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**WOMEN IN AGRARIAN SCIENCES**

**SHORT COMMUNICATION**

# Women's entrepreneurship in artisanal dairy farms in Rio Grande do Sul

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**Abstract –** Historically, male management prevails in most Brazilian rural properties. This article presents a study of a small rural property managed by a woman for seventeen years, during which she has implemented innovative and sustainable practices. The case study is based on a technical visit to a small rural estate located in the municipality of Estância Velha, Rio Grande do Sul. Among the primary findings, it was noted that the property manager is solely responsible for all investments and equipment acquisitions related to the estate, as well as for developing various products such as cheeses, yoghurts, and ice creams, including some produced with A2-A2 protein milk. Furthermore, she has been engaging in sustainability practices aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goals number 2 (sustainable agriculture), number 7 (reliable, sustainable, and modern energy systems), number 12 (sustainable production practices) and number 13 (combating climate change). Her products are supplied to school meals in neighboring municipalities and are featured in numerous agricultural fairs across the state, both large and small. Additionally, she has been investing in rural tourism, promoting and marketing her products without leaving the property.

**Keywords**: Female administration. Sustainability. Arte Seal. Artisanal products. Women in rural areas. Innovation.

## Empreendedorismo feminino em propriedade rural gaúcha de laticínio artesanal

**Resumo** – Historicamente, na maioria das propriedades rurais brasileiras predomina a administração masculina. Este artigo realiza um estudo em uma pequena propriedade rural, administrada por uma mulher há 17 anos, que vem inovando e tornando-se sustentável. Trata-se de um Estudo de caso, baseado em visita técnica, realizada em pequena propriedade rural no município gaúcho de Estância Velha. Dentre os principais resultados, verificou-se que a administradora da propriedade é responsável por todo e qualquer investimento ou compra de equipamento para a propriedade, bem como desenvolveu diversos produtos (queijos, iogurtes, sorvetes, etc.), inclusive alguns leites com a proteína A2-A2. Além disso, vem inserindo práticas de sustentabilidade, relacionadas aos ODS (Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável da ONU) nº 2 (agricultura sustentável), nº 7 (sistemas energéticos confiáveis, sustentáveis, modernos), nº 12 (práticas de produção sustentáveis) e nº 13 (combate às mudanças climáticas). Seus produtos estão presentes na merenda escolar de municípios vizinhos e em muitas feiras de pequeno e grande porte do setor agrícola estadual. Também vem investindo no turismo rural, promovendo e comercializando os produtos sem sair da propriedade.

**Palavras-chave:** Administração feminina. Sustentabilidade. Selo Arte. Produtos artesanais. Mulheres no campo. Inovação.

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This article pertains to a technical visit conducted on 11/29/2025 at a small artisanal dairy farm in the Rincão da Saudade neighborhood of the municipality of Estância Velha, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Seventeen years ago, a former nursing professional assumed sole management of her father-in-law's small rural property. Given that women occupy only 17 % of leadership positions within Brazilian companies (Brasil, 2024), it is imperative to highlight practical examples of female leadership.

Contrary to the predominant trend in most Brazilian rural properties - where male managers have historically been the norm (Farias *et al.*, 2020; SEBRAE, 2023) - this property is managed by an innovative woman and has experienced continual expansion, offering increasingly diverse products and services, and cultivating a loyal and satisfied customer base. Furthermore, sustainability initiatives have been increasingly integrated. Among several initiatives led by this female management is the pursuit of product registration under the "Selo Arte" from the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as the pursuit of certification for milk produced exclusively with A2-A2 protein. "Selo Arte" is designated exclusively for products of animal origin that are produced in an artisanal manner, as specified in Brasil (2019). Notably, the property engaged in milk and cheese production prior to the commencement of female management. Under the new administration, the production of yogurts, ice creams, and popsicles was also initiated. Additionally, a brand was established, and in 2019, an Instagram profile was created to promote the artisanal products produced on the farm.

Women, in comparison to men, generally face more social and cultural barriers when initiating entrepreneurial activities, especially in rural settings (Farias *et al.*, 2020; Brasil, 2024). Entrepreneurship enables women to attain economic independence, realize their personal aspirations, and effect societal change (Brasil, 2024). Therefore, it is vital to strengthen public policies that encourage women's entrepreneurship, particularly within the agricultural sector. An insightful contribution is presented in Costa's (2024) research, illustrating that such policies are crucial in motivating women to engage in entrepreneurial activities and expand their enterprises, as they enable access to training and financial support.

Costa (2024) delineates four programs dedicated to the education and/or credit facilitation for female entrepreneurs: "Sebrae Delas", "Pronampe", "Caixa pra Elas" and "Rede Mulher Empreendedora". Nevertheless, the author underscores that gender bias endures, manifesting in numerous forms, ranging from subtle discrimination to obstacles in accessing financial institutions. Consequently, she advocates for the establishment of support and mentorship networks targeted at women in entrepreneurship (Costa, 2024).

Regarding financial assistance, the study by Zuchetto and Bruch (2025) highlights an additional funding program not mentioned in Costa's 2024 study, namely "Pronaf Mulher," which is characterized as "[…] *an exclusive line of financing for women* […]." (Zuchetto; Bruch, 2025).

According to Marques and Teixeira (2025), women of lower income as well as those with higher financial standing consider family responsibilities as a primary motivation for initiating entrepreneurial ventures. They view entrepreneurship to improve resource management. However, the study indicates that an increase in the number of family members is associated with fewer opportunities for women to participate in entrepreneurial activities. According to the authors, this situation is likely due to the heightened domestic responsibilities imposed on women (Marques;


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Teixeira, 2025).

Silva, Mainardes and Lasso (2016), in a study conducted with 109 Brazilian women who were in charge of managing their own businesses, between October 2013 and April 2014, identified that Brazilian entrepreneurial women are mostly experienced (aged between 30 and 49 years – 64 % of the total interviewees), married (72 % of the total), with complete higher education (including undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees – 64 % of the sample), and they themselves carry out the planning of their enterprises (63 % of the interviewees) (Silva; Mainardes; Lasso, 2016). In this regard, Marques and Teixeira (2025) confirm that higher education is positively related to female entrepreneurship in the rural sector, where formal higher education is used to boost productivity and foster innovation. This study identified that the South and Northeast regions of the country are the most favorable for entrepreneurship. Regarding the South, it is noteworthy that a study conducted by the Ministry of Development, Industry and Commerce – MDIC (Brasil, 2024) also identified this region (along with the Central-West and Southeast regions) as the most supportive for white women entrepreneurs in the country. The study further noted that in the Northeast region, white women engaged less in entrepreneurship. However, when considering the population size solely, regardless to ethnicity, the Southeast region notably leads in female entrepreneurship, accounting for 44 % of the population. The Northeast region follows with 23 %, and thirdly, the South region. (15 %) (Brasil, 2024). Regarding women's involvement in the agro-industry in the southern part of the country, it is worth noting Boni's (2005) research, which found that women are prominent in the dairy sector in the South.

It is also important to address the inequality in women's roles within agribusiness. Generational succession in rural areas is one of the factors contributing to this inequality. This was one of the findings of a study on female entrepreneurship and generational succession that used data collected in Brazil from 2014 to 2024 (Zuchetto; Bruch, 2025). The authors found that in 2014, attention focused on education levels, rural exodus, and the lack of recognition of women's work. By 2024, the national debate shifted to wage inequality, presence in leadership roles, and societal recognition. Additionally, a challenge for the next decade was identified as changing the growing social recognition in concrete situations related to gender equity in rural areas. In practice, such social recognition of women would ensure real power in succession and management of Brazilian agricultural properties (Zuchetto; Bruch, 2025). Regarding women's involvement in productive activities in the countryside, Silveira (2022) found that although many women have been involved in agricultural activities since childhood, in some cases, women's entry into agribusiness occurs as a result of marriage. It is worth mentioning Farias *et al.* (2020) research, which highlights the daily challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in agribusiness, such as handling animals, operating machinery and equipment, daily property management planning, making investments, and using technologies. The author emphasizes that women need to balance these daily activities on the farm with household chores and motherhood. Despite these difficulties, women are standing out in the agricultural sector, transforming small properties into large enterprises, demonstrating innovation and serving as successful examples for other Brazilian women (Farias *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the research question is "How has female entrepreneurship been developing on a small rural property in Rio Grande do Sul specializing in dairy farming?" and the research problem to be addressed is "To verify the practice of


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female entrepreneurship on a small rural property in Rio Grande do Sul specializing in dairy farming". The methodology adopted is a case study, based on a site visit to a family-run agro-industry located on a small rural property in the neighborhood of Rincão da Saudade, in the municipality of Estância Velha, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS), in southern Brazil. A 'case study' is a research approach that 'addresses one or a few research objects in depth, therefore having great depth and limited breadth, aiming to understand in detail the reality of a person, a group of people, one or more organizations [...].' In other words, the main characteristic of this methodology is the depth of the study conducted (Zanella, 2009). Therefore, it is the appropriate methodology for this research, which aims to thoroughly examine female management of a small rural property in Rio Grande do Sul. The case study method has six possible data sources, namely: 'documents, archive records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts' (Bressan, 2000). In this research, data were obtained from documents (literature review) and direct observation (resulting from the field visit to the property studied, during which the author collected information and evidence). During the technical visit, notes were taken from verbal information provided by the property manager. After the visit, the enterprise's Instagram account was also consulted, which contains extensive information about the entrepreneur's brand products, details on the dates and locations of fairs she participates in, as well as product sales and other activities of the enterprise. To better understand the case study, a literature review on the topic was conducted. On 07/12/2026, a search was made on Google Scholar using the terms "*female entrepreneurship in Brazil*" OR "*rural female entrepreneurship in Brazil*". This research yielded 901 results. On the same day, a search was conducted on Scopus with the terms "wom*en,*" and "*sustainability,*" and "*agribusiness,*" (this research yielded 37 results) and in the "Lume" repository of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS, in the Theses and Dissertations database, with the terms "*agro-industry*" and "*sustainability*". This research yielded 1,412 results. Priority was given to materials addressing female entrepreneurship in rural Brazil, as well as those on the application of sustainable techniques in Brazilian agro-industry. Cross-referenced sources were also used. Additionally, online searches were conducted to verify the reality of Brazilian female entrepreneurship, especially on rural properties, as well as photovoltaic energy/sustainability, particularly their application in Brazil. This article was prepared so as not to identify the property manager involved in the study. Therefore, this research falls under the situation outlined in Art. 1, sole paragraph, item VII of Resolution No. 510, of 07 April 2016 of the National Health Council (Brasil, 2016a). Due to this classification, the research was exempt from submission to an Ethics Committee.

The fact that the administrator of the aforementioned property has higher education confirms the results of the research by Silva; Mainardes; Lasso (2016), which identified that the majority of Brazilian female entrepreneurs have completed higher education (34 %) and plan their business alone (63 %). It also confirms the study by the Ministry of Development, Industry, Commerce and Services (MDIC) on the Landscape of Female Entrepreneurship in Brazil (Brasil, 2024), which found that in the southern region of the country, women with higher education levels are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities, which may indicate "*opportunity-driven' entrepreneurship*", as opposed to female entrepreneurship in the northern and northeastern regions of the country, where women tend to have lower educational levels, indicating "*necessity-*


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*driven' entrepreneurship*" (Brasil, 2024).

The property studied covers 10 hectares, with forty cows (currently, fourteen in milking), and an additional five hectares in a neighboring municipality (Lindolfo Collor), used solely for maize cultivation to feed the cows. It also rents another 6 hectares in a different location, also dedicated to growing feed for the cattle.

The small farm endeavors to attain sustainability, as it not only produces fodder for the cattle but also generates its own electricity via solar panels. By producing the cows' feed, the property aligns with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number 2 (related to sustainable agriculture; Brasil, 2016b) and number 12 (aimed at ensuring sustainable production and consumption standards, Brasil, 2016b). Regarding photovoltaic solar energy production (Photovoltaic energy refers to the energy generated through the use of solar panels. Brasil, 2016b), this activity is directly related to UN DGs 7 and 13 (SDG number 7 pertains to the "*commitment to ensure universal access to reliable, sustainable, modern, and affordable energy systems*." SDG number 13 concerns the efforts to combat climate change, including "*the progressive replacement of fossil fuels with renewable sources in global energy matrices*"; Peixoto *et al*. 2025, p.18; Brasil, 2016b). The increasing use of photovoltaic energy in Brazilian agribusiness is considered an important opportunity for the sector's growth in the country, through reducing electricity costs. In the state of Paraná, for example, there is a program (RENOVAR-PR) aimed at "*helping to reduce the electricity costs for small rural producers, which can account for up to 30 % of production costs, depending on the techniques used*" (Peixoto *et al.*, 2025).

The sustainability developed on the Rio Grande do Sul property studied is an important factor that will likely (if it is not already) positively impact the marketing of the products produced on the farm.

The cows that are in the milking phase are semi-confined. The cows that are not in the milking phase are free in the pasture. Most of the cows are of the Jersey breed, but there are also some Holstein cows. The milking is mechanized and carried out twice a day, with a twelve-hour interval between each milking. Three cows are milked at a time, and the farm produces around 250 liters of milk per day. The milk is pasteurized using a machine, but all other parts of the production process are carried out manually. Due to this artisanal production, they obtained the "Selo Arte", which is a certification provided by the federal government for artisanal animal-origin products (Brasil, 2019; Brasil, 2018). This seal was essential for the farm to sell its products in neighboring municipalities. Currently, they supply products for school meals in various municipalities in the region and participate in two markets on Saturdays (one is a fair in the municipality of Estância Velha, and the other in the neighboring municipality of Campo Bom) and in major agribusiness trade fairs, such as Expointer (an annual international fair that spans one week, showcasing exhibitions of animals and agricultural commodities. Since 1999, it has incorporated a fair dedicated to family farming).

The transfer of milk from the milking machine to the pasteurization unit is conducted via automated hoses. In other words, the establishment utilizes "*direct expansion of the milk*," which, according to Froelich (2017), indicates that "[...] *from the milking machine it goes directly to the cooler, through pipes*." The author notes this as the "*most up-to-date*" system in milk production. There is no human contact with the milk prior to pasteurization, thereby preventing


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contamination. Additionally, the production area at the property lacks an air conditioning system. These procedures, together with the direct expansion technique, are implemented to prevent contamination from airborne sources.

It is important to highlight that, despite advancements in technology, some small-scale dairy producers continue to employ manual milking, as evidenced by Froelich's research (2017). Although the examined property is modest in size and produces limited quantities of milk, it has modernized its production methods in line with sector trends.

Decisions regarding investments or the procurement of equipment are made by the manager, who prioritizes needs, manages available funds, and forecasts expenses accordingly.

The cows are bred through artificial insemination (performed by the husband, who is a veterinarian, and the daughter, who is a chemist), aiming at the production of milk solely with the A2-A2 protein and the consequent certification (A2-A2 milk lacks the protein responsible for allergic reactions (A1), thereby facilitating easier digestion, Pereira; Vieira, 2024). The farm currently produces raw milk and pasteurized milk, colonial cheese and raw milk cheese, artisanal yogurt with seven flavors (artisanal yoghurts without preservatives, with fruit pulp sourced from local producers, bearing the "Selo Arte"), ice lollies, and artisanal ice cream with and without lactose. The artisanal ice creams are subject to inspection by the National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA). The recipes are proprietary. It is emphasized that the Rural Technical Assistance and Extension Company (EMATER) provided courses and assistance as needed. In 2023, the farm's cheese won a bronze medal at the 2nd artisanal cheese and dulce de leche competition in the state Rio Grande do Sul, as published on the brand's Instagram (Sabores do Rancho - EV, 2023).

Gradually, rural tourism is being introduced, with groups received by appointment for guided tours of the property's grounds and tastings of the products produced there. Entry to the production areas is not permitted to prevent contamination. However, they can be viewed through the windows of the premises. According to Savelli *et al.* (2022), rural gastronomic tourism is motivated by consumers' search for typical and local foods, combined with sensory experiences related to the consumption of such foods. Additionally, agri-food tourism attracts consumers from outside the rural producing region, as they seek out distinctive flavors (Radic *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, the rural agri-food tourism activity developed on the studied property is expected to have a positive impact, including on the economy of the Gaucho municipality of Estância Velha.

Next, Fig. 1 is presented, with some photos of the property and the products produced there. Some photos were taken during the technical visit, while others were obtained from the property's Instagram.

Given that the administrator assumed responsibility for the property upon her marriage, this corroborates one of the conclusions of Silveira's research (2022), which identified instances in which women's engagement in agricultural activities commenced after marriage. The administrator of the visited property is responsible for all investments within the enterprise, as well as for the development of various products and the continual pursuit of new strategies to promote the brand in the market, such as "Selo Arte" (already achieved) and artificial insemination of cattle (this procedure is performed with the aim of obtaining the "A2-A2' milk certification, which is intended for a specific demographic: individuals who have an intolerance or allergy to the A1 protein present in milk. Indeed, to serve this segment, the farm also produces a


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selection of lactose-free cheeses and ice creams).




**Figure 1**. Photos of the property and some products produced there. A) Photograph of the property's interior where product tastings and other agritourism events are conducted. Photograph by the author. B) Tasting board displaying cheeses produced on the property. Photograph by the author. C) Photograph of the artisanal yoghurts produced (Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DL_EXuSOVBs/?img_index=1. Publication date: 11 July 2025. Accessed on: 12 February 2025. Note: The brand's logo was obscured to prevent identification of the enterprise). D) Photograph of the artisanal lactose-free ice cream line, produced on the premises (Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CW0-Wixpqz6/. Published on 28 November 2021. Accessed on 2 December 2025. Note: The brand's logo has been obscured to prevent the identification of the establishment.). E) Photograph depicting one of the artisanal ice lollies manufactured on the premises (Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/B5qGswTp6Mh/. Published on 04 December 2019. Accessed on 02 December 2025).

Although it is a modest establishment engaged in artisanal production, its products are included in school meals in neighboring municipalities and are showcased at numerous agricultural sector fairs, both small and large, throughout the state. This corroborates the findings of Boni (2005), who determined that the marketing of agro-industrial products at regional fairs and sector events enhances product development due to the increased proximity between producer and consumer, thereby fostering greater satisfaction and consumption of such products. The manager of the evaluated property has been implementing sustainability practices aligned with SDGs number 2 (related to sustainable agriculture, Brasil, 2016b), number 7 (related to dependable, sustainable, and modern energy systems, Brasil, 2016b), number 12 (related to sustainable production practices, Brasil, 2016b) and number 13 (combat resolution concerning climate variation, Brasil, 2016b) of the United Nations. Nonetheless, female innovation within the examined estate extends beyond merely the development of products and the incorporation of sustainability


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initiatives; it also encompasses investments in rural tourism services. This approach facilitates the promotion and marketing of the estate's products without necessitating a departure from the property, thereby attracting consumers from diverse regions and substantiating the research conducted by Radic *et al.* (2023). The small rural dairy farm situated in Rio Grande do Sul exemplifies successful female entrepreneurship within the Brazilian agribusiness sector and supports the conclusions of Silveira (2022) regarding women's roles in family agro-industries, particularly in areas of organization, coordination, and management.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitation of the current study, which is based solely on a single rural property in Rio Grande do Sul, associated with only one segment of the agribusiness sector (dairies). Consequently, future research should aim to include additional rural properties in Rio Grande do Sul, encompassing various sectors of agribusiness, and identify any incentives from state and municipal governments for entrepreneurship in this sector. It is also advisable to conduct additional research on rural women's entrepreneurship in other states of Brazil to document additional instances of such entrepreneurial activity nationwide and identify the methods by which these women entrepreneurs overcome the challenges they encounter in their daily pursuits.

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**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any potential conflicts of interest.

**Ethical Statements**

The authors confirm that the ethical guidelines adopted by the journal were followed by this work, and all authors agree with the submission, content, and transfer of the publication rights of the article to the journal. They also declare that the work has not been previously published nor is it being considered for publication in another journal. Review by the Ethics Committee was waived because only secondary, unidentified and free-access data have been utilized. The authors assume full responsibility for the originality of the article and may incur on them any charges arising from claims, by third parties, in relation to the authorship of the article.

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