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Agricultural Innovations in Family Farming: Case Study from Esmeraldas in Ecuador

RAWIA DERBEL¹, NARCISA DE JESÚS REQUELME², MARCO MONCAYO MIÑO³

¹*Agris Mundus, Tunisia*

²*Salesian Polytechnic University, Ecuador*

³*Technical University of Madrid, Spain*

Abstract

In Ecuador, family farming (FF) is the predominant form of agriculture for food production as it represents 80% of the agricultural employment of the rural population and provides almost half of the consumed basic food. This study deals with identification and characterisation of innovations in family farms and analysis of factors that affect their adoption. It values the strategic importance of the implication of innovations and technologies in FF in Ecuador. Results are based on an online survey applied with professionals from the three micro climate zones in the country; coastal plains, mountain chain and Amazonia. In order to get a general overview, an accurate territorial case study was carried out in Esmeraldas based on focus group discussions with farmers. They suggested a wide range of innovations that come to support public policy makers and institutional frameworks in future strategies to let farmers produce competitively. The identified innovations have been classified according to multiple criteria: degree of novelty, nature and technological level. This generates eight types of innovations and an appraisal of fourteen typologies. A wide range of typologies has been evidenced in the field such as RaPcT that corresponds to radical process innovations based on generic technologies which modify profoundly the productive, environmental and economic parameters in production processes using existing technologies outside the local environment. However, to understand the social problematic of the adoption of innovations, factors have been pointed out from which the most important are economic, cultural, organisational and lack of technical information. To conclude, it has been evidenced that in FF in the Ecuadorian context, many innovations are considered because they modify and improve a production system and are adapted to territorial conditions. However, they cannot be considered as such in other production systems or territories. Therefore, state or private interventions must adjust to these realities. Furthermore the application of innovations in FF requires more than action by farmers alone, it involves the public sector, civil society and organisations in an innovation network to lead to a strong, competitive and sustainable FF.

Keywords: Ecuador, family farming, innovation