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Link of Ecuadorian Universities with the Rural Sector through Pre-professional Practices

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Abstract

During academic training, agricultural professionals acquire skills that are a fundamental pillar for revitalizing the agricultural sector, generating social change, meeting the needs of the productive sector and sustainable growth in rural areas. To promote this, Ecuadorian legislation requires the establishment of pre-professional practices that effectively bring students closer to the rural sector. The Organic Law on Higher Education (LOES) in Ecuador establishes the obligation to link producer organisations, public and private companies through a pre-professional practice program, which must be implemented and managed from the University. The present investigation tries to find out if this linkage is being carried out successfully in universities. For the purpose of the study an on-line survey was carried out in five of the main universities in Ecuador that are offering agricultural studies. In order to explore perceptions of different stakeholders four study groups were identified: managers of agri-food companies, students of agri-food studies, professionals already working after training, and finally, public and private institutions that have included pre-professional practices in their curricula. Data analysis was carried out by using multivariate hierarchical cluster technique. As expected, results show that Ecuadorian university complies with regulations regarding roles and functions of teaching and research. However, a direct relationship with the agricultural-rural environment is not well established yet, as the student's training is being undervalued in the framework of pre-professional practices. Several interesting strong points and deficiencies have been identified, and together they can very well guide high education decision makers in enhancing their practices programs.

Keywords: Ecuador, high education, pre-professional practices