greenland, with its Inuit population, followed by Guiana, with a large indigenous population. With climates that differ completely, they have something in common: peoples that live in isolation or in a socially rejected condition.

There are lots of studies in the world which try to understand why someone tries to take their own life. There is, for example, a study in Kazakhstan that demonstrates an association of the highest suicide rate with the north wind, something that we have already observed in the South of the Country with a certain frequency. The truth is this is a multifactorial problem present in the entire globe. Stigmatizing a specific agricultural crop, as is the case of tobacco, for something of such complexity, is a thoughtless attitude, to say the least.

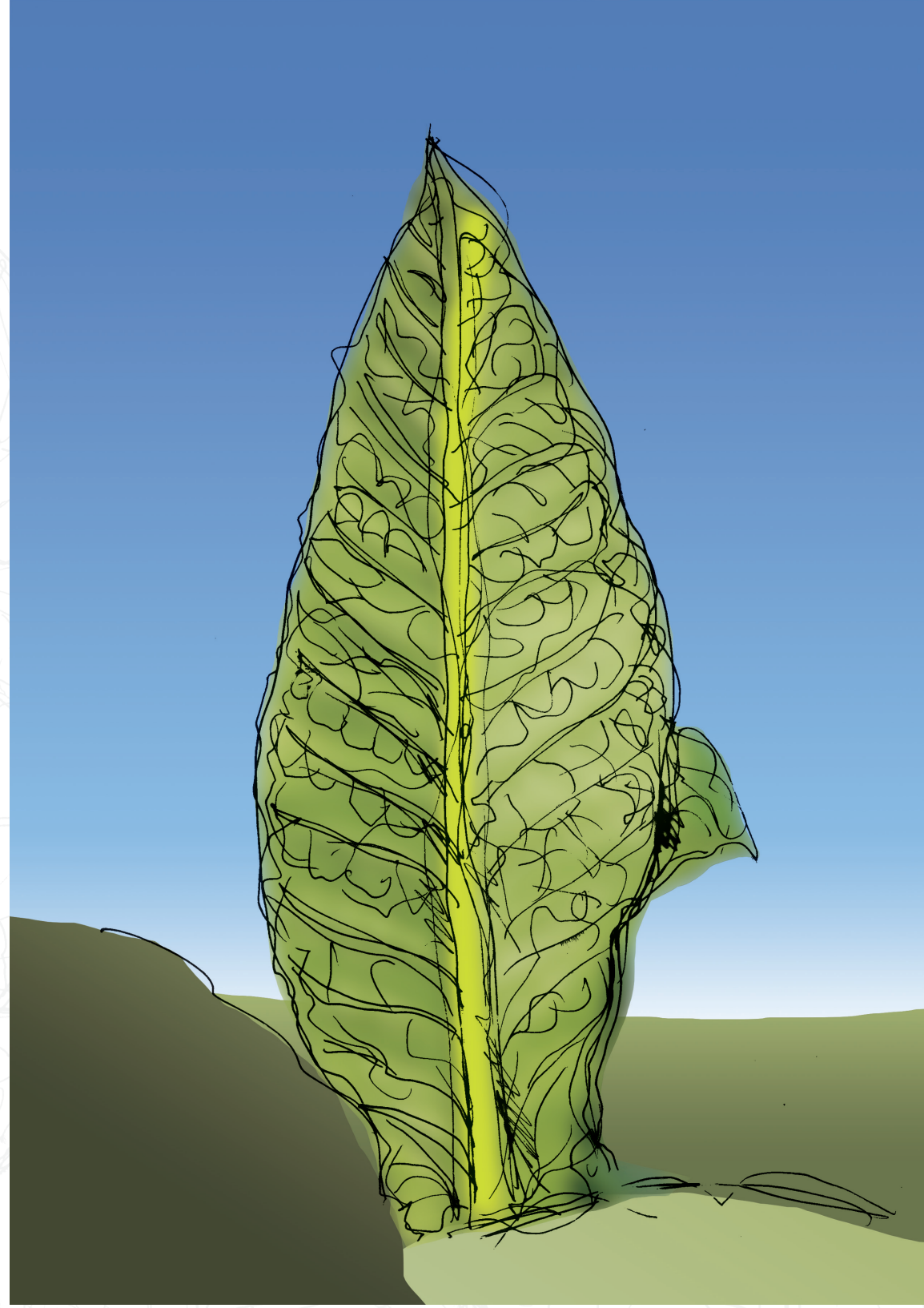


**ENLIGHTENING**

*Listen to the testimony of a tobacco farmer on the theory of trying to associate tobacco farming with suicide.*

**JUST TO REMIND YOU!**

It is always necessary to recall that Brazilian tobacco is one of the commercial crops that uses the least amount of pesticides, a fact that has been corroborated by different research works. Furthermore, organophosphate pesticides have already been banned by the tobacco sector a decade ago. There are records of industries which stopped using the product even before it was banned by legislation.





## Green Tobacco sickness

"In Brazil more than 350 thousand hectares of land are devoted to tobacco, a substance that does not only harm those who smoke, seeing that the farmers are exposed to the green tobacco sickness, resulting from excessive pesticide applications", states Dr. Bartó's column and the health doctors of the newsletter published by USP, on June 5th 20-23.

## safe harvest

There is need to clarify that the green tobacco sickness does not happen due to the use of agrochemicals, but it occurs when workers absorb nicotine through the skin as they come into contact with leaves wet with rain or morning dew. During harvest, if the farmers do not wear appropriate clothing, nicotine comes into contact with the skin and causes the so-called green tobacco sickness. It is characterized largely by nausea, vomiting, headache, itch, muscle weakness, and feeling of tiredness. The sickness usually occurs when the leaves are wet or humid with rain or morning dew.

The exposure to nicotine occurs when the skin comes into contact with the tobacco leaves at harvest, at topping, transportation from field to farm gate, curing barn loading and storing in the barn. Once absorbed by the skin, the nicotine reaches the blood vessels. Its absorption occurs according to the size of the body area affected and with the presence of skin lesions. Simple attitudes like wearing appropriate personal protective equipment and specific gloves, and opting for the hours of the day when the temperature is mild, enable the farmers to work safely.

Thinking about how to keep the sickness at bay, special clothing was developed for the tobacco farmers. It consists of pants, blouse and gloves made from impermeable and waterproof fabric. This clothing prevents the skin from absorbing the nicotine. For higher efficiency, there is need to wear closed toe shoes and a hat. The kit is available to the farmers at cost price.

The special clothing was created back in 2009, when Luiz Castanheira, agronomic and work safety engineer, and professor at Unicamp, conducted a research that resulted into technical specifications and in the development of the clothing items. From 2010 to 2011, company Planitox, from São Paulo, under the supervision of Dr. Flávio Zambrone, was hired to evaluate its efficiency and degree of protection. The study attested to a 98-percent decrease in dermal exposure. The specific harvest clothing is certified by the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE), and is, therefore, recommended and considered to be fully efficient.

As in other social and environmental fronts, the companies associated with SindiTabaco invest in information and awareness. More than 1.3 thousand extension agents took capacity-building courses on the subject in order to guide the farmers with regard to protecting themselves against the sickness. Media campaigns and printed materials reach the farmers on a regular basis, and they contain information on how to avoid the green tobacco sickness.

Research conducted in 2023 by the Studies and Research Center on Administration, a division of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (CEPA/UFRGS), concluded that 98% of the tobacco farmers declared they are well informed about the question of safe harvest, and 95.6% have already attended a course on safe pesticide handling. Almost half of the tobacco farmers have attended a course on correct soil management practices and on the administration or organization of a rural property.





## child labor

*"(...) the industry takes advantage, though indirectly, of child labor to lower the cost of their main input and increase their profit margins". Article published on blog ACT Health Promotion, on 11th June 2021*

## everyone's fight

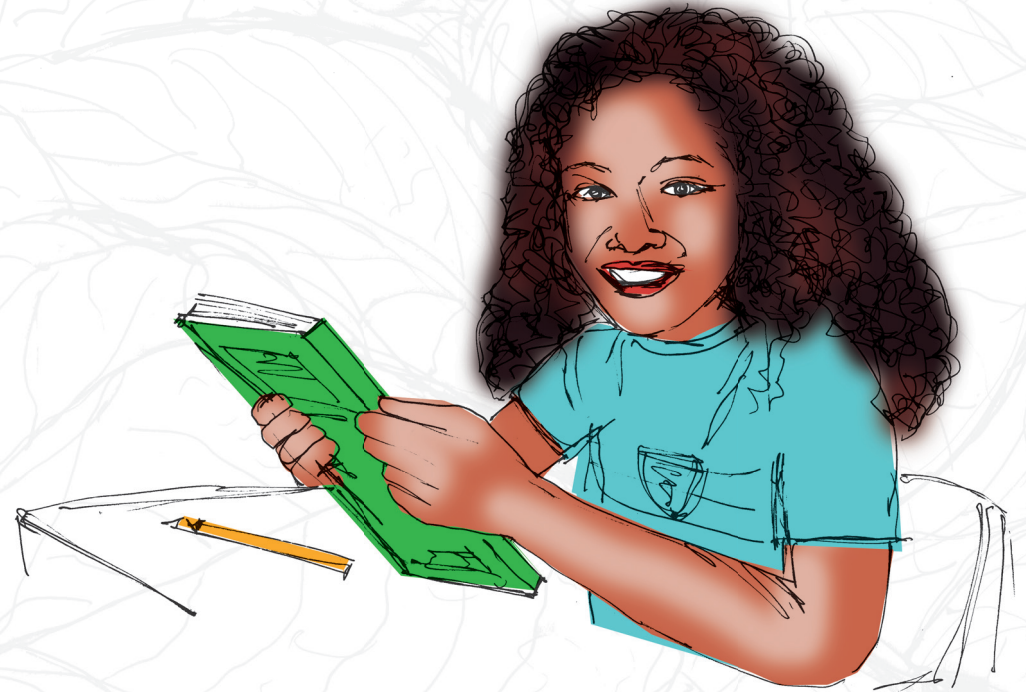
A major social question that involves family farming is the fight against child labor. The problem is not an exclusive concern in the realm of tobacco farming. According to IBGE sources, in 2022, there were 1.9 million children and teenagers, aged 5 to 17, involved in child labor activities in the country, representing 4.9% of this age group.

In 1998, by signing, along with other players of the supply chain, the Child Labor Eradication Agreement, SindiTabaco and the associate companies created the Future Is Now Program!, with the motto: Kids belong in school. The focus of the initiative consisted in creating awareness among the farmers, informing them about legislation in force and encouraging them about their children's school education. The companies associated with SindiTabaco created social projects geared towards the schools attended by the farmers' children, and the activities included the so-called extended school journey, cultural promotions, digital inclusion, sports, just to mention a few activities. In twelve years, the initiatives of the program reached upwards of 180 thousand tobacco farmers in South Brazil.

In 2008, another step forward was taken relative to the fight against child labor: the tobacco sector signed an agreement with the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rio Grande do Sul whereby the tobacco farmers are under obligation to present their children's school enrollment and attendance certificate to the associate companies.

The companies require the enrollment certificate of the farmers' children and the end-of-year school attendance certificate at the moment they sign the commercialization contract with these farmers. In case child labor is detected, the companies are under obligation to communicate the fact to the competent authorities. In case a repetition occurs, the companies do not renew the contract for the crop that follows.

As time went by, and as the theme matures in the environment of the farmers, and with good results accomplished, an updated strategic plan was structured and the project was reformulated. Then, in 2011, the Growing Up Right Program was born, with its main goal consisting in fighting child labor at any stage of tobacco farming operations, with a particular focus on actions related to teenagers.





## CULTURAL CHANGE

Until not long ago, rural families used to have a lot of children, and what they had in common was the fact that they used to engage the children in farming activities for the income to remain within the family. In the specific case of tobacco, there is also the fact that this crop started with the German immigrants, who believe that work is a valuable asset, just like discipline, honesty and respect. This scenario led to the belief that child labor was a cultural question. Making things worse, there was also the lack of options for the children to continue their education after finishing their Elementary School. In an attempt to prevent their children from migrating to towns to attend High School, or leading an idle life, many parents end up engaging their children in rural activities. That's why, if it is a question of fighting child labor, it is not enough to invest only in information and awareness, but also in alternatives, like extra-curricular courses.

Tobacco farmers' schooling period has as gone up as time went by. Survey conducted by the Research Center on Administration, a division of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, in 2023, attested that, among the tobacco farmers, nearly 60% of the householders attended school for more than 8 years. Among them, 32.2% attended school for more than 11 years, which corresponds to complete High School, or complete or incomplete higher education.

## THERE IS NEED TO CREATE AWARENESS

The Awareness Cycle on Farmers' health and safety, and child and adolescent protection is conducted on an annual basis by SindiTabaco and associate companies, with support from Afubra. In 13 on-site events, held since 2009, the Awareness Cycle events have already been attended by more than 34 thousand people, in 72 seminars held in different municipalities in the South Region of Brazil. In 2021, the Cycle was held in virtual format, transmitted on Youtube by SindiTabaco's broadcast channel, reaching 11 thousand visualizations

## MAJOR MESSAGES

- Only over 18 years old persons are allowed to carry out tobacco farming activities;
- Children and teenagers should attend school;
- Farmers must wear specific clothing at harvest, during mild temperatures and favorable weather conditions;
- Only adults are allowed to handle and apply agrochemicals, always wearing the recommended personal protective equipment.

## MORE THAN AWARENESS, SOLUTION

In the rural setting, opportunities for children and youth are scarce, a reality that requires a close look and a helping hand. During the seminars of the Awareness Cycles, held annually since 2009 by SindiTabaco and Afubra, the great anxiety expressed by the tobacco farmers used to be: "but what can my children do if they cannot handle tobacco until the age of 18?". **SindiTabaco went in search of answers and, failing to find them, came up with its own solutions.**

That was what gave rise to the Growing Up Right Institute in 2015, with the mission to fight child labor, seeing that young people under 18 are not allowed to carry out tobacco farming activities. The Institute is also engaged in creating transformation-oriented initiatives that provide professional and personal development, as well as creating income opportunities for adolescents aged 14 to 17.

With support from specialized consultancy and different partnerships and local arrangements, an innovative formula for the rural area was created: the Rural Professional Learning Program. On the basis of the Learning Law, the young are hired as apprentices and remunerated as such to attend courses focused on rural management and entrepreneurship.

In all, the course consists of 800 hours of practical and theoretical activities, in the shift opposite to their regular school hours. The quotas are granted by the companies associated with SindiTabaco. In practice, the young are hired by the tobacco companies as young apprentices, but the only work they do is carried out within the context of the course, without doing any work at the premises of the company. In less than a decade and approximately one thousand apprentices certified, the Growing Up Right Institute has been widely acknowledged and was awarded several prizes.



*Know more about the Guidance Primer handed out to the farmers by the extension agents*

# timeline

From the fight against child labor to the creation of opportunities for young people from the rural setting

**1998**

The Future Is Now! program is launched, with the motto: Kids belong in school, a pioneer in the fight against child labor in the agricultural sector. The program was focused on farmers' awareness, informing them about legislation and the need for the children to attend school.

**2008**

An agreement was signed with the Public Prosecutor's Office of RS, focused on the fight against child labor, with the farmers under obligation to present to the companies the enrollment and school attendance certificates of their children.

**2009**

Beginning of the Awareness Cycles on farmers' health and safety and child and adolescent protection. In 13 editions, the events attracted more than 34 thousand people in 70 municipalities in the South Region of Brazil.

**2010**

Census conducted by IBGE attests that the highest percentages of child labor reduction throughout the country took place on the small tobacco producing holdings, in comparison with the previous census (2000).

**2011**

Agreement with the Public Prosecutor's Office in Brasília for SC and PR, expanding the awareness initiatives of the tobacco farmers on the theme for the entire South Region of Brazil.

Growing Up Right Program is launched, focused on incentive to education for farmers' children and adolescents.

**2012**

Training for all extension agent teams of the companies – more than 1.3 thousand professionals – **on child and adolescent protection, with the participation of the International Labor Organization (ILO).**

**2015**

Foundation of the Growing Up Right Institute. Development alternatives for adolescents and strengthening of the spirit of entrepreneurship and rural management, especially in tobacco producing areas in the South Region of the Country.

**2016**

Beginning of the activities of the Rural Professional Learning Program, run by the Growing Up Right Institute, which offers income and qualification opportunities to young people aged 14 to 17.

**2017**

Beginning of the activities of the Us for Them Program – The voice of rural women, with capacity building courses in communication, for former girl students of the Learning Program, in partnership with the University of Santa Cruz do Sul (UNISC).

**2020**

Implementation of the **Good Entrepreneurial Practices towards Education**, geared towards schoolmasters of schools that act in partnership with the Growing Up Right Institute.

Growing Up Right Institute conquers the second position in the **Innovare Award granted by the Justice Department.**

**2021**

*Growing Up Right Institute is granted the **Brazil Child-friendly Award.***



## work

“The sectors with the highest number of rescued workers belong to the tobacco industry, totaling 76 in all. Then came the cattle farming sector, with 85 and charcoal production, with 81. In the sequence, timber extraction, with 59, sugarcane cultivation with 44 and the textile industry, with 44”. (Excerpt from the article: The companies on the Dirty list, published in CartaCapital, on 18 March 2023)

## decent

Despite the regrettable mistake made by the journalist in ranking the above mentioned sectors, we understand that, just like what happens with the question of the fight against child labor, decent work is the fruit of joint efforts. It is clear that tobacco is not facing alone this agriculture problem.

Recent survey attests that 42.2% of the tobacco farmers hired outsourced workers during the past season. So as to give them guidance in a manner that makes them comply fully with legislation, two primers were handed out to thousands of tobacco farmers who have a contract with the associate companies.

The primer: “Hiring labor at family farming, what is important to know” was joint work that involved the Ministry of Labor and Employment, Federation of Agricultural Workers in Rio Grande do Sul (Fetag/RS), Federation of Rural Salaried Employees in Rio Grande do Sul (Fetar/RS), with support from SindiTabaco and the Tobacco Growers’ Association of Brazil (Afubra).



Access the publication that clarifies the main doubts about the hiring process, thus ensuring safe hiring practices in compliance with legislative requirements, especially occasional and temporary hiring services.

Another informative primer now being handed out to the tobacco farmers is titled “Sustainable Work Program”, which intends to fight slave-like work, was launched by the Ministry of Labor Employment and Social Security, with support from SindiTabaco, Afubra, Fetag/RS and the Federation of Agriculture of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (Farsul). The primer clarifies doubts regarding sanitary facilities, food, water, resting places and accommodation, besides other matters relative to decent work. These are initiatives that attest to the involvement of the tobacco supply chain in farmers’ awareness.





# thesis + antitheses = **synthesis**

This content was generated on the basis of decades of replies to attacks against a well organized and sustainable sector. It is a compilation of a lot of what was said and is being said by the advocates of the sector, in linear form and without any cuts.

It is a guideline for future debates, but, especially, a reply not always comes in an integral form – and, in some cases, it is not even integral. At this point, we raise a point: do we want to leave a better world for the people or better people for the world?

Better people seek complete information, have a thirst for knowledge. They are thoughtful in accepting a counterpoint and believe in freedom for choices, but also in the responsibility they attract. And here the importance of awareness comes in.

There is no other agricultural crop that acts in such direct form towards awareness. Whether from matters related to health-care, farmers' safety, child and adolescent protection, the fight against slave-like work, the tobacco sector has taken the frontline and has come up with solutions. More than that: it is ready to dialogue in order to transform thesis and antithesis into synthesis.

And our culture continues the same: **tobacco is agro.**





issue

**CONTROVERSIAL**

necessary

**COUNTERPOINT**

Deconstructing narratives about  
the production of tobacco in Brazil.

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