

RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR FAMILY FARMING: ANALYSIS OF THE YOUTH AND WOMEN IN ACTION PROGRAM IN THE STATE OF SANTA CATARINA

**POLÍTICAS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO RURAL PARA A AGRICULTURA
FAMILIAR: ANÁLISE DO PROGRAMA JUVENTUDE E MULHERES EM AÇÃO NO
ESTADO DE SANTA CATARINA**

**POLÍTICAS DE DESARROLLO RURAL PARA LA AGRICULTURA FAMILIAR:
ANÁLISIS DEL PROGRAMA JÓVENES Y MUJERES EN ACCIÓN EN EL ESTADO
DE SANTA CATARINA**

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ABSTRACT

Family farming plays a strategic role in Brazilian rural development, especially in the state of Santa Catarina, where small farms predominate. However, factors such as the aging of the rural population, the exodus of young people, and the underrepresentation of women pose challenges to the sector's sustainability. This article analyzes the Youth and Women in Action Program, implemented by the Santa Catarina state government through the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock, which aims to encourage young people to remain in rural areas and strengthen the autonomy of women farmers. The methodology used involves a bibliographic and documentary review, based on institutional reports and secondary data. The results indicate significant progress in productive inclusion and the development of rural leaders, although the program has faced limitations regarding territorial coverage and adherence to processes. It is concluded that integrated public policies, focusing on youth and gender, are essential for strengthening family farming and the sustainable development of rural areas.

Keywords: Family Farming. Public Policies. Rural Youth. Women Farmers. Sustainable Development.

RESUMO

A agricultura familiar desempenha um papel estratégico no desenvolvimento rural brasileiro, especialmente no estado de Santa Catarina, onde predominam as pequenas propriedades rurais. No entanto, fatores como o envelhecimento da população rural, o êxodo de jovens e a sub-representação feminina representam desafios para a sustentabilidade do setor. Este artigo analisa

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o Programa Juventude e Mulheres em Ação, implementado pelo governo do estado de Santa Catarina por meio da Secretaria de Agricultura e Pecuária, que visa incentivar a permanência de jovens em áreas rurais e fortalecer a autonomia das mulheres agricultoras. A metodologia utilizada envolve revisão bibliográfica e documental, baseada em relatórios institucionais e dados secundários. Os resultados indicam progresso significativo na inclusão produtiva e no desenvolvimento de lideranças rurais, embora o programa tenha enfrentado limitações quanto à abrangência territorial e à adesão aos processos. Conclui-se que políticas públicas integradas, com foco em juventude e gênero, são essenciais para o fortalecimento da agricultura familiar e o desenvolvimento sustentável das áreas rurais.

Palavras-chave: Agricultura Familiar. Políticas Públicas. Juventude Rural. Mulheres Agricultoras. Desenvolvimento Sustentável.

RESUMEN

La agricultura familiar desempeña un papel estratégico en el desarrollo rural brasileño, especialmente en el estado de Santa Catarina, donde predominan las pequeñas explotaciones. Sin embargo, factores como el envejecimiento de la población rural, el éxodo de jóvenes y la baja representación de las mujeres plantean desafíos para la sostenibilidad del sector. Este artículo analiza el Programa Juventud y Mujeres en Acción, implementado por el gobierno del estado de Santa Catarina a través de la Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería, cuyo objetivo es incentivar a los jóvenes a permanecer en las zonas rurales y fortalecer la autonomía de las mujeres agricultoras. La metodología empleada comprende una revisión bibliográfica y documental, basada en informes institucionales y datos secundarios. Los resultados indican un progreso significativo en la inclusión productiva y el desarrollo de líderes rurales, si bien el programa ha enfrentado limitaciones en cuanto a cobertura territorial y cumplimiento de los procesos. Se concluye que las políticas públicas integradas, con enfoque en juventud y género, son esenciales para fortalecer la agricultura familiar y el desarrollo sostenible de las zonas rurales.

Palabras clave: Agricultura Familiar. Políticas Públicas. Juventud Rural. Mujeres Agricultoras. Desarrollo Sostenible.



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INTRODUCTION

Family farming represents a fundamental segment for food security, environmental sustainability, and rural development in Brazil. According to Buainain, Garcia, and Souza Filho (2014), public policies aimed at family farming seek to address structural inequalities in rural areas by promoting access to productive resources, credit, technical assistance, and markets. Law No. 11,326/2006 establishes guidelines for the recognition and formulation of these policies,

consolidating the role of family farming in the national context (BRASIL, 2006).

Sabourin (2010) emphasizes that sustainable rural development cannot be understood solely as economic growth, but as a process that integrates social, cultural, and territorial dimensions, reinforcing the importance of the social inclusion of family farmers. The author emphasizes that effective public policies should promote the active participation of farmers and value local knowledge.

In recent years, attention to the specificities of social groups, such as youth and women in rural areas, has gained greater prominence on public agendas. Travassos et al. (2013) state that rural youth face challenges such as lack of access to land, adequate education, and limited job prospects, which has led to rural exodus. The permanence and prominence of these young people depend on policies that promote training, access to technology, and incentives for rural entrepreneurship.

⁴In the case of rural women, Schneider (2016) highlights their central role in managing family farms, caring for production, and diversifying income. However, gender inequalities persist, highlighting the need for public policies that promote equal opportunities and female empowerment in rural areas.

Programs such as "Youth and Women in Action" in Santa Catarina illustrate initiatives that seek to strengthen these groups by promoting technical training, access to resources, and support for family succession (EPAGRI, 2023; SANTA CATARINA, 2023). These policies are aligned with the territorial rural development perspective, which recognizes local dynamics and seeks to integrate actions in a participatory and intersectoral manner.

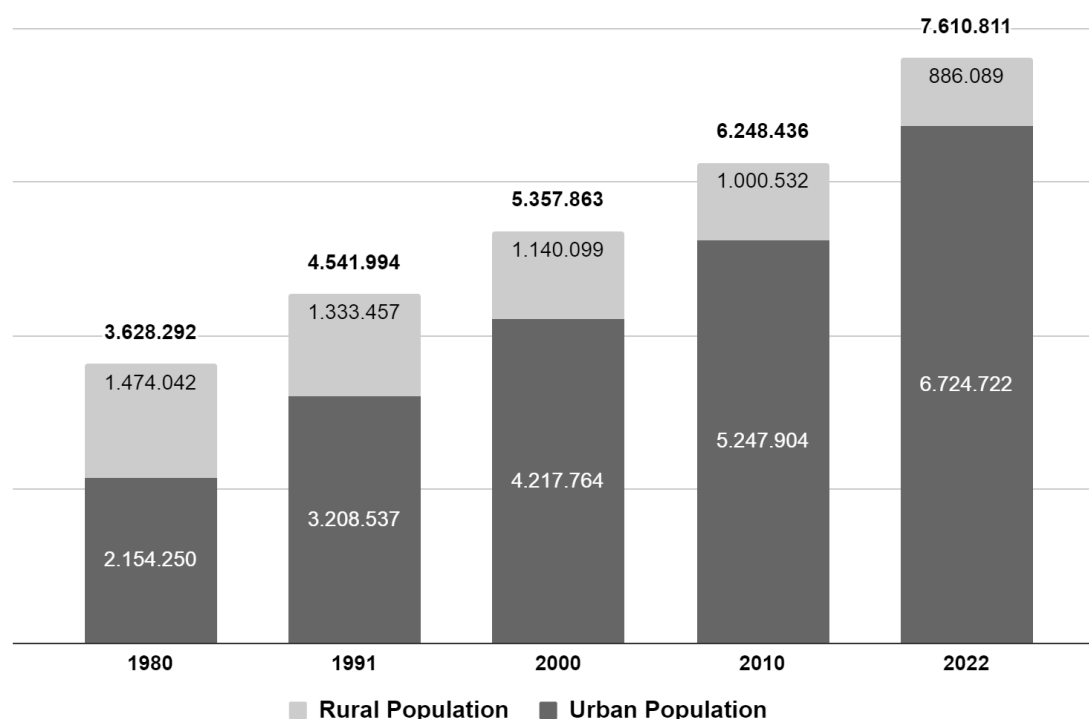
In summary, the literature indicates that the success of public rural development policies is conditioned by their ability to coordinate actions that consider social diversity, value family farming, and promote the inclusion of young people and women as active agents in the countryside. Family farming represents one of the main segments of the Brazilian agricultural sector, characterized by diversified production, family management of production units, and the important social role it plays in rural communities. In Santa Catarina, approximately 85% of agricultural establishments are classified as family-owned, according to data from the Agricultural Census (IBGE, 2017).

⁴ The Youth and Women in Action Program consists of five lines of action (projects): 1) Rural and Maritime Youth Action; 2) Connect Flor-e-Ser; 3) Connect Youth; 4) Rural and Maritime Women Action; and 5) Realize. These projects target rural and fishing youth and women and aim to support projects developed and presented by young people and women participating in training programs coordinated by Epagri. This program aims to empower young people and women and initiate a succession process in business management.

Despite its relevance, the sector faces structural challenges, such as the migration of young people to urban centers (as shown in chart 1), low rural succession, and gender inequality, which directly impact its continuity and vitality. Therefore, specific public policies have sought to address these issues, promoting the social and productive inclusion of young people and women in rural areas.

Graph 1 illustrates the evolution of population distribution in the state of Santa Catarina between 1980 and 2022, distinguishing between the urban and rural populations. By analyzing the data, it is possible to identify clear trends of urbanization and a decline in the rural population.

Chart 1 - Santa Catarina: Urban Population and Rural Population - 1980-2022



Source: SIDRA, IBGE, 2025.

It can be observed that the state experienced urban population growth. Between 1980 and 2022, Santa Catarina's urban population increased from 2,154,250 to 6,724,722 people, representing an increase of over 212%. This significant growth reflects the advancement of urbanization in the state, driven by factors such as industrial expansion, improved urban infrastructure, service provision, and internal migration.

On the other hand, the reduction in the rural population is noteworthy, which, in the same period, decreased from 1,474,042 to 886,089 inhabitants, representing a reduction of

approximately 40%. This decline can be attributed to the mechanization of agricultural activities, the decrease in the number of family farms, the lack of opportunities in the countryside, and migration to urban centers in search of better living conditions.

Consequently, new population structures have been observed. In 1980, the rural population represented approximately 40.6% of the state's total population. By 2022, this proportion had fallen to approximately 11.6%, demonstrating Santa Catarina's consolidation as a predominantly urban state.

This demographic transformation has several implications for public planning. In rural areas, challenges such as maintaining essential services, family succession in agriculture, and ensuring young people remain in the countryside stand out. In urban areas, pressure is growing for adequate infrastructure, housing, transportation, basic sanitation, and job opportunities.

Despite the relative reduction in the rural population, it is important to emphasize that family farming remains a strategic pillar for the state's economy and food security. Therefore, it is essential that public policies continue to support this segment, including programs such as "Youth and Women in Action," which strengthen rural retention through training and access to productive credit.

Despite occupying only 1.13% of Brazil's territory, the state of Santa Catarina stands out as one of the largest food producers in the country. This performance is a result of a land structure composed largely of small rural properties, where family farming predominates. The state's main agricultural and livestock products include pork, poultry, milk, apples, bananas, corn, soybeans, rice, honey, and vegetables. In this context, the Youth and Women in Action Program represents an important initiative of the State Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock, aimed at strengthening family farming and supported by the State Agricultural Law (Law No. 8,676/1992). This legislation, along with its regulations, ensures institutional and financial support for farming families. Rural development policies are deliberated within the scope of the State Council for Rural Development (CEDERURAL), as established by Resolution No. 005 of September 9, 1993, in accordance with Article 5 of the Agricultural Law and its complementary decrees. These actions are operationalized through resolutions approved annually.

The program was formalized through Resolution No. 12/2021 of March 11, 2021⁵, which established the Training and Support Program for the Socioeconomic Development of Young People and Women in Rural and Fishing Areas in Santa Catarina. The measure authorized the

⁵ E da Resolução 01/2025/SAR/CEDERURAL, can be accessed in <https://acesse.one/5R7aN>

transfer of resources from the Rural Development Fund (FDR), focusing on granting financing for projects developed by young people and women participating in specific technical training programs. Investment plans are developed during the courses and aim to promote the implementation or strengthening of productive enterprises on rural and fishing properties.

As one of the program's initiatives, the Rural and Sea Youth Action Project was created, offering credit to young people from rural and fishing areas who participate in training programs conducted by the Santa Catarina Agricultural Research and Rural Extension Company (Epagri). The methodology used is based on the Pedagogy of Alternation, with a minimum workload of 220 hours (divided into eight stages) for rural youth and 120 hours (in six stages) for maritime youth.

The Program is implemented through three strategic projects aimed at promoting economic autonomy and strengthening productive activities: Projeto Realiza; Projeto Conecta Jovem; Projeto Conecta Flor-e-ser. These initiatives aim to promote the leadership of young people and women in rural areas, encouraging them to remain in the countryside through training, entrepreneurship, and access to targeted credit.

In this context, this article analyzes the Youth and Women in Action Program, implemented by the Santa Catarina State Government, focusing on training, technical support, and encouraging these groups to remain in rural areas. The article presents some of the Program's main results and challenges, highlighting its contribution to strengthening family farming.

METHODOLOGY

This research was organized using a qualitative approach, appropriate for understanding complex social phenomena, such as the dynamics surrounding family farming and the formulation of public policies aimed at rural areas. According to Trivinho (2011), the qualitative approach allows for the analysis of social interactions and the meanings attributed by individuals based on specific contexts.

The research is based on a literature review and document analysis. The literature review aimed to theoretically contextualize the topic of public policies for rural development, focusing on family farming and the role of youth and women in rural areas. Understanding rural public policies requires reviving both the conceptual foundations and the historical processes behind the development of programs aimed at strengthening family farming (SABOURIN, 2010).

The document analysis, in turn, involved examining federal and state legislation, institutional reports from the Santa Catarina State Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock, technical documents from Epagri, as well as secondary data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). According to Buainain et al. (2014), analyzing official documents is essential to assess the effectiveness of public policies and their ability to reach family farmers in their multiple dimensions.

A critical reading of the data sought to understand the objectives, implementation structure, and impacts of the "Youth and Women in Action" program on the protagonism of young people and women in the context of family farming in Santa Catarina, considering social, economic, and territorial aspects.

PUBLIC POLICIES FOR RURAL YOUTH AND WOMEN

The recognition of family farming as a socio-productive category was consolidated with Law No. 11,326/2006, which established guidelines for the formulation of the National Policy for Family Farming and Rural Family Enterprises. Since then, several initiatives targeting youth and women have been implemented at the federal and state levels.

state, seeking to overcome barriers to access to resources, technical training, and social recognition.

Rural youth face structural challenges that hinder their permanence and protagonism in rural areas, such as the lack of policies for access to land, contextualized education, and productive credit, as well as the absence of prospects for generational succession within family units. According to Travassos et al. (2013), the lack of specific policies aimed at rural youth has contributed to the rural exodus, compromising the continuity of family farming.

Rural women, in turn, historically placed in socially invisible roles, fight for greater economic autonomy, the appreciation of productive and reproductive labor, and greater participation in decision-making. According to Schneider (2016), despite their active presence in agricultural activities and property management, women still face gender-based barriers that limit their access to resources and social recognition. In this sense, public policies with an intersectional approach are essential to promote equity and ensure the continued professional development of young people and women in rural areas (SABOURIN, 2010).

In recent decades, public policymaking for rural Brazil has more systematically

incorporated the specificities of two historically marginalized segments: young people and rural women. The inclusion of these groups in government agendas represents not only a demand for social justice but also a fundamental strategy for ensuring the sustainability of family farming and generational renewal in rural areas (TRAVASSOS et al., 2013).

Rural youth face numerous challenges, such as limited access to land, credit, and technical assistance, as well as a lack of professional training opportunities compatible with rural realities. This situation contributes to rural exodus and the weakening of productive family structures. Programs such as Pronaf Jovem and entrepreneurial training initiatives have been created to encourage young people to remain in rural areas, offering them the means to achieve economic and social autonomy (BUAINAIN et al., 2014; SCHNEIDER; GAZOLLA, 2010).

Similarly, rural women, although they play fundamental roles in productive, reproductive, and community activities, still face inequalities in access to public policies, productive resources, and decision-making spaces. The inclusion of gender criteria in programs such as Pronaf Mulher, the National Plan of Policies for Women, and state initiatives such as the Youth and Women in Action program in Santa Catarina, represents progress in promoting equity in rural areas (SANTA CATARINA, 2023; EPAGRI, 2023).

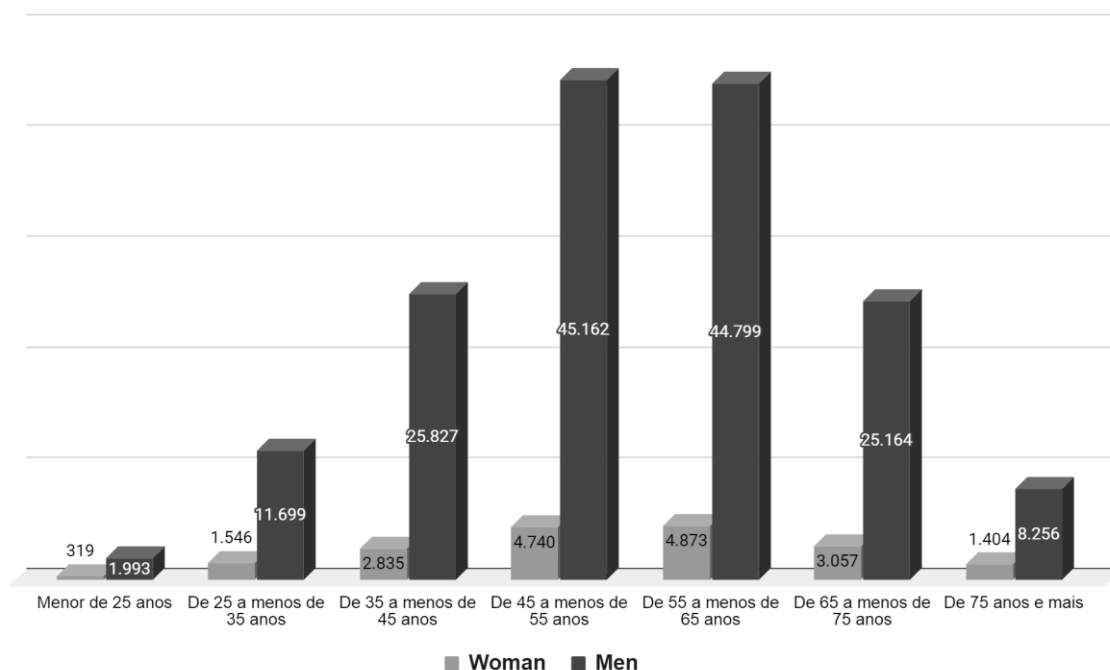
According to Schneider (2016), public policies need to recognize the active role of women in building resistance and development strategies in rural areas, promoting their autonomy and appreciation. For Sabourin (2010), it is essential that these policies adopt a territorial and participatory approach, capable of articulating intersectoral actions and respecting local specificities, in order to empower social subjects and strengthen ties with the territory.

Therefore, public policies targeting rural youth and women must be understood as central pillars for consolidating rural development, with social justice, productive diversity, and qualified retention in the countryside.

To evaluate the actions of this public policy, an analysis of the age and gender profile of the rural population was conducted, which is fundamental to understanding the social, productive, and demographic dynamics that structure family farming in Santa Catarina. Data from the 2017 Agricultural Census, conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), reveal significant transformations in the composition of the rural workforce, marked by the aging of the working population and the still unequal presence of women in leadership positions in production units. These indicators point to significant challenges related to rural succession, youth retention in rural areas, and overcoming gender inequalities in access to land, property

ownership, and public policies. Therefore, understanding these aspects is essential for guiding planning and policymaking aimed at strengthening family farming in Santa Catarina.

Chart 2 - Santa Catarina: Age and Gender Profile of the Rural Population



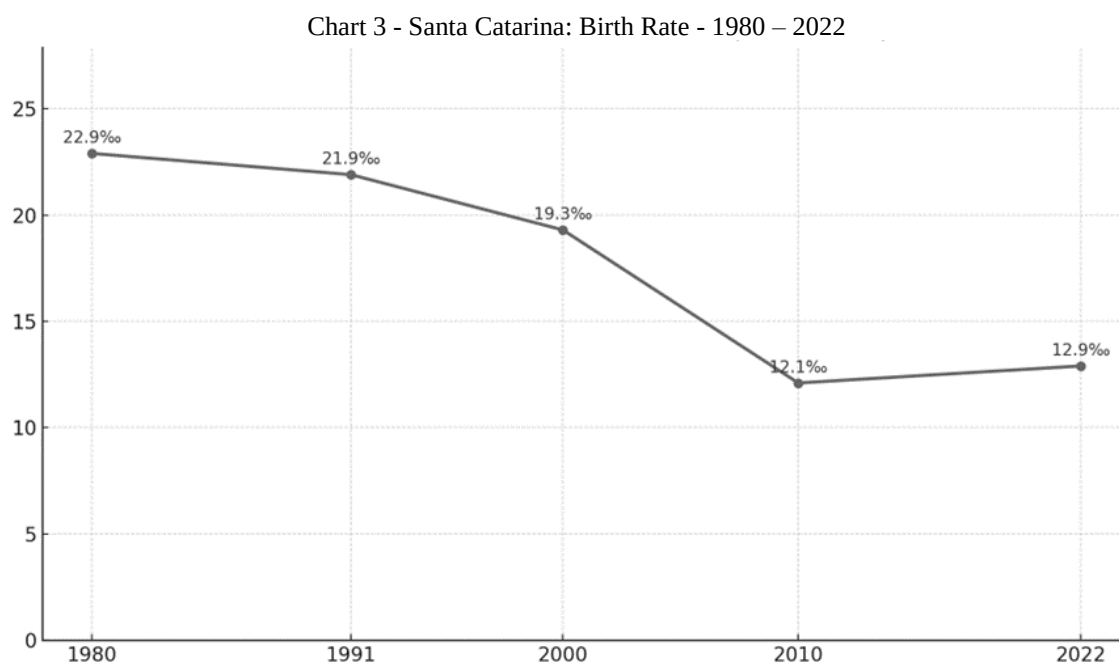
Source: SIDRA, IBGE, Agricultural Census, 2017.

The analysis, based on the data contained in Graph 2, revealed important demographic characteristics, which point to the aging of Santa Catarina's rural population, as well as significant gender inequality in rural areas.

It can be seen that the largest concentration of people in rural areas is in the age groups 45 to under 55 (45,162 men and 4,740 women) and 55 to under 65 (44,799 men and 4,873 women). Together, these two age groups represent the largest portion of the rural male population, indicating a predominance of older producers. This data confirms the aging trend of male and female farmers, reflecting the difficulty of generational renewal in rural areas.

The historical series of the crude birth rate in Santa Catarina shows a clear downward trend over the past few decades. In 1980, the rate was approximately 22.9‰, indicating a high frequency of births per thousand inhabitants. In the following years, the rate progressively decreased: 21.9‰ in 1991, 19.3‰ in 2000, until reaching 12.1‰ in 2010. In 2022, a slight fluctuation was observed to 12.9‰, but the downward trend remains predominant throughout the period.

The trend observed in Santa Catarina is in line with the national reality, reflecting a process of demographic transition in Brazil⁶, in which the birth rate is declining and the population is aging. This scenario poses future challenges for public policies in the state of Santa Catarina.



Source: SIDRA, IBGE, Brazil in Brief, 2022.

This change in the birth rate profile directly impacts population growth, the age structure of the population, and public policies, requiring new strategies to address the aging population (Chart 3). Therefore, these data clearly demonstrate the rapid demographic transition in Brazil, associated with urbanization, coincides with the age profile of the population in Santa Catarina.

The under-25 and 25-to-under-35 age groups present the lowest numbers, with a notable low female participation rate (319 and 1,546, respectively). Among men, the numbers are also low (1,993 and 11,699), highlighting a worrying youth exodus from rural areas. These data reinforce the urgent need for public policies aimed at valuing rural youth, such as strategies for training, access to credit, and family succession.

There is a significant imbalance between the number of men and women in all age groups, with male participation far exceeding that of women. The inequality is especially pronounced in the 35-to-under-55 age group, a period typically associated with higher economic productivity.

⁶ Between 1980 and 2022 in Brazil, the birth rate fell from 32.42‰ to 12.56‰, indicating a reduction of over 60%.

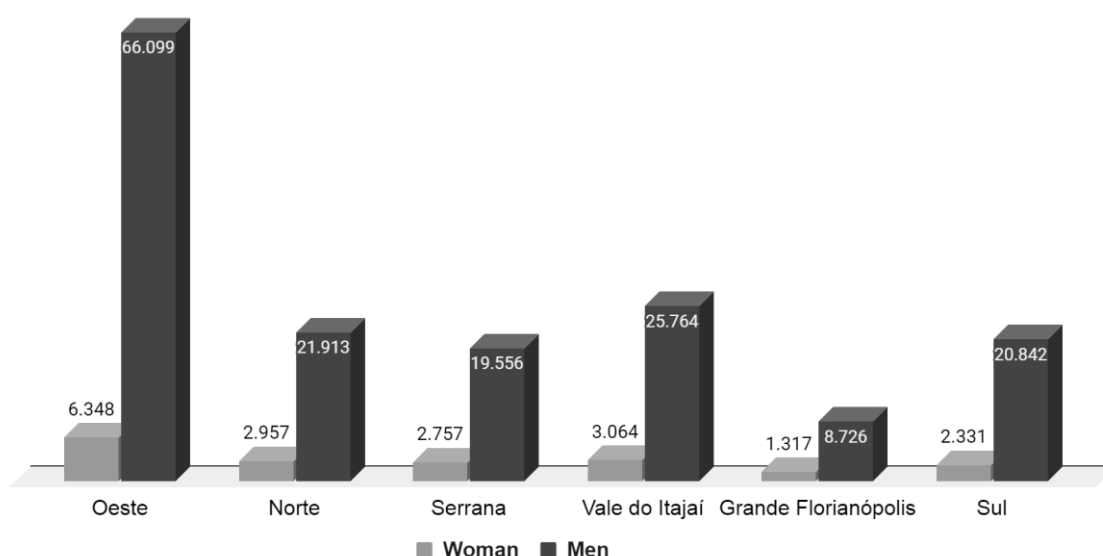
Female underrepresentation may indicate barriers to women's access to productive and management roles in rural areas, which demands attention in terms of inclusion, training, and economic autonomy policies.

In the 65 to under 75 age group, there are 25,164 men and 3,057 women, revealing a significant portion of the elderly still in productive activity. Furthermore, the 75 and over age group includes 8,256 men and 1,404 women, demonstrating the persistence of elderly individuals in rural areas, often due to the lack of successors or adequate rural retirement policies.

Chart 4 shows a predominance of the rural population in the Western Mesoregion, which has the largest rural population in the state, with 66,099 men and 6,348 women. These figures highlight the region as the state's main agricultural hub, likely due to the presence of structured production chains, such as pig farming, poultry farming, and dairy farming, associated with family farming. The significant difference between men and women points to a traditional gender division in rural labor, possibly related to property ownership and access to productive resources.

In the other regions, the male presence also significantly exceeds that of women, maintaining the trend of gender inequality. Even so, it is observed that these regions maintain important centers of rural production, albeit with different economic vocations, such as fruit growing, dairy production, and horticulture.

Chart 4 - Santa Catarina: Distribution of the Rural Population in Geographic Mesoregions - 2017 Census



Source: SIDRA, IBGE, Agricultural Census, 2017.

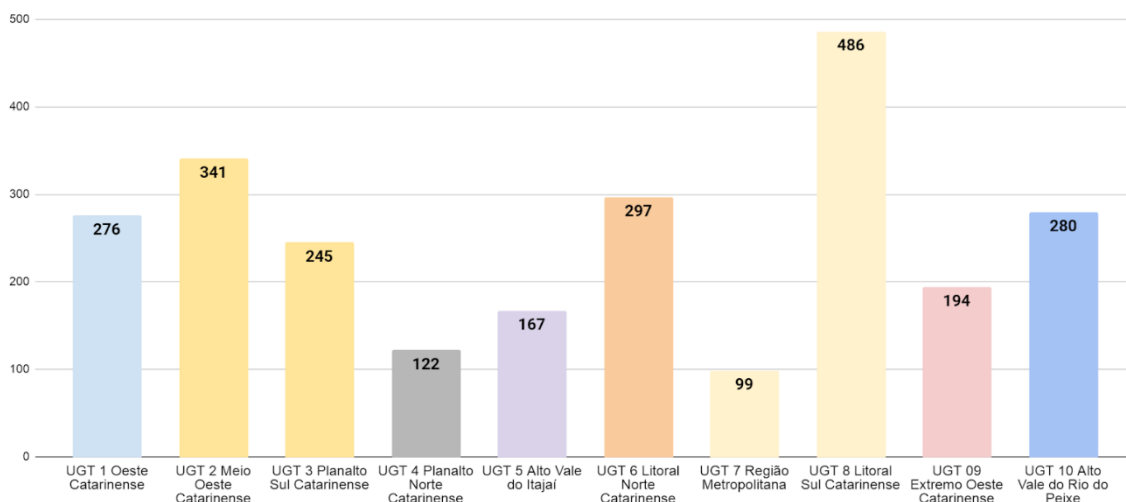
In the Greater Florianópolis region, the lowest number of people in rural areas is noted: only 8,726 men and 1,317 women. This figure reflects the region's high degree of urbanization, which accounts for a large portion of the state's total population and has less land available for agricultural use.

Finally, gender inequality is notable across all regions. It is clear that in all regions analyzed, the rural male population is substantially larger than the rural female population. This disparity may reflect a number of factors, such as the migration of women to urban areas, the lack of formal recognition of women's work in the countryside, and the concentration of property ownership in the hands of men.

THE YOUTH AND WOMEN IN ACTION PROGRAM

Created by Epagri, the Youth and Women in Action Program aims to encourage young people and women to remain in agricultural activities by strengthening productive projects and encouraging social protagonism. The Program's objectives and guidelines include: valuing the role of women and youth in rural development; supporting sustainable productive projects; promoting technical and managerial training; and encouraging cooperative practices and support networks. Regarding its implementation and operational structure, it involves: training: courses, workshops, and educational activities focused on property management, marketing, and sustainable practices; project development: technical support in developing viable production proposals; financing: access to subsidized credit lines or non-refundable resources; ongoing technical assistance: monitoring by Epagri extension agents.

Chart 5 - Santa Catarina - Youth and Women in Action Program - Number of young people trained by Epagri between 2017 and 2025



Source: Data from the Human and Social Capital (CHS) Program, Epagri, 2025.

Chart 5 presents the number of young people trained in various Epagri's Technical Management Units (TMUs)⁷ from 2015 to 2025. The data show significant variation across regions, indicating inequality in the coverage and reach of Epagri's training initiatives.

An analysis of the number of young people trained by Epagri's TMUs from 2017 to 2025 highlights significant disparities in the regional distribution of training initiatives aimed at rural youth in Santa Catarina. The data indicate that TMU 10 (280 young people), TMU 1 (276 young people), and TMU 3 (245 young people) account for the largest numbers of trained young people, possibly reflecting greater institutional reach, local demand, or more effective mobilization strategies in these regions. In contrast, TMU 6 (97 young people), TMU 7 (99 young people), and TMU 4 (122 young people) had the lowest numbers, which may be related to logistical obstacles, territorial limitations, or low youth participation in the initiatives offered. This variation highlights the importance of territorially focused public policies that consider the specificities and potential of each region to ensure greater equity in access to training and foster the retention of qualified youth in rural areas.

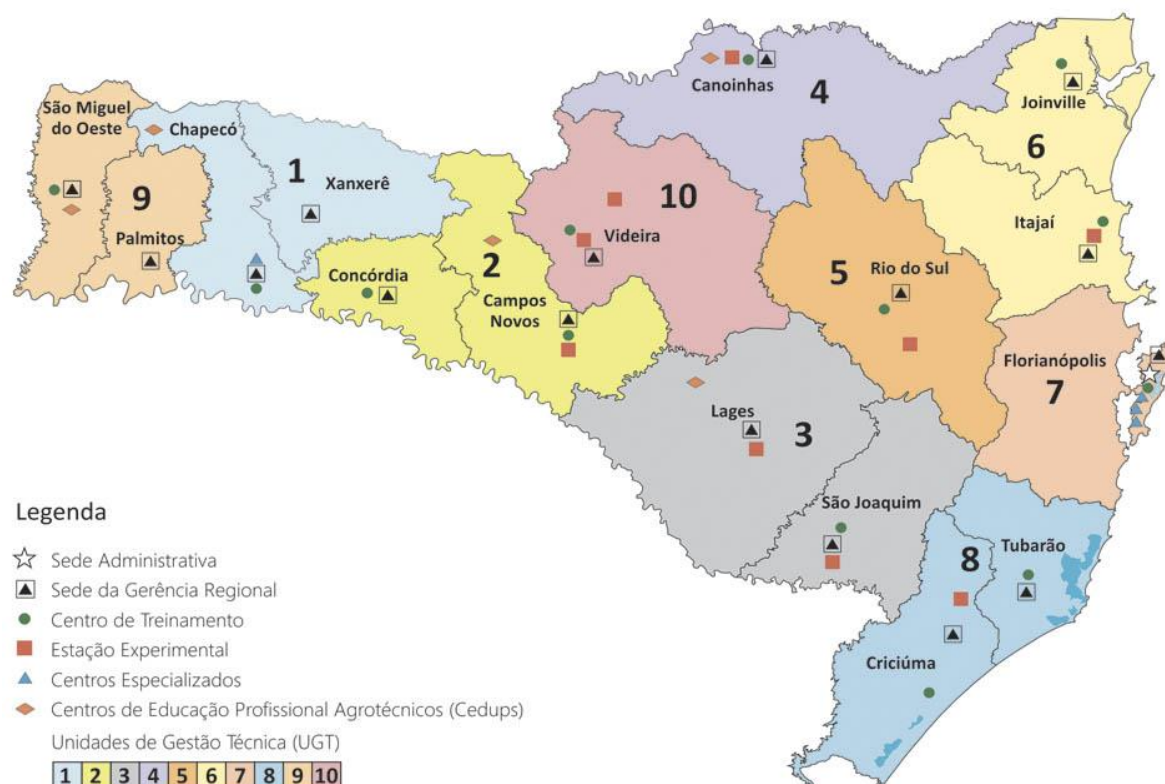
Furthermore, we can conclude that the number of young people trained by TMUs has a satisfactory territorial distribution in the state of Santa Catarina, but on the other hand, there are imbalances between the populations of young people in the mesoregions. When we interpolate

⁷ TMU 1 – Oeste Catarinense | TMU 2 – Meio Oeste Catarinense | TMU 3 – Planalto Sul Catarinense | TMU 4 – Planalto Norte Catarinense | TMU 5 – Alto Vale do Itajaí | TMU 6 – Litoral Norte Catarinense | TMU 7 – Região Metropolitana | TMU 8 – Litoral Sul Catarinense | TMU 9 – Extremo Oeste Catarinense | TMU 10 – Alto Vale do Rio do Peixe.

the data between graphs 4 and 5, we find that regions with smaller numbers of young people, according to the 2017 IBGE census, have graduated more young people in Epagri training courses.

Below is a map (Figure 1) that spatially locates the Epagri TMUs in the state of Santa Catarina.

Figure 1 - Epagri TMUs in the state of Santa Catarina



Source: EPAGRI, available at <https://www.epagri.sc.gov.br/a-epagri/unidades/>, 2025.

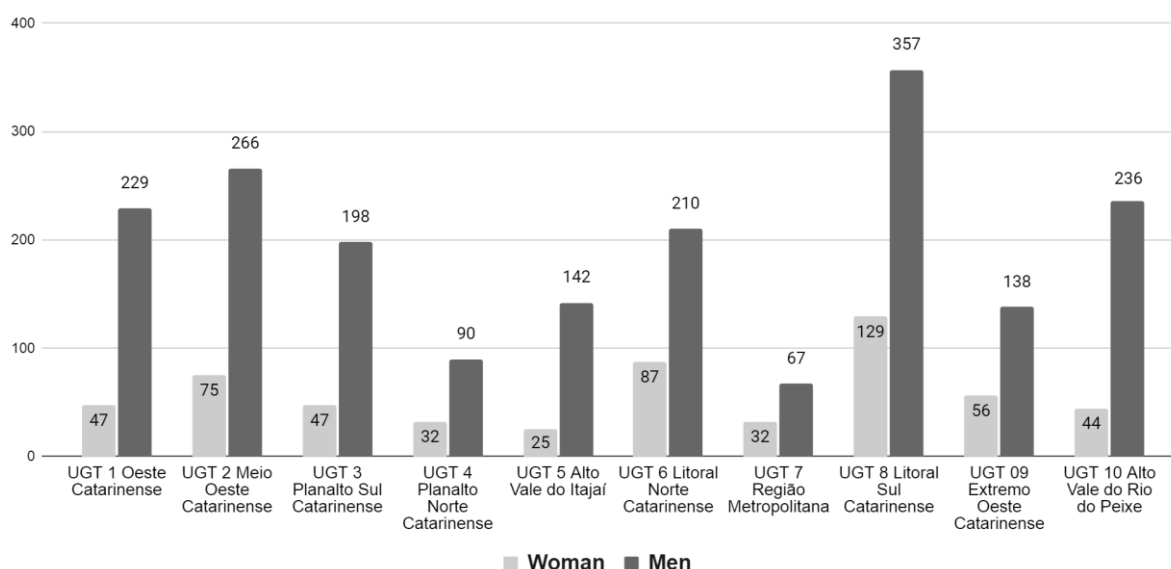
Epagri's Technical Management Units (TMUs) represent a strategic form of administrative and operational decentralization of rural extension and agricultural research in Santa Catarina. Each TMU covers a specific region of the state, grouping municipalities with similar socioeconomic, geographic, and productive characteristics, allowing for greater efficiency in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of public policies aimed at rural development. Currently, Epagri is organized into ten TMUs: Far West, West, Midwest, Upper Rio do Peixe Valley, Southern Plateau, Northern Plateau, Upper Itajaí Valley, North Coast, South Coast, and Metropolitan Region. This structure favors regionalized planning, the adaptation of technologies to local realities, and the strengthening of agriculture and livestock, contributing to the sustainability and economic dynamism of Santa Catarina's rural areas.

Table 1 - Santa Catarina: Number of Municipalities by TMU of Epagri

EPAGRI's TMU	Nº of municipalities
TMU 1 West of Santa Catarina	39
TMU 2 Middle West of Santa Catarina	36
TMU 3 Southern Plateau of Santa Catarina	17
TMU 4 Northern Plateau of Santa Catarina	12
TMU 5 High Valley of Itajaí	29
TMU 6 Northern Coast of Santa Catarina	32
TMU 7 Metropolitan Region	21
TMU 8 Southern Coast of Santa Catarina	46
TMU 09 Far West of Santa Catarina	26
TMU 10 High Valley of Rio do Peixe	15

Source: <https://acesse.one/RtwMm>, 2025.

Chart 6 - Santa Catarina: Youth and Women in Action Program - Young people – men and women – trained between 2017 and 2025 in courses by TMU (Technical Management Unit) of Epagri



Source: Data from the Human and Social Capital (CHS) Program, EPAGRI, 2025.

The distribution of young graduates by gender in the different TMUs between 2017 and 2025 reveals a markedly unequal pattern between men and women. In all regions analyzed, a significant predominance of young men in the training offered is observed, indicating a persistent gender inequality in access to training opportunities in rural areas.

TMUs 1, 3, and 10 stand out with the highest absolute numbers of young male graduates, totaling 229, 198, and 236 male participants, respectively, while the numbers of women in these same regions were 47, 47, and 44, respectively. On the other hand, TMUs such as Itajaí/Joinville (TMU 6) and Concórdia Campos Novos (TMU 2) had the lowest numbers of female participants (20 and 32, respectively), reinforcing the underrepresentation of women in these training spaces.

Despite the widespread numerical inequality, some TMUs demonstrate relative progress

in the inclusion of young women. A striking example is TMU 8 Araranguá/Tubarão, with 81 female graduates. While still lower than the number of male graduates (195), it represents the highest absolute number of female graduates among all units. TMU 6 Itajaí/Joinville also stands out for the relative proximity between the numbers of women (67) and men (133), indicating potential regional strategies to encourage female participation.

These data reinforce the need for specific public policies that promote gender equity in access to rural education and training, recognizing the historical and cultural barriers that limit women's participation. As Schneider (2016) argues, the presence of women in rural production activities is still undervalued, despite its economic and social relevance. Therefore, initiatives that include affirmative action, such as gender quotas, inclusive pedagogical approaches, and encouraging female leadership, are essential to reverse this situation.

Given the gender inequality evidenced in the data, it is essential that public policies aimed at rural development adopt more inclusive strategies that are sensitive to the specific needs of young rural women. Sabourin (2010) emphasizes that the historical invisibility of women in agricultural policies is directly associated with patriarchal social structures, which still limit women's access to resources, land ownership, and technical training. For Buainain et al. (2014), the effectiveness of public policies depends on their ability to recognize and address the social and territorial diversity of rural Brazil. As Travassos et al. point out. (2013), promoting the qualified retention of rural youth, especially women, is not only a matter of social justice, but also a strategic condition for the sustainability of family farming and territorial development.

RESULTS

The analysis of the data presented shows that the Youth and Women in Action Program is an important initiative to strengthen family farming in the state of Santa Catarina, especially by addressing two strategic areas: rural youth and gender equity. Based on data from 2017 to 2025, a positive impact was observed in the training of young farmers, encouraging them to remain in the countryside, and promoting rural entrepreneurship, although there are limitations that need to be addressed.

The results reveal that:

- There was an increase in the participation of young people in productive activities and in the development of viable agricultural projects, particularly in TMUs 1, 3, and 10, which concentrated the largest number of trained young people.
- The presence of women in technical and training courses, although still unequal compared to men, has shown progress in some regions, such as Araranguá (TMU 8) and Joinville (TMU 6), which indicates the effectiveness of local inclusion strategies.
- The training provided by the program has generated positive impacts, such as strengthening productive autonomy, access to targeted credit lines, and encouraging skilled workers to remain in rural areas.

Demographic data from the 2017 Agricultural Census indicate a significant aging of Santa Catarina's rural population and a reduced presence of young people and women in productive and leadership positions. The predominance of farmers over 45, combined with the underrepresentation of women in all regions, confirms the need to strengthen public policies that address these historical inequalities.

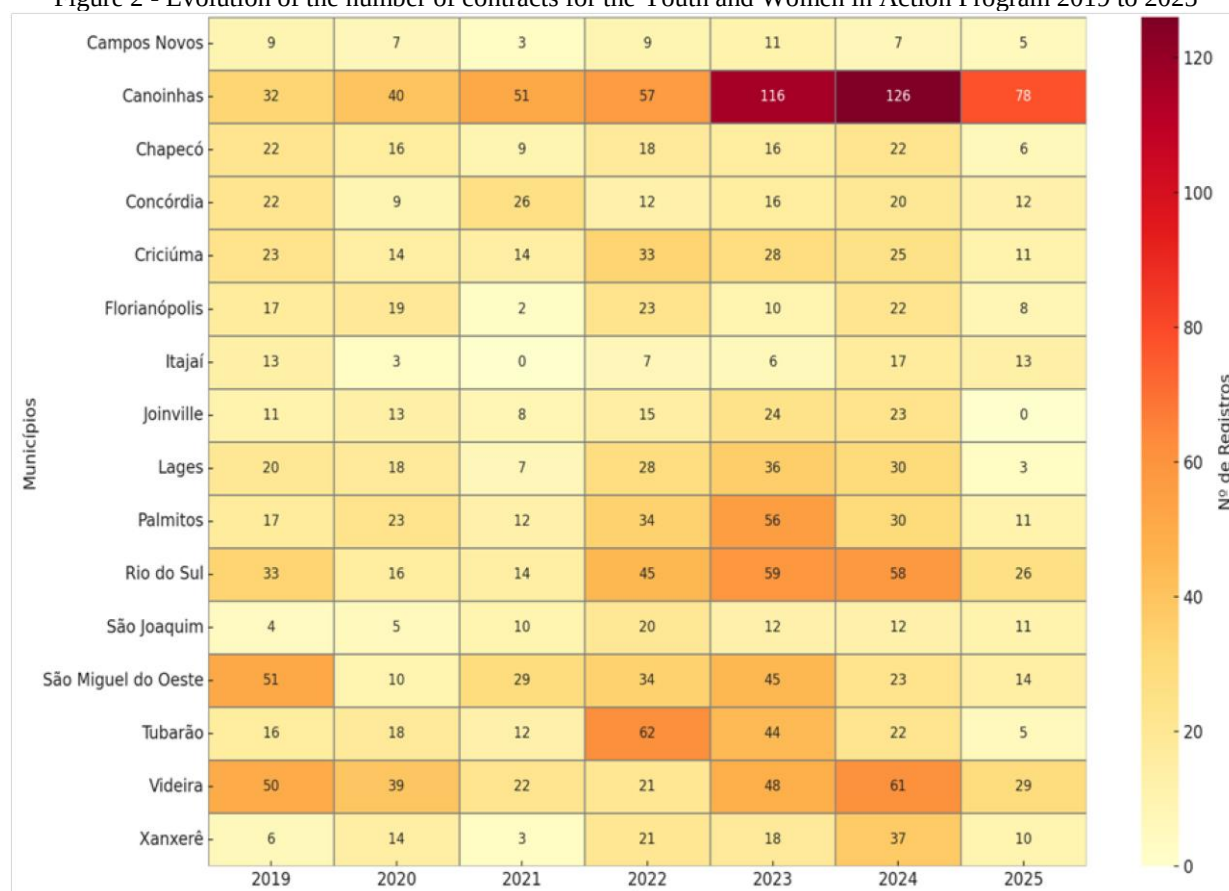
Given this scenario, the Youth and Women in Action Program stands out for promoting an integrated approach—combining technical training, access to credit, and ongoing technical assistance—and directly responds to demands for generational renewal and gender inclusion. Its design and implementation reflect the principles of a territorial and participatory approach, recognizing the economic, social, and cultural diversity of Santa Catarina's rural environment. To increase its effectiveness, we recommend:

- expanding regional coverage, focusing on more vulnerable areas or those with lower participation to date, and
- creating permanent monitoring and evaluation systems that allow for the real impact of actions to be measured in the short, medium, and long term.

In short, the results indicate that public policies aimed at rural youth and women are essential for the sustainability of family farming. Such policies not only foster social and productive inclusion but also ensure the future of rural communities, promoting a more just, resilient, and inclusive rural development model.

Below, Figure 2 presents the spatial distribution of the number of contracts under the Youth and Women in Action Program from 2019 to 2025 in the state of Santa Catarina.

Figure 2 - Evolution of the number of contracts for the Youth and Women in Action Program 2019 to 2025



Source: Data from the CHS (Human and Social Capital) Program, Epagri, 2025.

Continuity and regional intensification are identified in the midwest and northern regions of the state of Santa Catarina, with a constant and high intensity of contracts throughout the period. In 2021, 2023, and 2024, this area stands out as the epicenter of the program, suggesting a territory with strong participation or a need met.

Progressive Geographic Expansion. The program's territorial reach is growing:

- **2019–2020:** Coverage still concentrated in specific areas.
- **2021–2022:** Greater diversity of participating municipalities, including regions on the southern and western coasts.
- **2023–2024:** Continuity of the dispersion pattern, albeit with a strong concentration in a central core, suggesting that, despite the expansion, some municipalities account for the majority of contracts.

Areas with Low or No Participation Some regions have remained without any contracts over the years, which may indicate: weak local institutional coordination; lack of publicity; lack of young people and women with the profile to join the program; socioeconomic or logistical

obstacles to implementation.

The spatial distribution of contracts under the Youth and Women in Action Program between 2019 and 2024 reveals a process of institutional maturation and selective territorialization of public policy. While some regions maintain consistent participation—indicating consolidated local structures and strong social demand—others remain marginalized, which may reflect inequalities in access to public policies.

The program's spatial behavior suggests that its activities are focused on territories with a history of family farming organization and the presence of active rural youth, but it still faces challenges in reaching regions with low visibility or a lack of coordination.

The spatial analysis of contracts signed by the Youth and Women in Action Program from 2019 to 2024 highlights a trajectory of progressive territorial expansion, albeit marked by strong regional concentration. The persistence of high contract volumes in certain areas, notably in the midwest/north region of Santa Catarina, points to the effectiveness of local institutional coordination, while the lack of coverage in other regions of the state suggests structural inequalities in access to public policies. These results reinforce the need for decentralization strategies, territorial inclusion, and strengthening of local networks to ensure equity in the implementation of rural development policies aimed at youth and women.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The data analyzed in this study show that Santa Catarina's rural population presents a profile marked by aging, male predominance, and limited generational renewal. This scenario reinforces the urgency of public policies aimed at ensuring the continued qualifications of young people and women in rural areas, such as the Youth and Women in Action Program, which integrates technical training with access to guided productive credit. Such initiatives are fundamental to the valorization of family farming based on equity, inclusion, and social sustainability. A regional analysis of rural dynamics in Santa Catarina highlights three relevant implications for public policy planning: i) The concentration of agricultural activity in the Western mesoregion demands specific actions to encourage innovation, sustainability, and the strengthening of family production chains; ii) Persistent gender inequality in rural areas highlights the need to expand women's access to land, credit, technical assistance, and decision-making; iii) The socioeconomic and cultural diversity among mesoregions imposes the need for territorialized

policies that respect local specificities.

The Youth and Women in Action Program stands out as a relevant strategy by addressing, in an articulated manner, two central challenges in rural areas: generational succession and gender equity. Its integrative concept—based on training, technical assistance, and financial support—contributes to a systemic approach to sustainable rural development. The data demonstrate the urgency of addressing the aging of the rural population, the low inclusion of young people, and gender inequality in access to productive opportunities. To increase the program's effectiveness, the following are recommended:

- Expanding territorial coverage, focusing on underserved regions;
- Creating and improving monitoring and impact assessment mechanisms, with quantitative and qualitative indicators;
- Maintaining and expanding resources;

It is therefore concluded that structured and intersectional public policies, such as the Youth and Women in Action Program, not only favor social inclusion, but are also decisive for the vitality of family farming and the sustainability of rural communities in Santa Catarina.

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