

ECONOMY AND FINANCE

INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN COSTA RICA

A quality label to promote solidarity-based trade

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Compared to other Latin American countries, Costa Rica has good indicators of economic growth and social development. However, social inequality and spatial disparities are growing.



A part of the rural population of Costa Rica feels left behind by the changes, and has lost confidence in the political system. This is jeopardizing the country's governance.



This paper proposes a certificate for small-scale family agriculture as an instrument for promoting social and territorial cohesion. This would help family agriculture compete with imports and ensure good sales levels and attractive prices.

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THE SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF COSTA RICA

Costa Rica has good indicators of economic growth and social development. However, the country is experiencing increasing social and territorial polarization. While the promise of social advancement is limited to highly educated population groups living in the Greater Metropolitan Area, rural areas and many of their people are feeling left behind by change. This endangers the governance of the country. This paper proposes a certificate for the country's peasant family agriculture as an instrument for promoting social and territorial cohesion.

Historically, Costa Rica's economic development has combined internal growth with intelligent use of the options offered by international markets, such as coffee exports since the 1820s, banana exports since the 1880s and, more recently, tourism, light industry and the international provision of business services. Steady but unspectacular economic growth rates have led to a 60% increase in per capita income between 2000 and 2018.¹ Combined with a tradition of public services to promote social inclusion (education, health), multidimensional poverty rates also fell from 31% in 2010² to 21% in 2018. Altogether, this has placed Costa Rica at the forefront of human development in Latin America. In 2019, Costa Rica was ranked 68th out of 189 countries in the world in the Human Development Index, which reflects performance in life expectancy, education and per capita income.³

SO ALL "PURA VIDA" IN COSTA RICA?

Unfortunately, a closer look shows that the country has lost, in the last two to three decades, a lot of ground in an area that historically was a distinctive feature of the country: relative equality and social cohesion.

The Gini Index measures the concentration of household income in a society and ranges from zero (completely equal distribution of income) to one (maximum inequality).

Some thirty years ago, Costa Rica ranked quite well in one of the most unequal regions of the world. Its Gini index was 0.45, lower than almost all the countries in the region (see table 1).

Since then, the Gini Index has fallen in several countries, such as Brazil and Chile under center-left governments in the 2000s. This was not the case in Costa Rica, where the level of inequality did not fall, but rose instead. Income distribution in Costa Rica today is more unequal than in countries like Chile or El Salvador, traditionally societies with extreme social inequality. Social services, such as education and health, continue to support social cohesion in Costa Rica, but the growing disparity in income threatens to erode it.

The flip side of the coin is growing spatial disparity. (Legal) occupations with good income expectations are mostly located in the Greater Metropolitan Area (Gran Área Metropolitana, GAM). Truly rural areas have not had a real chance to benefit from new employment and income opportunities, such as light industry (assembly of medical equipment) and modern services (call centers, software), which are heavily concentrated in GAM free zones. Outside the Central Valley, traditional agro-exports (bananas) and some non-traditional ones (pineapples) have grown, but they absorb little labor per cultivated hectare and often have severe ecological side effects. For the peripheral regions, and especially the coastal areas, tourism is the main non-traditional activity, offering decent jobs and self-employment. Nevertheless, this is the exception to the rule that the economic growth of recent decades has not reached the rural areas.

¹ Constant values in \$ of 2017, purchasing power parity, own calculations based on data from the World Development Indicators.

² First year for which this indicator was calculated

³ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking>

Table 1
Gini Index, Costa Rica and comparison countries

Gini Index, Costa Rica and comparison countries				
	1990/19921	999/2000	2009/2011	2017/2018
Costa Rica	0,45	0,47	0,48	0,48
Uruguay	0,40	0,43	0,45	0,40
Chile	0,57	0,53	0,46	0,44
Bolivia	0,49	0,62	0,49	0,44
Brasil	0,61	0,59	0,54	0,54
Honduras	0,57	0,55	0,53	0,52
El Salvador	n.d.	0,52	0,49	0,39

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, accessed 27 October 2020

Social and spatial disparities lead to serious problems of governance and political stability, such as party fragmentation and the emergence of radical right-wing populist figures. Evangelical and Pentecostal movements pushing radical conservative positions (Kourliandsky 2019) have been advancing in Latin America for several decades. Their first entry point is the poorest populations groups, mostly living in rural areas.

This can be observed in the case of Costa Rica. In 2013, there were 3645 evangelical congregations in the country, of which 1566 (43%) were located in the three fully rural provinces: Guanacaste, Puntarenas and Limón.⁴ These provinces represent only 26% of the Costa Rican population and are precisely those areas in which the Partido Renovación and its presidential candidate Fabricio Alvarado won many votes in the first round of elections in 2018 (Pignataro / Treminio 2018). The peripheral areas are also the ones that showed the highest levels of abstentionism, which indicates a low level of confidence in the political system.⁵ Pentecostal movements related to an ultraconservative turn arose strongly to Costa Rica, as they did in other Latin American countries, and they are there to stay. The emergence of right-wing populism in population groups that feel marginalized and perceive few prospects for a better future for themselves and their children can also be observed in European countries and in the U.S., indicating that it is not a transitory phenomenon.

Recovering higher levels of confidence in the State's control capacity and thus obtaining higher levels of governance are very important priorities for Costa Rica, considering the challenges the country faces in the short and medium term. The exact impact that the Covid 19 pandemic will have in the medium and long term is not yet known. For an economy strongly affected by globalization, the pandemic's impact on the main export markets will be very important. A deep and prolonged crisis could seriously affect export opportunities for products such as bananas, pineapples, ornamental plants and, definitely, tourism. This would not only imply macroeconomic problems, but also greater levels of social and territorial imbalances.

To mitigate these problems, measures must be taken to stabilize the economy and social relations in rural areas of the country. One option, outlined below, is to develop and implement a seal that differentiates the products of family agriculture (FA) and increases their competitiveness against agricultural imports, which are often highly subsidized. Enabling small-scale producers to channel larger quantities of products to the markets and obtain better prices can be an important element of a comprehensive strategy to foster Costa Rica's social and territorial cohesion. The FA seal can also have important symbolic value, transmitting the message of solidarity and shared identity between the urban and rural populations.

FAMILY FARMING: IMPORTANT HISTORICAL LEGACY

Costa Rica's satisfactory levels of socio-economic development and good political performance have not been achieved in spite of having been the poorest province of the Spanish colonies. Rather, the lack of primary resources and a relatively small indigenous population was the basis for a much stronger and healthier dynamic to date, compared to other countries in the region. Naturally rich areas of the continent (rich in precious metals and labor for slavery) were colonized in a way that involved social and ethnic polarization from the beginning, between large landowners and impoverished peasants; between mine operators and their proletariat. In Costa Rica, immigrants during colonial times came to the territory with only the promise of receiving a plot of land to grow and produce their own food. By the end of the colonial era, Costa Rica was a purely small holder farming country (Rankin 2012). This was how the first successful commercial crop from the 1820s, coffee, was produced by a broad social base, in contrast to countries like El Salvador, where a handful of landowners secured access to the coffee export earnings.

4 <https://www.elfinancierocr.com/economia-y-politica/movimiento-evangelico-en-costa-rica-del-servicio/5NROWY6WQVHHRIFU-2JSSV2JHEE/story/>

5 <https://semanariouniversidad.com/pais/abstencionistas-se-ocultan-las-ciudades/>

a plot of land to grow and produce their own food. By the end of the colonial era, Costa Rica was a purely small holder farming country (Rankin 2012). This was how the first successful commercial crop from the 1820s, coffee, was produced by a broad social base, in contrast to countries like El Salvador, where a handful of landowners secured access to the coffee export earnings.

Historians link the nature of colonialism (colonies of settlement, colonies of exploitation) with the type of institutions that manifest themselves in a society decades and centuries later. Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that the fact that Costa Rica opted for a series of bourgeois institutions (universal education, democracy) and not feudal ones, like other Latin American countries, has its roots in the state of poor colony and its social equity among small farmers. Thus, resorting to family agriculture when designing policies for greater social inclusion and cohesion has an important historical legacy.

Costa Rica has undergone very significant transformations in recent decades that have also affected the agricultural sector and rural areas, such as the diversification of agro-exports and the increase in other economic activities, such as international tourism. In the last agricultural census of 2014, a total of 93,017 agricultural farms were counted, a decrease of 9% compared to the census of thirty years back (1984), but 12,000 more units than in 1973. This means that small and medium sized agricultural farms continue to play an important role in the country's productive and social structures. For this article, it is important to note that family agriculture in Costa Rica is highly diversified, with coffee (24.3%) and livestock (28.5%) being the main activity for many farms, followed by fruit (12.3%), grain (8.4%) and vegetables (4.8%). Under the broad concept of "other activities" (21.7 %) are forestry, sugar cane, ornamentals, palm oil, root vegetables and tubers, among others (INEC 2015).

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SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT MODEL COMPATIBLE WITH PLANETARY LIMITS

The call for more sustainable consumption is not new, but can be traced back to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the Agenda 21 adopted there. Sustainable consumption should not only reduce the ecological footprint of the products that are consumed, but also promote socially equitable development. At the United Nations level, the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP) was established in 2012. In the 2030 Agenda, approved in 2015 with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), goal number 12 emphasizes the global commitment to transform consumption patterns towards higher levels of sustainability.

Costa Rica is very active internationally in discourses and programs to promote sustainable production and consumption patterns. Among others, the country participates in the Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee of the United Nations' "10YFP Sustainable Food Systems Programme". However, there is still no toolbox to stimulate the accelerated transition to more sustainable consumption patterns.

The instrument we propose in this paper is to establish a certification linked to a seal or label that distinguishes agricultural products from family farming, and helps the buyer to make relevant decisions for more sustainable consumption. By 'buyer' we mean both the private consumer and state purchases. The goal of achieving sustainable public purchasing patterns has been a key element in the discourses on sustainable consumption since Agenda 21. The main logic is that in most countries and sub-national territories, both in the North and in the South, at least 10–20% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is generated by the purchases that public institutions make for their own operations and to provide services to societies, in education, health, public works and transport, etc. And since the state can define the rules under which it makes its purchases, it is an obvious idea to promote sustainable development through public procurement.

CERTIFICATES, SEALS AND LABELS TO GUIDE PURCHASING DECISIONS

Sustainability certificates and seals are an effective instrument to reduce transaction costs related to the verification of a product's characteristics in relation to sustainability. Voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) have their roots in the 1940s, when interest in organic agriculture emerged. To make it possible to identify organic agricultural products, labels with a recognizable name, such as "Demeter", began to be used. With the growing formation of international agricultural and forest product chains, other VSS were created from the 1980s onwards, such as Fairtrade (1988), Rainforest Alliance (1989) or Forest Stewardship Council, FSC (1993). With the globalization of manufacturing, VSS were also initiated in other sectors, such as textile and garment certification, for instance Fair Labor Association in 1999 and Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) in 2006.

After about thirty years of experience with VSS in trade relations, some important lessons can be (tentatively) drawn:

- Seals or labels can be an effective tool to guide the decisions of buyers (private and public);
- Seals always imply a simplification of reality because they certify complex systems against the same standard;
- However, sustained success depends largely on the credibility of the seal in its key message;
- A great collective effort is required to achieve significant market penetration (private and public markets);
- The certification of a standard, while it has to be reliable, should not trigger high costs for the unit to be certified, for example, a family farm or a cooperative enterprise.

Since the late 2000s, a new trend has gradually emerged: actors in the South have started to take over the definition and approval of sustainability standards for their products and services (such as for tourism). Of particular importance are initiatives with the purpose of making visible the work, effort and dedication of poor farmers.

In 2007, at the initiative of the Specialized Meeting on Family Agriculture (REAF), in the context of MERCOSUR, the idea of implementing seals that identify products and services of small-scale agriculture in each country was promoted and has already been partially transposed:

- Argentina: 2015, Seal “Product of Family Agriculture,” Secretariat of Family Agriculture of the Nation
- Brazil: 2009, “Selo de Identificação da Participação da Agricultura Familiar” (SIPAF), Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário;
- Chile, 2015, “Sello Manos Campesinas”, Ministry of Agriculture;
- Paraguay, 2016, “Seal of Family Agriculture, chocokué rembiapo”, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock;
- In Uruguay, in 2015, discussions were initiated to launch a similar seal.

CHILEAN SEAL “MANOS CAMPESINAS”

The Sello Manos Campesinas (SMC) (Farmers’ Hands) in Chile is the most advanced and best documented seal in the region. There is a feasibility study (Köbrich et al. 2014) and an evaluation of SMC’s impacts two years after it was launched (Alvial & Köbrich 2018). SMC seeks to make poor farmers’ production visible by accrediting four attributes that consumers recognize: poor farmer origin, artisanal product, health, and promotion of local development.

In Chile, the last agricultural census was conducted in 2007. At that time, the total number of farms reached 296,000 units, of which around 220,000 cultivated less than 20 ha of land, which can be considered an approximation to family agriculture units. Twenty-six percent of all farms were farmed by women and 53,064 producers belonged to indigenous groups. The vast majority of family farms combine production for self-consumption with the marketing of part of the produce. The main sales channels are fairs and direct sales (on the farm). Some producers have managed to secure sales to the public administration for supplying school canteens and hospitals. Others have managed to transcend national barriers and export their products.

The idea of developing a seal for the FA in Chile has its roots at the beginning of this century. A 2001 study by the Agricultural Development Institute (INDAP) identified that a sector of the urban population associates the countryside, poor farmers and their products with values, beliefs and opinions that constitute a positive heritage.

This observation gave rise to the idea of developing a brand that would enhance the commercial possibilities of a considerable range of poor farmers’ products.

A 2013 study highlighted that consumers associate with poor farmers goods made mostly by hand, by small producers, who live in the countryside and use traditional recipes based on local raw materials without chemicals. Based on the study by Köbrich et al. (2014), the “Sello Manos Campesinas” (SMC) concept was launched, with an easily recognizable logo.

The awarding of the seal is governed by a Technical Committee made up of representatives of national farmers’ organizations, representatives of the University of Chile and the Institute for Agricultural Development. The SMC accredited the first products in June 2015. By March 2018, there were some 400 producers and 1500 products accredited, including fresh foods (fruits and vegetables); processed foods, both of vegetable origin (jams, pickles, etc.) and animal origin (dairy and bee products); and also handicrafts.

A study conducted two years after the launch of SMC (Alvial & Köbrich 2018) indicated that, for producers, the main motivation for entering the program was to improve the conditions for marketing products, either because the client values or highlights the quality of the product (50%), to have new sales channels (10%), or to directly sell more and at a better price (7%). Another 11% said that the program would allow them to value themselves as producers. The study classifies the respondents into four categories: happy (6%), satisfied (20%), “expected more” (45%) and finally indifferent (29%). It should be noted that most of the producers in the “happy” and “satisfied” categories were women marketing processed foods, bee products or handicrafts. Important sales channels are hotels, restaurants and catering services. The authors mention, as the main factors of the modest success, that SMC in the first two years had focused on setting technical standards, designing operating procedures, and incorporating small-scale farmers. On the other hand, the promotion of the seal to clients and the development of sales channels in which to find the products was postponed. However, they conclude that the seal can be an effective instrument for improving business opportunities, either through higher sales volumes and/or better prices (Alvial & Köbrich 2018, 23).

THE CHILEAN EXPERIENCE AND CONCLUSIONS FOR COSTA RICA

Chile's experiences deserve closer scrutiny if a label is to be developed for the FA in Costa Rica. Both Chile and Costa Rica are relatively high income countries based on a diversified economy. In both countries, agro-exports have been an important axis of economic growth in the past decades and with some integration of small producers. Cooperatives are an important part of the agricultural institutional framework of both countries. The feasibility study of the SMC in Chile indicates that a seal can help develop differentiated agricultural and agro-industrial products and that consumers recognize it and see the characteristics indicated as desirable.

From Alvial & Köbrich's evaluation of the SMC (2018), and experiences with other labels for differentiated products, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Based on consultation processes and multi-stakeholder dialogues, an indigenous label can be designed to reflect national realities and reward products with the desired characteristics. The limited level of satisfaction that Alvial & Köbrich's survey has found among producers participating in the SMC program points to three aspects:

- First, establishing a label with significant impact requires time. VSS in countries such as Germany have a modest market penetration, for example 4.5% in Fairtrade coffee (2018), and 0.28% in Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) (2017).
- Second: The certification process for a family agriculture label in Costa Rica should be simple, cost efficient and not time consuming.
- Third, and probably most importantly, the concept of a seal for the FA should be thought through from the desired outcome. In other words, how can it help develop farmers' marketing channels, ensuring higher sales volumes and/or better prices?

In its last part, this paper will focus on two aspects. First, what would be the sales channels for FA products in Costa Rica that could benefit farmers in a sustained way? Second, what would be the characteristics that a FA label should convey to markets?

COMMERCIALIZATION CHANNELS

A starting point for SMC in Chile was the observation that a part of the urban population associates a number of positive attributes with farmers' production. Obviously, the urban consumer must also be the first point of reference in Costa Rica, since four out of every five Costa Ricans now live in the city (see Table 3). It is worth mentioning that Costa Rica, compared to Chile and other countries in the region, is a country of late urbanization. In 1990 the same proportion of Costa Ricans lived in the countryside and in the city, while in Chile in the same year 83% lived in urban areas (in Argentina 87%, Mexico 71%, Colombia 69%). This indicates that many of the Costa Ricans living in the city today grew up in a rural area or come from parents with "rural" roots. It can be assumed that the emotional link between the urban population and rural territories may be greater than that observed in Chile, which could constitute a good emotional basis for an FA seal for products marketed in Costa Rican cities.

Table 2:
Urbanisation rates Chile and Costa Rica 1971 – 2019

Urbanisation rates Chile and Costa Rica 1971-2019						
	1971	1980	1990	2000	2010	2019
Chile	76%	81%	83%	86%	87%	88%
Costa Rica	39%	43%	50%	59%	71%	80%

Source: World Bank World Development Indicators, accessed 05 November 2020

As for marketing channels, supermarkets are essential if outreach and impact are to be achieved. Rapid urbanization in Costa Rica went hand in hand with rapid “supermarketization” of retail trade. As early as 2000, Reardon & Berdegué (2002: 374) noted that 50% of Costa Rica’s food was sold in supermarkets. Without more recent data, it is not unreasonable to assume that in the last twenty years the participation of supermarkets in the retail trade of agricultural products has further increased. If products with a FA seal are successfully positioned in Costa Rican supermarket chains, a significant effect could be obtained. Electronic sales should also be included as a possible marketing channel.

Another relevant channel is public institution canteens, hospitals and homes for the elderly. Since 2015, Costa Rica has been pursuing a sustainable public procurement strategy, and an FA seal could be included as a selection and award criterion in public tenders for food distribution in state institutions and catering services at public events. It would mean that producers with the FA seal receive additional points when evaluating their offers, along with the quality and price of the product.

In Chile, a very relevant channel for the producers surveyed in the 2017/2018 evaluation was restaurants, hotels and catering services. This is another relevant sales channel in Costa Rica, given that many Costa Ricans have a habit of consuming food outside the home. In 2014, 86% of Costa Ricans living in the Greater Metropolitan Area said they visited restaurants.⁶

Finally, although the main target group is the country’s urban population, international tourism should also be considered. Table 4 shows the data for international tourist arrivals in Costa Rica. It should be noted that the number of foreigners visiting the country has grown over the last few years, and the length of stay has increased.⁷ Considering that many tourists visit Costa Rica with a vision of sustainable tourism, it can be expected that a considerable number of them would give preference to hotels and restaurants that offer FA meals in harmony with the environment and local culture. For certain products, a niche in the international market could also be opened, taking tourism as a “springboard”. Café Britt’s business was partly built on tourists who participated in a “Coffee Tour” and ordered a shipment of coffee to their international addresses. Today, you can buy Café Britt, for example, from Amazon in Germany.

Combining several marketing channels could mean that farmers notice a tangible advantage relatively quickly, ensuring good sales levels and/or better prices. At the same time, it could help with one of the challenges that all sustainability labels often struggle with: visibility and label recognition.

Table 3
International tourism as a possible market for PA products in Costa Rica

International tourism as a possible market for PA products in Costa Rica		
Year	Tourist arrivals (in thousands)	Average days of stay
Costa Rica		
2015	2899	11,3
2017	3231	11,9
2019	3366	12,6

Fuente: <https://www.e-unwto.org>, accessed 05 November 2020

⁶ <https://www.elfinancierocr.com/negocios/aumentan-los-costarricenses-que-comen-fuera-de-casa/NRJL6BU5EJ3FKDUA5A7MZ37Y/story/>

⁷ The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international tourism cannot be estimated. It is possible that the number of visitors will decrease, but the length of stay will increase, also because there is growing interest in reducing the carbon footprint of private consumption.

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RECOMMENDATIONS AND OUTSTANDING ISSUES

International experiences indicate that in a differentiated society such as Costa Rica, there could be room for a FA seal. There are a number of options for developing content and processes. Without wanting to anticipate the dialogs among the interested groups, but reflecting on the experiences of Chile and others like it, we recommend

- That a FA seal certifies the producer, and not the products or both together, as is the intention of Chile's SMC. The range of products offered by Costa Rica's FA is very varied, and certifying qualities from beans to coffee or ornamental plants would require a complex and costly system of conformity assessment.
- A FA seal should have an unambiguous and relatively simple message. If the idea is to promote FA products, this has to be the message reflected in a logotype, as is the case with Chile's SMC. Other "desirable" aspects of the producer, product, or process should be certified separately, such as organic agriculture.
- A FA seal should include processed products, since this is where there is potential for greater value added. Appropriate methods must be found to certify eligible models for organizing product industrialization, which could well be a cooperative of small producers, but also other associative models.
- Finally, it is important that the certification process be robust and at the same time simple enough not to incur excessive delays and costs. One option is to assign the certification responsibility to the Costa Rican Technical Standards Institute (INTECO); another would be the FLO Cert office in Costa Rica. In both cases, it would be possible to take advantage of capacities related to the certification of productive units.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The international crisis related to the covid-19 pandemic teaches us that a society is at risk if it depends too much on globalized relationships and networks. Europe has experienced this with the unavailability of some pharmaceutical products. Costa Rica, at least, runs the risk that income from international tourism and some agro-exports could lose momentum in the long term. This would particularly affect rural areas and their people. Strengthening short food supply chains - not as an alternative, but as a complement to exports - is needed to stabilize the countryside and prevent people living there from moving further away from the democratic and progressive consensus that has long distinguished Costa Rica. A seal for the FA, broadly outlined in this article, will not be sufficient, but it could have important leverage effects. Also, it is a measure that would not require heavy state investment, which is definitely an important advantage considering the country's precarious fiscal situation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In 1965 the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES, Friedrich Ebert Foundation) opened its first office in the Central American region in Costa Rica. On July 23, 1965, the Cooperation Agreement between the Government of Germany and the Government of Costa Rica was signed. On September 1, 1980, Law 6454 was approved, which ratified it. For more than 55 years, the Foundation in Costa Rica has developed its activities as a platform for dialogue, political analysis and political advice. The participation of multiple actors and the strengthening of social democracy are the bases of the cooperation carried out with Costa Rican social and political institutions.

Currently, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, through its office in Costa Rica, develops the two regional work projects of the FES in Central America. On the one hand, the Social Ecological Transformation Project, which seeks to contribute to improve the capacities of democratic and social government, provide content and support dialogues towards a socially and ecologically sustainable economy,

carry out proposals for alternative development models, and a fiscal policy as instrument of social justice and gender equality. On the other hand, the Progressive Youth Project, which offers spaces for training and strengthening leadership in the youth, and encourage this leadership to participate more effectively in the process of stand up for of democracy and Human Rights.

The planning concept and activities of the FES in the network of the six Central American offices consists of regional coordination, exchange and articulation with national implementation.

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Compared to other Latin American countries, Costa Rica has good indicators for economic growth and social development. Historically, it has managed to combine inward growth with intelligent use of the options offered by international markets. In recent decades, the country has undergone a strong structural change, with new export activities generating well-paying jobs and accelerated urbanization. While this has allowed for solid economic growth rates, it has also meant an increase in social inequality and greater territorial disparities.



A considerable part of the population living in Costa Rica's rural areas feels left behind by the changes and has lost confidence in the political system. This puts the country's governance in jeopardy. This article proposes a seal for the country's family agriculture as an instrument for promoting social and territorial cohesion. A seal that highlights the peasant origin of agricultural and agro-industrial products can enable producers to compete with imported products and ensure attractive sales channels with good prices.



It can also have an important symbolic value, transmitting the message of solidarity and shared identity between the urban population and rural areas. In order for producers to perceive positive changes in the near future, several sales channels should be served simultaneously, namely supermarkets, hotels, restaurants, e-commerce and tourism. The certification process should be robust and at the same time simple, to avoid delays and high costs.

More information on the subject is available here
<https://www.fesamericacentral.org>