

Rural identities in the Amazon: a history of social occupation by family farmers in Amapá

Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada

Instituto Federal do Amapá – Santana – AP - Brasil

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7763-9249>

Oriana Trindade de Almeida

Universidade Federal do Pará – Belém – PA - Brasil

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4254-7982>

Tiago Idelfonso e Silva Pedrada

Instituto Federal do Amapá – Santana – AP - Brasil

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0647-6232>

Roberta Cacela de Almeida

Instituto Federal do Amapá – Santana – AP – Brasil

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5156-8443>

Abstract

Family farmers in the Amazon are individuals with diverse backgrounds, given their multifaceted historical formation. Understanding these rural persons and their social diversity is a challenge. This research sought to profile family farmers in Amapá, based on their historical background, and how these contexts have influenced their economic activities, directly affecting the preservation of biodiversity and local knowledge in the region, with the reproduction of agroecological farming technologies. The research method used was historical-structural analysis, with document reviews and interviews conducted with community leaders in the area. The research showed that the family farmer is a territorial subject and a reflection of the ethnological diversification that persists in the Amazon. Agroecological agricultural technologies also exist and continue in rural family farms in Amapá, based on traditional knowledge and the result of rural identities, but they lack better technical assistance and rural extension services compatible with the realities of family farmers in the region.

Keywords: Territoriality. Amazonia. Agroecology. Agrarian trajectories.

Identidades rurais na Amazônia: uma história de ocupação social do agricultor familiar no Amapá

Resumo

O agricultor familiar na Amazônia é um sujeito composto de trajetórias distintas, dada a sua formação histórica multifacetada. Entender este homem rural e sua diversidade social é um

desafio. Essa pesquisa buscou desenhar o agricultor familiar amapaense, de acordo com sua trajetória histórica, e como esta trajetória infundiu em sua atividade econômica, influenciando diretamente a preservação da biodiversidade e os saberes locais da região, com reprodução de tecnologias agrárias de base agroecológica. Usou-se, como método de pesquisa, a análise histórico-estrutural, com exames de documentos e com entrevistas, realizadas com lideranças comunitárias da área. A pesquisa evidenciou que o agricultor familiar é um sujeito territorial e é um reflexo da diversificação etnológica, que insiste e que persiste na Amazônia. Também as tecnologias agrárias de base agroecológica existem e resistem nos espaços rurais familiares amapaenses, pautadas em seus conhecimentos tradicionais, e são frutos de suas identidades rurais, mas que carecem de melhores acompanhamentos de assistência técnica e de extensão rural, compatíveis com as realidades do agricultor familiar da região.

Palavras-chave: Territorialidade. Amazônia. Agroecologia. Trajetórias agrárias.

Identidades rurales en la Amazonía: una historia de ocupación social del agricultor familiar en Amapá

Resumen

El agricultor familiar en la Amazonía es un sujeto compuesto por trayectorias distintas, dada su formación histórica multifacética. Comprender a este hombre rural y su diversidad social es todo un reto. Esta investigación ha tratado de perfilar al agricultor familiar de Amapá, de acuerdo con su trayectoria histórica, y cómo esta trayectoria ha influido en su actividad económica, actuando directamente en la preservación de la biodiversidad y en los conocimientos locales de la región, con la reproducción de tecnologías agrícolas de base agroecológica. Como método de investigación, se utilizó el análisis histórico-estructural, con exámenes de documentos y con entrevistas realizadas a líderes comunitarios de la zona. La investigación puso de manifiesto que el agricultor familiar es un sujeto territorial y un reflejo de la diversificación etnológica que insiste y persiste en la Amazonía. Las tecnologías agrícolas de base agroecológica también existen y resisten en los espacios rurales familiares de Amapá, basadas en sus conocimientos tradicionales, y son fruto de sus identidades rurales, pero carecen de un mejor seguimiento de la asistencia técnica y la extensión rural, compatibles con las realidades del agricultor familiar de la región.

Palabras clave: Territorialidad. Amazonas. Agroecología. Trayectorias agrarias.

1 Introduction

The process of territorial occupation in the Amazon is justified by developmentalist narratives focused on socialization and development, which span different time periods (Romani, Souza & Nunes, 2014). These are discourses that arose and grew out of the dispute over land since the colonial period, between the 16th and 18th centuries, and which have been reproduced across generations, seeking to validate the introduction of projects centered on agribusiness or large-scale resource exploitation in the Amazon, to “resolve” social conflicts at the local level in the 21st century.

Since the beginning of colonization in the 16th century, the economic model implemented in Brazil has been systematized in large estates, with land concentration, labor specialization - focused on the cultivation of export

monocultures - and slavery (Silva, 2019), leading to the belief that large capitalist production units would evolve - and become hegemonic with capitalism - and resolve the global food crisis (Azevedo & Santos, 2017).

With the introduction of other cultures and peoples into the region, European colonization led to the almost total disappearance of the Amazon's native indigenous nations, due to high mortality rates from fighting and disease resulting from contact with Europeans, and the consequent loss of memories and traditions of local cultures (Costa, 2012; Filocreão, 2015; Nahum & Ferreira, 2019).

From a more human perspective, European colonization captured not only the natural resources of the Amazon, but also the epistemological knowledge associated with these goods, through the disappearance of materials and social groups (extinction, genocide, acculturation, epistemicide) - and the loss of the relationships and social meanings that constituted them (Silva, 2017).

In addition, in recent decades, especially since the 1960s, the Amazon has undergone economic development processes, creating trajectories of social and economic dependence anchored in the exploitation of the region's natural goods and the exclusion of rural people - and their traditional knowledge - through the transformation of forests into extensive pastures and agricultural fields, land grabbing, and rural violence, which has resulted in a mosaic of degraded areas, the depletion of natural resources, and, once again, the loss of cultural identities of the local people (Azevedo-Ramos, 2009; Silva, 2017; Silva & Simonian, 2015).

Amazon colonization programs represent these development processes, under the narrative of reducing social poverty through economic valorization, forming an understanding that exploitation will be sustainable if, and only if, it is subject to corporate rules of monopoly over resources or State rules for coordinating the interdependent actions necessary for the systematic use of these natural materials (Costa & Fernandes, 2016; Silva & Simonian, 2015; Simonian, 2007).

This capitalist logic ended up driving a counter-hegemonic Brazilian peasant movement, a process marked by organization and political and social formations, when native peoples, such as indigenous peoples, were displaced from their lands. This group was joined by slaves, immigrants, and then Europeans - who were excluded from the class monopoly agreement established in Brazil (Azevedo & Santos, 2017) - united in the struggles for freedom and territorial rights, which arose from resistance actions on agrarian issues, with the aims of working and living in dignity.

This counter-hegemonic movement, which runs counter to the developmentalist thinking historically structured by colonialism in the Amazon, has been developing in the region. In it, the socialization of nature, which can be seen as an alternative to the capitalist mode of industrialization in the Amazon, as it values healthy eating, based on agrarian trajectories and food sovereignty, using regionally and culturally appropriate aspects and foods, comes in opposition to the wave of modernization and its thinking on economic development, since it bases the creation of economic capacities on a solidarity economy and the potential of production and resources. In this sense, the capacity to use natural resources has to do with the traditional knowledge of societies that are part of the environment, not with Western-style industrialization. Agroecological strategies point to increases in production and conservation of natural goods, as well as job creation and

opportunities for access to local markets, given their productive and economic stability, promoted by local actors who operate in different places, undertaking resident diversity, with emphasis on the strengthening of agricultural trajectories and constant innovation, fostered by small rural communities (Altieri, 2010).

The rural development process, driven by social diversity of the Amazon, arises from this long-term historical reality, as a legacy of resistance to the colonial processes imposed in the past, which gave rise to today's small local rural producers (Silva, 2017). The social subject of the Amazon emerges from the family-structural project, whose technological trajectories are guided by its products, and is one of the main factors responsible for the dissemination of experiences in local production process contexts, shaping the ecosystem according to its needs (Costa, Fernandes & Crispim, 2018; Simonian, 2007).

The diversity present in Amazonian rural identities goes beyond the region's biodiversity, comprising indigenous peoples, riverine communities, quilombolas, caboclos, former rubber tappers, and other groups, and is the result of indigenous, European, Northeastern, and even African cultural heritages (Nahum & Ferreira, 2019). Their territories are the main condition for their social, environmental, and economic reproduction, and Agroecology stands out in the role of technology prepared among family farmers when developing and adapting methods appropriate to specific local situations (Caporal & Costabeber, 2004). The multifaceted complexity and diversity of the peasant environment in the Amazon region point to the urgent need to study the rural identities and agricultural practices promoted by these peoples, as this community encompasses the use and development of traditional technologies that ensure the integrated management of local natural resources, aiming at their best usage, with minimization of environmental and social impacts (Stuchí, Rodrigues & Santos, 2016).

The objective of this research is to understand the historical structures of family farmers in Amapá, to know how these structures influence their economic activities, based on the reproduction of agroecological agricultural technologies, acting directly on the preservation of biodiversity and local regional knowledge. In this research, it was decided not to generalize the participating subjects by placing them in social categories already present in previous academic studies, as it is understood that these subjects have heterogeneous historical and social values, given their many regional and historical realities. In other words, the class of small rural producers in the Amazon cannot be seen as homogeneous, as it depends on both time and spatial contexts analyzed, thus presenting different family, work, and production configurations that do not fit into pre-established models, since no identity or society can be described from singular and universal perspectives (Escobar, 2005; Oliveira, 2018).

2 Methodological procedures

This is a social and applied research study, involving qualitative analysis and exploratory and explanatory methodological objectives. The method used was historical-structural analysis, employing research techniques based on bibliographic and documentary reviews and semi-structured interviews. In the bibliographic analysis, content from research in the Scopus database and the CAPES journals

platform was reviewed and examined, searching for research containing keywords related to the Amazon region, such as “peasantry”, “caboclos”, “extractivists”, “family farming”; “rubber tappers”, among others, published between 1995 and 2022, in addition to texts by classic authors that refer to the theme of peasantry. Concerning documentary assessments, the database of family farmers of the *Secretaria de Desenvolvimento Rural do Amapá* (Amapá State Rural Development Secretariat) for the period 2016-2022 was explored, as well as information from the 2017 agricultural census conducted by the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE) (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics). Likewise, there were on-site interviews with the leaders from five agricultural communities in the rural area of the municipality of Macapá, which account for 48% of the state's family farmers. These communities had been previously identified by the state's technical assistance and rural extension agencies as promoters of agroecological practices and considered active in the process of sustainable agroecological rural development in the region - the interviews took place between April 2021 and December 2022, and each lasted an average of an hour and a half.

In the interviews, to understand the trajectories, the researcher addressed topics such as historical family processes, land speculation, territorial relations, and land emancipation. Regarding the study of agricultural technologies, the researcher delved into aspects such as traditional agroecological practices (re)produced in communities, promotion of environmental preservation actions, and technical assistance support in accessing these technologies. Finally, the latent desires and needs in the field, necessary to continue endorsing Agroecology in local rural establishments, were addressed, according to the leaders interviewed. Prior to and after the interviews with these leaders of agricultural communities, between 2021 and 2022, visits were made to gain field knowledge and identify them, during which the scientist used participant observation as a complementary technique, taking field notes and participating in association meetings. Also, before the interviews, the study was submitted to the Ethics and Research Council to obtain its approval (identified by number CAEE: 38065120.0.000.0003). Next, the data collected were analyzed and interpreted, with full reading and transcription of the interviews, in order to obtain the results and conclusions of the overview.

3 The historical formation process and agrarian trajectories of family farmers in Amapá

3.1 The period of colonization and the first agrarian movements in the Amazon

It is essential to highlight that, during the early colonization of Brazil, which took place between the 16th and 18th centuries, there was the production of pre-industrial technologies, the presence of precious metal flows, the creation of the first commodities (rubber, sugar, and coffee), and the appropriation of lesser-known resources in the world, such as the Drugs of the Sertão, in the Amazon, whose territory underwent social changes during the expansion of the European economies that colonized the region (Costa, 2012; Filocreão, 2015).

Discussions about the peasantry in Brazil are also historical, dating back to this colonization period, which placed rural society on the periphery of capitalism and on

the margins of slave-based large estates, in the face of the imposition of development based on the modernization of agriculture, with the monoculture and land concentration it caused, a neoliberal and classicist strategy in which capitalism appropriates the territory that remains, even after the end of the Colonial Period (Fernandes, 2012; Marques, 2008; Wanderley, 2014).

In this sense, since the 16th century, knowledge and appropriation of the Amazonian territory has been reinterpreted and reused in different disputes: maintaining Portugal's possession of the territory; conflicts between Europeans and the Church, aiming at rights over the indigenous population; creation of an identity linked to the West, sometimes as a way of marking the difference between it and the uncivilized space, sometimes as a way of highlighting it as the cradle of true nationality (Neto & Neto, 2017; Pereira & Oliveira, 2018). Thus, Europeans treat this region as a large forest mass to be occupied, colonized, and developed, using this narrative to discuss, from a historical perspective, the impacts and conflicts brought to the living conditions of local populations (Miranda, 2018; Romani, Souza & Nunes, 2014).

From this perspective, ideas persist of a supposed demographic void that needed to be filled with economic productivity and images of a society that needed to be civilized to face global greed. Such simplifications, anachronisms, and common-sense analyses naturalized economic exploitation and, above all, the view of this territory as retrograde, inhospitable, or savage (Neto & Neto, 2017; Romani, Souza & Nunes, 2014). It is not forced to assert that the structures imposed by European colonization in the Amazon region continue to this day. This link with the past, called coloniality, has coexisted with modernity since the “conquest” of the country; it is this coloniality of being, knowledge, and power that the current US-led empire attempts to silence and contain; the same coloniality that asserts itself at the borders of the modern world-system - from which subaltern groups attempt to reconstitute themselves (Escobar, 2004).

It is also important to highlight the rubber boom in the Amazon in this context, which lasted from 1848 to 1912, as the workforce for this production was based on rural laborers, who were strongly influenced by the immigration of workforces from the Northeast and the introduction of slave labor. During this period, rubber production was controlled by indigenous techniques, but it had no economic importance in trade, as it only supplied the domestic market. From 1877 onwards, the exploitation of Amazonian rubber plantations required a large personnel, as the European and American automotive industries demanded rubber from the plantations as raw material, and this reverberated in the regional reorganization, especially in the riverside areas (Nahum & Ferreira, 2019). The end of the rubber cycle came in 1912, when exports from rubber plantations in Malaysia, established in a homogeneous manner from biopirated Brazilian seeds, brought down world market prices due to their much higher productivity than that of native Amazonian plantations (Costa & Inhetvin, 2007). The collapse of this economy led to the breakdown of trade chains, expanding the peasant base in the region, composed of the workforce retained in the rubber plantations, which did not return to the Northeast and remained in the floodplain areas, traditionally inhabited by riverine communities, with their ways of life secularized by the indigenous peoples, making

use of fishing and agriculture or beginning to exploit latex under the old rubber plantation regime (Costa, 2012; Costa & Inhetvin, 2007; Nahum & Ferreira, 2019).

Faced with this crisis, the caboclos, heirs to indigenous cultural components and with a historical trajectory spanning two centuries, in which they completely dominate the natural productive potential of their territories, in relation to the newly formed human population, set aside companies linked to the rubber plantation commercial structure and begin to base themselves on the logic of social and environmental diversity in agriculture and livestock farming.

This transformation in the Amazon was based on three internal agrarian structural movements: some workers, linked to the bankrupt rubber plantations, became autonomous agricultural peasants, settling near cities and producing vegetables, cassava flour, or rice; others remained in the rubber plantation areas, producing rubber in an organized manner through family production as extractive peasants; and others maintained working relationships with the market through the extraction of expanding chestnut trees (Castro, 1999; Costa, 2000).

Added to this process of historical colonization in the Amazon is the rationale used by the military regime during its years of intervention in the region - between the 1960s and 1980s -, which drew on certain organizing elements in its discourse, such as integration, nationalism, the myth of empty space, the idea of borders, and the need for security, all of which were guided and organized by the obsession with development that marked the administration of the period (Soares, 2019).

Over the years, agricultural, mining, and logging fronts developed, responsible for the rapid increase in deforestation, the pollution of rivers and springs, and the disappearance, invisible in the historiographical narrative, of indigenous peoples, riverine communities, chestnut gatherers, and rubber tappers (Souza & Carodi, 2019). In this sense, public policies were formulated that sought alliances with the business community in the expansion of a new land market and its economic exploitation through monoculture crops and livestock, assuming that such actions would reduce pressure on the countryside in other regions of the country, always in the name of national security (Neto & Neto, 2017).

At that time, the inhabitants of the land were seen by the military as empty creatures, devoid of any belief or ideology, into whom they could easily introduce their Christian concepts - they were considered savages, subjugated, inferior, and incapable of understanding the dimensions of Western civility (Souza & Carodi, 2019). But the fact is that there was no demographic void, nor were there empty people; on the contrary, there were traditional peoples and communities, with their own logic of reproduction, in the Amazon territory, which did not fit into the developmentalist discourse of the period.

The colonization policies of the military dictatorship gradually created a scenario conducive to the emergence of land conflicts, bringing together different social groups, such as traditional populations, family farmers, and large landowners, in the same space, with disparate logics of territoriality and forms of land appropriation and use (Romani, Souza & Nunes, 2014), which led to the occupation of indigenous and/or caboclo lands and the expulsion of their inhabitants from their established properties. In short, the peasant social formation of the Amazon region is the result of initially imposed historical and structural processes, caused by European colonization between the existing natives and the colonizing peoples, later

including migrants from the Northeast and African slaves, giving rise to the great social diversity of the region (Costa, 2012; Nahum & Ferreira, 2019), reverberating in the discourses and practices reproduced during the rubber boom and the military dictatorship, which strongly influenced the agrarian dynamics of the Amazon. For this reason, the small rural producer class cannot be seen as homogeneous in the Amazon, since, depending on the time and spatial context analyzed, it will present different family, work, and production configurations that do not fit into pre-established models (Oliveira, 2018).

It is in this sense that recognizing the legacy of the native populations of the Amazon seems beneficial: it discards the preconceived notion that the Amazon was discovered by Europeans, composing a pure nature, and asserts that the biological diversity of the region was not intensively managed by native peoples, reasons for which the technical past of men in the tropical region changes condition (Silva, 2017).

3.2 The historical process of social and economic occupations in Amapá

Until the early 1940s, the peasantry of Amapá was engaged in subsistence agriculture, cattle raising, fishing, hunting, and plant extraction (nuts, wood, and rubber), with a small population divided into isolated settlements separated by riverbeds, living in minimal conditions in houses built of straw and wood, with little access to basic services (Lobato, 2014). This scenario ended up leaving out debates on the relevance and social reproduction of agriculture, despite its modernization, and on the knowledge of traditional populations regarding natural resources and their strategies for environmental and commercial use and exploitation, which continue to be part of everyday production in many regions of the Amazon (Castro, 1999; Porto, 2005). These peasants cannot be seen as poor farmers isolated from the capitalist world (Azevedo & Santos, 2017), who plant only for their own survival, given their historical and unique contexts of insertion, with political protagonism in the struggle for land, in which family needs are at the heart of the organization (Vieira, 2019). Using the term “subsistence” to describe their economic structure would be inadequate and incomplete, which is why it is imperative to study their historical, political, and social forms of organization.

The origin of Amapá as a federal territory was based on an institutional idea of exogenous development (read: exploitation) since the Colonial Period, followed by the extraction of manganese using imported technologies between 1957 and 1998, the creation of Conservation Units, also through mandatory legal measures, and, from 1989 onwards, the development of agriculture, without taking into account local environmental characteristics, among other aspects. In any case, the situation remained the same: exploitation of natural resources, contrasting with a lack of basic infrastructure and a population living in extreme poverty (Chagas et al., 2017; Lobato, 2014; Lobato & Ferreira, 2020; Porto et al., 2009).

The transformation of the territory of Amapá into a state in 1988, together with the depletion of the mines in 1998, revealed the lack of vision of the public administration at the time regarding the autonomous development of the region, especially in relation to its infrastructure (Chagas et al., 2017; Porto, 2005). Gradually, economic activities were redesigned, and their social and labor reproduction spaces were redefined. Since then, the workforce has turned to the economic activities that

the state has been hosting since 1998 to 2025: agribusiness, which generates few jobs and causes an increase in deforestation, given the weaknesses of environmental policies; and the urban structure and social inequality it has created, leading to the collapse of basic services and violence, while others have insisted on remaining in the countryside, promoting small-scale family farming. Thus, the peasantry has become a social class that survives amid the contradictions of capitalist expansion in the region (Ploeg, 2009; Shanin, 2005).

Therefore, parallel to the government's efforts to set up hegemonic neoliberal-based infrastructures, there is a rural-based development project underway in the Amazon, characterized by natural capital. In this project, the production process is seen as an extensive set of products obtained through extractive gathering or small-scale diversified production, and the soil supports various forms of agriculture and livestock farming, which consists of small family farms, where there is no innovation or the sharing of the knowledge associated with it (Costa & Inhetvin, 2007).

Genetically, this more traditional Amazonian producer is linked to the family-structural project, whose technological trajectories are oriented towards its product and organize the technical production relationships that prevail in it, expressing value chains that are established in social, production, and transaction relationships (among themselves and with external agents), with the same occurring with the distribution of the surplus generated in it (Costa, Fernandes & Crispim, 2018).

Finally, it should be remembered that the expression traditional peoples, institutionalized by Decree No. 6,040/2007, is widely used in the Northern Region of the country and refers to quilombolas, riverine communities, indigenous peoples, and family farmers, among others, who are key players in the conservation of Amazonian biodiversity. In short, it refers to people with knowledge about the exploitation and management of natural resources, who have cultural values that are passed down from generation to generation. Thus, the concept of traditional population would have, in its preservationist sense, a much more political and ideological value than an academic-scientific one, whereby the way of life of this population is based on the use of natural resources and promotes low environmental impacts (Brazil, 2007; Silva & Simonian, 2015).

3.3 Productive restructuring of family farming in Amapá: social characterization, land use, and land speculation

In the state of Amapá, farmers who remained in the countryside, reproducing themselves socially and economically, deserve special mention, since 77% of the workforce employed in the agriculture and livestock sector is allocated to family farming (IBGE, 2019). The rural identities of this contingent are diverse, since, historically, its members have experienced different spatial and temporal processes, reproducing various aspects of peasant life (Saquet, 2014).

From this perspective, this research collected reports of diverse histories and struggles, based on which, before identifying themselves as peasants (if they do so at all), the participants presented themselves as family farmers, part of a universe of small rural producers, extractivists, caboclos, quilombolas, indigenous peoples, riverine communities, partners - in short, forest peoples. However, the absence of

class self-identification does not prevent their recognition, marked by control over their own means of production and work (Azevedo & Santos, 2017).

Some of them are descendants of northeasterners who came to the Amazon in search of work during the rubber cycle, and others were descendants of African slaves (and proudly displayed the family's manumission documents):

“My family and I have always worked in the fields. The land was granted to my grandmother, who was a slave [at this point, he shows the letter of manumission]. My grandmother was a Creole woman who fled to a quilombo community during the era of slavery and married a German man” (verbal information from Interviewee 03, 2021)¹.

These are stories told by family farmers who are proud of their roots, showing how it is their duty to perpetuate the legacy of agriculture in their families:

“I have been working in horticulture here in Amapá since 1995. Before that, I worked in construction in the Northeast with my father, but hunger was too great, and it wasn't what I wanted. I married a cabocla. She knew the secrets of working this land here. I am the son of pain, the pain of hunger” (verbal information from Interviewee 01, 2021)².

During the research, farmers were also found who were descendants of indigenous people, river dwellers - who lived on the banks of the Araguari River and moved to Macapá in search of a “piece of dry land” to live on - grandchildren of former rubber tappers, descendants of workers from the former company responsible for manganese mining in the region, who were not absorbed by the urban environment, and descendants of marriages between Europeans and natives of the region, the so-called caboclos; all, without exception, called themselves “family farmers”, highlighting the diverse types of family farmers present in Amapá.

In fact, it is impossible to homogenize the concept of family farmer based on these points alone, as the impact of the specific histories of peasants on the societies to which they belong would be neglected, reducing the concept of these people to a simplistic, Cartesian plane. On the contrary, they are diverse individuals whose characteristics vary according to the location, landscape, soil, and climate of their region. In other words, the heterogeneity of peasants is undeniable, as they cannot be understood or adequately described without their broader societal structures -the same is true for their historical contexts (Shanin, 2005). It is worth noting that the social milestone of the concept of family farming in Brazil occurred in the 1990s, with the creation of the *Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar* (PRONAF) (National Program for Strengthening Family Farming), by Decree No. 1,946/1996, followed by the creation of Law No. 11,326/2006, as a way of classifying the social class into a category so that it could have access to public policies (Felício,

¹ In the original: “Eu e minha família sempre trabalhamos no campo, a terra foi empossada pela minha avó que era escrava [nesse momento, ele mostra a carta de alforria]. Minha avó era crioula que fugiu para uma comunidade quilombola na época da escravidão e casou com um alemão”.

² In the original: “Eu trabalho com horticultura aqui no Amapá desde 1995. Antes eu trabalhava na construção civil lá no Nordeste com meu pai, mas a fome era grande demais, e num era o que eu queria não. Casei com uma cabocla. Ela sabia os segredos de trabalhar nessa terra aqui. Eu sou filho da dor, dor da fome”.

2006; Vieira, 2019). In short, this concept was created by neoliberalism to weaken the antagonism between the peasant social classes, since these persons, with a little more labor and income at their disposal, no longer see themselves as peasants, despite their experience (Oliveira, 2018).

It should be noted that, from a theoretical point of view, there is a certain difficulty in attributing a conceptual value to the idea of family farming that has spread in Brazil, since public policies aimed at small-scale agriculture have the objectives of enabling technological intensification in rural areas and boosting agricultural production and interaction between farmers and the market, which is often not the reality for small rural producers in the Brazilian Eastern Amazon. Brazilian rural workers strive for autonomy, but they are heterogeneous, that is, they have different family sizes, incomes, and workloads (Wanderley, 2019); their land is synonymous with survival, and family work is their way of life, based on independence from work and social reproduction (Fernandes, 2012); and they have their own economic market organizations and share their knowledge, which is why family farming corresponds to an agricultural production unit in which property and work are closely linked to the family, facilitating the transmission of wealth and the reproduction of this form of exploitation (Felício, 2006).

In this way, stories of struggle reflect the need for historical reparations, as generations perpetuate their trajectories, which are evident in the interviews and observational analysis: “[...] *my children and nephews study in the capital, but they will return to work on the land with the knowledge they have gained from their studies*” (verbal information from interviewees 02 and 04, 2022)³; and “*I want to honor my family name, continue the work that my grandmother taught my father and that she taught me. I want to continue our history, it is an obligation within me, I am proud of where I come from*” (verbal information from Interviewee 03, 2021)⁴.

The research also identified that the larger the plot of land, the larger the family that occupies it, since the units between 20 and 200 hectares account for 54% of all family farm labor in the state of Amapá, usually composed of families with more than five members (IBGE, 2019). Relating the variables number of people employed and plot size, the average number of workers per hectare remains the same across all plot size scales: 3.5 people (IBGE, 2019). This scenario demonstrates that the economic dimensions of peasant enterprises as production units in Amapá are determined by their availability of members capable of working, that is, by the maximum amount of work they can perform until reaching the limit of their physical capacity (Carvalho, 2014; Costa, 2014). Family farmers' ties to the land can be of the squatter or tenant type, are the product of histories of struggle for land, and are reproduced based on traditional practices that are part of the family routine (Archetti, 1974; Fernandes, 2002; Saquet, 2014; Shanin, 2005). Land use conditions vary in Amapá: about 56.7% of family farmers own their land, while 29.81% are concessionaires or settlers awaiting definitive land titles. Among landowners, the size

³ In the original: “[...] os filhos e sobrinhos estudam na capital, mas vão voltar a trabalhar na terra com o conhecimento que ganhou nos estudos”.

⁴ In the original: “Quero honrar o nome da minha família, dar continuidade ao trabalho que minha avó ensinou para o meu pai e que me ensinou. Quero dar continuidade à nossa história, é uma obrigação dentro de mim, eu tenho orgulho de onde eu vim”.

of their areas is concentrated in the range between 5 and 200 hectares (72%), with an emphasis on areas between 50 and 100 hectares (25%). For farmers with granted or settled areas, the sizes vary (IBGE, 2019) - agrarian reform settlements are formed from peasant family organizations in a historic quest for access to land and the legal regularization of their territories (Santana, Gervais & Mattos, 2021).

In Brazil, agrarian struggles are a recurring debate, as land concentration is a historical and structural process dating back to the 16th century and the colonization method. In the Amazon region, such actions date back to the *sesmarias* (land grants), the struggles of the *quilombos* (slave settlements) and indigenous peoples, and the *Cabanagem*, among other events, and even shape current discussions, such as the *Movimento dos Sem Terra* (Landless Movement), which began during the country's redemocratization, whose strategies for access to land include the occupation of large properties that do not fulfill the social functions of land (Fernandes, 2002; Silva, 2019). These agrarian struggles are, first and foremost, the peasantry territorializing the struggle for land and delegitimizing the agrarian commodification imposed by neoliberalism, which is the strategic way in which capital appropriates territory. In this vein, spaces of struggle and resistance are materialized in the occupation of land - and occupation is a condition for territorialization - so the struggles for land and agrarian reform are, above all, clashes against large agrarian capital (Felício, 2006; Fernandes, 2012; Marques, 2008; Ploeg, 2009). Tensions surrounding the issue of peasant reproduction, as subordinated to the capitalist mode of production, scarce agrarian reform, and increases in land concentration and processes of deterritorialization, coupled with other factors, have amplified struggles over land in Brazil (Vieira, 2019). It is therefore necessary to highlight that, over the last 20 years, a group of large companies has consolidated its position in the northern region of the country, whose management has aimed to respond to the demands of the global market, leading to land concentration and the exclusion of rural workers. Agribusiness, one of the recent economic activities in Amapá, has converted forests into grain monocultures, especially soybeans, in its most significant form of introducing an exogenous crop that exacerbates socio-environmental conflicts, which involve irregular land ownership, causing impacts on ecosystems and uncertainties regarding the region's economic foundations (Castro, 1999; Chagas et al., 2017). On the other hand, land concentration has historical motivations that refer to mechanisms of social domination, which is why the agrarian issue in Brazil takes on a fundamentally political dimension (Wanderley, 2019).

Actually, in 2019, the soybean harvest in the state of Amapá was 54,000 tons, occupying a total of 18,000 hectares (APROSOJA, 2019). Given the economic importance of family farmers in the state, the issue of land concentration becomes even more evident with the entry of agribusiness into the region, as the conflict over land has become more prevalent and is being carried out by capitalist companies, with the implementation of large projects, and by the Brazilian State, with the creation of preservation and integral protection areas, marginalizing the issue of land concessions to family farmers (Lomba; Silva, 2014). Agribusiness denies the identity dimensions that nourish the categories of "peasant" and "family farmer", removing from them any reference to the constitution of political subjects, often ignoring the subordinate nature of their sectoral participation, which excludes any possibility of

economic and political adherences to large properties and production (Wanderley, 2014).

It is a fact that the State's actions have always been characterized by an explicit bias in favor of large landholdings, through socially costly and parasitic initiatives and actions: the donation of land through the sesmaria system during the colonial period; the opening of agricultural frontiers, which favored the incorporation of new arable areas; the installation of infrastructure; and the legitimization of illegal and violent appropriations of public lands, in the form of land grabbing (Wanderley, 2019). In essence, the main differences between peasant and corporate (capitalist) agriculture do not lie solely in property relations; they lie mainly in the different ways in which the (re)production, distribution, and appropriation of value are organized (Ploeg, 2009).

In Amapá, land concentration is no different from that of Brazil, where family farmers occupy 82.1% of the state's agricultural establishments but hold only 19.7% of the total agricultural area (IBGE, 2019). Even in this scenario, family farmers are responsible for 60.8% of the temporary crops, 73.4% of horticulture, and 89.7% of permanent crops in the state, proving to be an important factor in the sustainable rural development of the region (IBGE, 2019).

In this context, the survey questioned leaders about the problems of land speculation and coercion for land, but they reported that they had never received offers for their properties, nor did they feel coerced to do so by large landowners. However, they all knew “some other fellow family farmer” who had experienced this problem and sold their land, with undeniable economic promises, and who now lives in the cities, marginalized, underemployed, and living in peripheral and unhealthy locations: “Today, we are already making farmers in the association aware not to sell their land. Because the land is a source of food, it is part of who we are” (verbal information from Interviewee 05, 2022)⁵; “There are some farmers who were part of the association who sold their land and now work as supermarket packers or domestic workers in family homes. They think that 15,000 is a lot of money, but the money runs out and they have to find another source of income” (verbal information from Interviewee 01, 2022)⁶; and “Today they [the farmers who sold their land] want to return to the community, but it is difficult to get land, they don't have money to buy land, they live a life of misery in the capital” (verbal information from Interviewee 04, 2021)⁷.

In Amapá, these conflicts are more closely linked to moral pressure, through the coercion of citizens, using other forms of violence to force family farmers and pressure them to sell their homes, farmland, or fishing grounds at ridiculously low prices (Lomba, Filocreão & Silva, 2020; Silva, 2015). These are historical conflicts, dating back to the colonizers and the native population, based on economic and

⁵ In the original: “Hoje a gente já tá conscientizando os agricultores da associação para não vender as terras deles. Porque a terra é uma geradora de alimentos, ela faz parte de quem somos”.

⁶ In the original: “Tem uns agricultores que faziam parte da associação, que venderam as terras e hoje trabalham como embalador de supermercados ou domésticas em casa de família. Acham que 15 mil é dinheiro, o dinheiro acaba e tem que procurar outra renda”.

⁷ In the original: “Hoje eles [os agricultores que venderam suas terras] têm vontade de voltar pra comunidade, mas é difícil conseguir terra, não tem dinheiro pra comprar terra, vivem uma vida de miséria na capital”.

political relations and their forms of wealth appropriation, led by the Pombaline Period and its miscegenation policies, groups of Jesuit missionaries, and Casas de Aviamento in the Amazon (Chagas et al., 2017; Costa, 2000, 2012; Porto et al., 2009; Porto & Brito, 2005). The food crisis, chronic unemployment, reduced income levels in rural areas, the growing energy crisis, and the new degree of organization of peasant agriculture are consequences of capitalism and not the roots of the struggle for land. The fight for land is a structural problem that arose during colonization and continues to this day, with the ongoing formation and maintenance of the agri-food empire and the consequent homogenization of production.

3.4 Agroecological agricultural technologies promoted by family farmers in Amapá and the preservation of socio-biodiversity

The dispute over development models in rural areas raises questions about agrarian reform, food security and sovereignty, and labor relations, as well as how and for whom to produce food, inputs, and seeds. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss Agroecology, a peasant production model that values relationships with production, nature, and other human beings (Scarabeli & Mançano, 2020).

Studies emphasize that traditional and local agroecological knowledge systems improve soil quality, biodiversity, nutrient and pest management, and the ability to respond to social tensions (Francis et al., 2003; Gliessman et al., 2007), and that agroecological methods and agricultural technologies, led by family farmers, non-governmental organizations, and local arrangements, contribute to the food security and sovereignty of a territory (Altieri, 2010; Scarabeli & Mançano, 2020; Sevilla-Guzmán, 2006).

In this context, the concept of food sovereignty stands out as the right of peoples to define their own agri-food policies, based on food production systems that are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable and culturally appropriate to their needs, to reduce hunger and poverty and promote sustainable rural development (Collado, Montiel & Ferre, 2010). The fundamental elements of food sovereignty are: strengthening family farmers and local and regional food systems; promoting agrarian reforms based on the organization of peasant families; not using chemical inputs and genetic resources imposed by industrial agriculture; strengthening agroecological production practiced by family farmers; endorsing socially and environmentally healthy food systems; developing and implementing public policies aimed at family farmers that can guarantee the right to food; encouraging preservation of biodiversity and traditional knowledge; and national independency to define food policies (Brasil, 2014; Hoyos & D'Agostino, 2017; Santana, Gervais & Mattos, 2021).

The focus of the agricultural economic base in the Amazon is on products with a high level of sustainability, significant economic value, and recognized strategic importance for sustainable and inclusive rural development, largely based on peasant forms of ecosystem resource management and agroforestry systems, and strongly anchored in technological trajectories grounded in traditional knowledge associated with small-scale agriculture and local capacities and arrangements, such as agroecological agriculture, mainly oriented towards local markets (Futemma, Castro & Brondizio, 2020; Mattos et al., 2010).

One of the most efficient ways to promote food security and sovereignty is through the promotion of family farming circuits, where part of the products generated are consumed by the farming family itself, maintaining and reproducing the system, while another part is shared by other members of the community through cultural, social, and economic networks, which “[...] contributes significantly to the stability and permanence of rural communities, based on economic and social relations culturally maintained by community members” (Noda & Noda, 2003). Peasants maintain autonomy over the means of production and are part of the circuit of producers and consumers of goods, in addition to having a great capacity to produce the means indispensable for their survival (Paulino, 2006). Thus, peasant autonomy manifests itself in the control of their time and space, unlike the logic that exists in capitalism (Silva, 2019). A family, territorial, and sovereign farmer is capable of endorsing social control mechanisms to combat hunger in their region, based on social and ecological constructions and the relationship between humans and nature, valuing resources and being able to create culturally and environmentally sustainable food systems based on Agroecology (Altieri, 2010; Francis et al., 2003; Sevilla-Guzmán, 2013).

This phenomenon was also found in the research:

“I expanded my land, bought another plot because my demand was high, to make biofertilizer, organic fertilizer, plant more vegetables. I only don’t plant cassava because I don’t have the land. But then I exchange the green leaves for cassava here at the association” (verbal information from Interviewee 01, 2022)⁸.

“Today I support my whole family with the vegetable garden, I no longer need to work daily, I produce what I need to produce, I put food on the table, and my wife sells it at the market too” (verbal information from Interviewee 04, 2022)⁹.

Territoriality is more than a simple relationship between man and territory, a demarcation of land; it is a social relationship between human beings who seek autonomy, compatible with the resources available there (Rodrigues et al., 2020). These characteristics of family farming, which go beyond the legislative frameworks, aim at sustainable land use, following agroecological principles, and promote social empowerment and sovereignty of farmers, given their social and spatial reorganization in the development of different forms of land use and management, building new territorialities and new local identities (Rodrigues et al., 2020; Sena et al., 2019).

Based on the concept of food sovereignty as territory, it can be said that the dispute over a model of rural development is gaining range, as it places peasants in their rightful space of autonomy for production and social reproduction, while at the

⁸ In the original: “Eu aumentei as terras, comprei mais um lote porque minha demanda estava alta, pra fazer biofertilizante, adubo orgânico, plantar mais hortaliças. Só não planto mandioca porque não tem terreno. Mas aí eu troco a folha verde pela macaxeira aqui na associação”.

⁹ In the original: “Hoje eu sustento toda minha família com a horta, não preciso mais fazer diária, produzo o que tem de produzir, coloco comida dentro de casa e minha esposa vende lá na feira também”.

same time strengthening the struggles for the deterritorialization of large estates and agribusiness, stimulating plurality and collectivity (Scarabeli & Mançano, 2020).

Agroecological actions, such as the rescue and conservation of creole seeds grown by the family farmer, in opposition to genetically modified seeds, the conservation of natural resources, the production of pesticide-free food, the preservation of biodiversity, the valorization of traditional knowledge and the articulation in the distribution and consumption of food, from the promotion of short marketing circuits, are indispensable attitudes to the realization of food sovereignty used by the traditional populations of the Amazon. Not all peasant agriculture is agroecological, but agroecological practices are peasants - they are not business - and involve knowledge, techniques, technologies, and principles such as cooperation and appreciation of ecological and family heritage and political organization and struggle, in resistance movements to the expansion of capital (Saquet, 2014).

The main practices used in an agroecological production, characterized as agricultural technologies in the Amazon, are: use of organic fertilizers and biofertilizers; management of live cover or native invasive herbs; management of mulch; green fertilization; crop rotation; intercropping; insertion of windbreaks; implantation of plant curtains; and use of areas of refuge for fauna, in addition to traditional knowledge, associated with the family generations present in the territory (Abreu et al., 2012; Almeida, Petersen & Silva, 2009; Altieri, 2002; Assis & Romeiro, 2002).

In recent decades, numerous studies developed by Ecology and Ethnoecology on the natives of the Amazon have shown the diversities and extensions of knowledge and techniques developed to appropriate environmental resources and adapt them to their needs (Castro, 1999). With this farmer, there is a detailed catalog of knowledge about structures or elements of nature, about relations established between them, and about the processes or dynamics and their potential utilities (Toledo, 2005).

These social forms, present in the small agroextractivist production, in Agroecology, in agroforestry systems, in artisanal fishing, among others, are representations of unique and local characters, that is, they bring together ancestral technical and management elements (Castro, 1999; Filocreão, Silva & Lomba, 2020; Lobato & Ferreira, 2020). This can be seen in the production techniques identified in the communities, such as time, how to stock, the influence of the Moon on production, the rainy season, and others, explaining the reproduction of knowledge (Castro, 1999). These techniques are agroecological agricultural technologies, produced within family farming, that endorse sustainable rural development in the region.

To understand the relationship between the family farmer and the land, the research sought to delve into the agricultural technologies promoted by them, related to environmental preservation, which serve to justify territoriality from the use and management of the land. They are agroecological practices, linked to traditional knowledge and related to their origins, based on their historical trajectories, which result in the rational use of the land (Caporal & Costabeber, 2002; Castro, 1999; Sevilla-Guzmán, 2005). They are territorial and emancipatory subjects that do not commodify food; on the contrary, they are able to promote food sovereignty and are producers of culture. They are subjects that respect the natural

cycles of agriculture, with their diversified ecosystems, because they know that they depend on natural resources to survive, which comes from their productive diversity. After all, it is its culture that roots economic activity in the territory and its sociopolitical and cultural contents, without ignoring or denying its own history of agrarian struggles. Although the last agricultural census identified that 59.8% of the family farmers in the state of Amapá promote some agroecological practices (forest management, soil rest, crop rotation, interbreeding) (IBGE, 2019), the indicators were different in practice, because numerous agroecological practices were identified in all family establishments visited.

These practices, seen as agricultural technologies in the local reality, are models of agricultural trajectories and are reproduced in establishments, such as: “[...] crop rotation, to ‘make the land more stable’; natural selection of the best seeds for replanting” (verbal information from Interviewee 05, 2021)¹⁰; “[...] use of fertilization made in the community itself, with internal inputs, which ‘will do good for the health of the earth’” (verbal information from Interviewee 01, 2021)¹¹; “[...] planting of certain plants only in the period of full Moon; terracing techniques, to ‘better take advantage of the rainy season without flooding the plantation’” (verbal information from Interviewee 04, 2021)¹²; “[...] integration of land with animals, recycling and management of biomass generated by dry foliage” (verbal information from Interviewee 03, 2021)¹³; and “[...] use of large trees around the plantation, to ‘prevent the neighbor’s pesticide from entering the plantation’” (Verbal information from Interviewee 02, 2021)¹⁴. Although they do not manage to explain many of the phenomena observed in the research, the practical actions work by the answers given on the relations with nature, informing the process of knowledge accumulation by generations - there is a rationality in the selection of what is socially accumulated, recycled, and socialized (Castro, 1999).

“We use practices that my grandmother taught to the family, such as using waste for fertilization, making crop rotation to leave the land stronger, and using the tucupi (traditional sauce, extracted from cassava) as a defense against pests. These things were all the grandmother who taught. It is not in the book” (verbal information from Interviewee 03, 2021)¹⁵.

These subjects are historically territorialized in different ways through agroecological practices, adapting to social and natural conditions, producing food

¹⁰ In the original: “[...] rotação de culturas, para ‘deixar a terra mais firme’; seleção natural das melhores sementes para o replantio”.

¹¹ In the original: “[...] uso de adubação feita na própria comunidade, com insumos internos, que ‘vão fazer bem para a saúde da terra’”.

¹² In the original: “[...] plantio de determinadas plantas somente em período de Lua cheia; técnicas de terraceamento, para ‘aproveitar melhor o período de chuvas sem inundar a plantaçoão’”.

¹³ In the original: “[...] integração da terra com animais, reciclagem e manejo de biomassa gerada pela folhagem seca”.

¹⁴ In the original: “[...] utilização de árvores de grande porte ao redor da plantaçoão, para ‘evitar que o agrotóxico do vizinho entre na plantaçoão’”.

¹⁵ In the original: “A gente usa de práticas que minha avó ensinou pra família, como usar o lixo para adubação, fazer rotação de culturas para deixar a terra mais forte, usar o tucupi (molho tradicional, extraído da mandioca) como defensivo contra as pragas. Essas coisas todas foi a vó que ensinou. Tem em nenhum livro não”.

without chemical inputs, and valuing the knowledge that is passed on from generation to generation (Saquet, 2014).

The food systems promoted in Agroecology are built in territories, from the strengthening of agricultural technologies promoted by family farmers. In order for this strengthening to occur, it is necessary that the policies promoting *Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural* (ATER) (Technical Assistance and Rural Extension) are expansive and socialized (Caporal, 2006, 2011). When it comes to access to technical assistance, the interviewees stated that they see the state welfare agencies as forms of access to social security aid and issuance of documents, as potential possibilities of organization and participation in the construction of knowledge and public policies. They claim to have only help from the *Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas* (SEBRAE) (Brazilian Service of Support to Micro and Small Enterprises) to emancipate the commercialization of their production and social movements.

Authors affirm that several factors contribute to the non-application of financial resources and ATER in the agricultural community, for generations of improvements and/or technologies, and cite the main problems that characterize the difficulties of access to credit policies in the state of Amapá: access bureaucracy; deficiency in the number of technicians, to assist family farmers in the preparation of projects; poor execution of projects, when elaborated, disconnected from reality; deviations in the use of resources; disability or lack of technical follow-up; difficulties in renegotiating debts with banks; farmers non-payments; and lack of information by farmers (Caporal, 2011, 2020; Filocreão, Silva & Lomba, 2020; Lomba & Silva, 2014), which is confirmed in the scenario found in the research.

The criticisms about ATER and access to rural credit are that they should prioritize the democratization of knowledge and promote family farming, in the epistemological bases of Agroecology, and respect the economic, cultural, and environmental pluralities and social diversities of the country. But the reality is that there is a dispute between two rural development proposals: the neoliberal agribusiness project, based on the expansion of agriculture, which commodifies natural resources, homogenizes production and delegitimizes local knowledge; and the democratizing project, represented initially by the proposals of agrarian reform and development in the rural environment, based on family farming and which is guided by the affirmations of the expansion of internal market agriculture, the recognition of social rights of rural populations, the democratization of access to public policies and the fundamental objective of obtaining food and nutritional security and sovereignty of the Brazilian population (Caporal, 2006, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to use differentiated strategies, which include: the immersion of the ATER agent in communities; the adoption of more participatory methodologies; the valorization of local knowledge; the understanding of participation as a right of citizenship, that generates empowerment for local actors; the use of educational processes, capable of contributing to the emancipation of the subjects involved; and the contribution in the systematization of experiences as a form of learning (Caporal, 2020; Gollo & Oliveira, 2021; Peixoto, 2008).

Questioned about the persistence in the rural environment and production in the field, even in the face of the present land pressure, economic and social factors and relationships of territoriality and emancipation in the field were cited by farmers:

“I have never seen people working with agriculture go hungry, because it gives money all the time, turns a lot, then the money comes in faster. Every day I have something to eat here in my house” (verbal information from Interviewee 02, 2021)¹⁶; and *“I am not even wanted to be rich, but I earn enough to live and eat well. Neither car I have, but I have my land and food”* (verbal information of Interviewee 01, 2022)¹⁷.

Above all, the Brazilian peasantry stands out for its form of organization, based on family labor, and the way in which it articulates itself with local and capitalist agrifood markets, seeking their reproduction, as a peasant class, and denying the bases of expanded capital accumulation (Silva, 2019). Amid the exogenous chaos found in the region, and despite the historical and structural changes in the economy and society of Amapá State, the forms of social reproduction and labor found in traditional societies insist on remaining in the region, due to the characteristics identified in the based on the concepts of family farming: territorial and emancipatory subjects; with resistance struggles against the neoliberal economic structure present in the state; and able to reproduce agrarian trajectories of agroecological base, promoters of preservation of sociobiodiversity.

Asked about the reasons to resist in the field, some of the leaders so put themselves: *“[...] I’m happy here, I just wanted to increase my technologies, disseminate knowledge, set up an organic restaurant, make an agroecological school, bring doctors here, association”* (verbal information from Interviewee 01, 2021)¹⁸; and *“It’s what I know how to do, mess with the land, I can talk to her, she tells me what I should plant. You have to know how to listen. In a world that knows no. It is not easy, but things continue improving”* (verbal information of Interviewee 05, 2022)¹⁹.

Finally, asked about what could improve their lives in the field, numerous suggestions were raised, such as access to credits and training, related to local agroecological practices, valorization of work and promotion of sales channels, Here are some of the manifestations: *“I wanted automatic irrigation, clean and controlled water”* (verbal information from Interviewee 04, 2021)²⁰; *“I wanted more training on biofertilizers, use of natural fertilizer or pest control, but when they [the welfare agencies] come here, we teach more than we learn”* (verbal information of Interviewee 05, 2021)²¹; *“We wanted to be more valued in what we do”* (verbal information of Interviewee 04, 2021)²²; *“We wanted to learn how to improve sales, have an organic label or natural product sales seal. There are people who value our*

¹⁶ In the original: “Eu nunca vi gente trabalhar com agricultura passar fome, porque dá dinheiro toda hora, gira muito, aí o dinheiro entra mais rápido. Todo dia eu tenho o que comer aqui na minha casa”.

¹⁷ In the original: “Não sou nem quero ser rico, mas ganho o suficiente para viver e comer bem. Nem carro eu tenho, mas tenho minha terra e comida”.

¹⁸ In the original: “[...] eu sou feliz aqui, eu só queria aumentar minhas tecnologias, disseminar o conhecimento, montar um restaurante orgânico, fazer uma escola agroecológica, trazer médicos pra cá, pra associação”.

¹⁹ In the original: “É o que eu sei fazer, mexer com a terra, eu consigo falar com ela, é ela quem me fala o que eu devo plantar. Tem que saber ouvir. Num é todo mundo que sabe não. Não é fácil, mas as coisas continuam melhorando”.

²⁰ In the original: “Eu queria irrigação automática, água limpa e controlada”.

²¹ In the original: “Querida mais treinamento sobre biofertilizantes, uso de adubação natural ou controle de pragas, mas quando eles [os órgãos assistencialistas] vêm aqui, a gente mais ensina do que aprende”.

²² In the original: “A gente queria ser mais valorizado no que faz”.

product as differentiated. I know this because I sell my product directly to the customer” (verbal information from Interviewee 01, 2021)²³. Despite the difficulties presented, none of the interviewees showed a desire to go out from the field, leave rural daily life, or seek new work relationships.

Agriculture is a socially constructed process, which occurs in an environment of ecological and social agroecosystems, so radical transformations will always be necessary in agriculture, which are social, political, cultural, and economically directed, because it is their collective that determines the way of activity (Altieri, 2010).

4 Final considerations

When studying the family farmer inserted in the process of socioeconomic formation of Amapá, from the perspective of sustainable rural development, it should be taken into account the diversity of the subjects that make up the territory, understanding them as a result of historical processes, and finding the exploratory logic in the narratives of the constitution of agriculture in Brazil. In Amapá, it was identified a heterogeneous peasant subject, given its historical trajectories - descendants of slaves, indians, caboclos, quilombolas, former rubber tappers and riverside people that live from family agriculture in the state - and their relations with the land - are territorial subjects, driven by their forms of occupation and social reproduction, and drivers of socio-biodiversity in the region, whose relationship with the land is differentiated because they understand that this connection goes beyond generating profits, composing stories of struggles; stories whose perpetuation is almost an obligation.

The family farmers of Amapá have control of their own means of production, have political and social organizations, can reproduce socially, from their relationships, are heterogeneous, differing from each other by geographical location, by types of crops, by the relations - which are not only economic aspects -, by the social work that they do, by the cooperation between their peers, and have historical importance, by their contentions against the forms of political or economic domination. Also, their agricultural technologies were found in the field and are part of their rural identities - such technologies, based on Agroecology, endorse the preservation of the environment and the strengthening of traditional knowledge.

Today, these family farmers are essential to the agroecological process because they have found ways to continue living from agriculture in Agroecology. Despite the effort required for the exercise of their activities, the Amapá rural subjects were able to remain in the field, under conditions in which they are subjects of their own stories. In this way, studying the diversity of rural men and their relationship with nature is part of agroecological science, so considering traditional and local practices and knowledge is essential to know the agroecological dynamics in Brazil, especially in the Amazon, aiming to understand the strategies of reproduction in this space.

²³ In the original: “A gente queria aprender a melhorar as vendas, ter um selo orgânico, ou selo de venda de produto natural. Tem gente que dá valor ao nosso produto como diferenciado. Eu sei disso porque eu vendo meu produto direto pro cliente”.

Finally, the development of sustainable agriculture promoted by family farmers in the Amazon will require significant structural changes, as well as technological innovations, networks, and solidarity between farmers and consumers. This expectation is that, through the constant political pressure of organized farmers and members of civil society, the legislative sphere is urged to develop and compose public policies that can improve food sovereignty, preserve the base of natural resources, and ensure social equality and economic viability of the activity of these subjects.

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Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada. Doutora em Desenvolvimento Socioambiental, Núcleo de Altos Estudos Amazônicos (UFPA). Professora do Instituto Federal do Amapá. Rod. Duca Serra, 1133 - Fonte Nova, Santana - AP, 68925-000. ana.lima@ifap.edu.br.

Oriana Trindade de Almeida. Doutora em Ciências Ambientais. University of London, UL, Inglaterra. Professora do NAEA-UFPA. Rua Augusto Correa, nº 1, sala 221. Guamá. 66035170 - Belém, PA. orianaalmeida@gmail.com.

Tiago Idelfonso e Silva Pedrada. Mestre em Desenvolvimento Regional (UNIFAP). Professor do Instituto Federal do Amapá. Rod. Duca Serra, 1133 - Fonte Nova, Santana - AP, 68925-000. Tiago.pedrada@ifap.edu.br.

Roberta Cacela de Almeida. Mestre Ensino de História (UNIFAP). Professora do Instituto Federal do Amapá. Rod. Duca Serra, 1133 - Fonte Nova, Santana - AP, 68925-000. roberta.almeida@ifap.edu.br.

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CONTRIBUIÇÃO DE CADA AUTOR

Conceituação (Conceptualization): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada

Curadoria de Dados (Data curation): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada e Tiago Idelfonso e Silva Pedrada

Análise Formal (Formal analysis): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada e Roberta Cacela de Almeida

Obtenção de Financiamento (Funding acquisition): Oriana Trindade de Almeida

Investigação/Pesquisa (Investigation): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada e Oriana Trindade de Almeida

Metodologia (Methodology): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada e Tiago Idelfonso e Silva Pedrada

Administração do Projeto (Project administration): Oriana Trindade de Almeida

Recursos (Resources): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada, Tiago Idelfonso e Silva Pedrada

Software Supervisão/orientação (Supervision): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada

Validação (Validation): Oriana Trindade de Almeida

Visualização (Visualization): Roberta Cacela de Almeida

Escrita – Primeira Redação (Writing – original draft): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada, Oriana Trindade de Almeida, Tiago Idelfonso e Silva Pedrada, Roberta Cacela de Almeida

Escrita – Revisão e Edição (Writing – review & editing): Ana Karolina Lima Pedrada Oriana Trindade de Almeida

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