

Abstract

Globally, the farming sector is facing the problem of overageing. Outmigration of youth to urban areas where jobs and infrastructure are better than in the rural parts, adds to the problem. However, there are youth that are interested in the farming sector, but they are often lacking starting capital, and end up in different employment sectors in the cities. Reengaging youth in agriculture requires addressing the numerous constraints that young people face when trying to earn a livelihood on a farm.

The National Colonisation Institute (INC) in Uruguay helps people accessing land, with a special focus on young people. They rent out fractions for half the market price, offering an attractive option for youth.

This work highlights the challenges of youth (≤ 35 years) accessing land in Uruguay and the criteria according to which the INC selects applicants. Furthermore, it is evaluated whether the INC plays a role in countering landgrabbing in Uruguay and whether the INC model could be applied in other countries as well.

Wanting to capture individual experiences and opinions in detail, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Six young people that all had faced difficulties accessing land were visited on their farms in Uruguay and semi-structured interviews were carried out. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with staff of the INC as well as key experts on the topics of landgrabbing, youth, and access to land. The secondary data collection was complemented with a literature study.

The interviews showed that the case study individuals all had difficulties to access credits and therefore all applied to open calls of the INC. However, four of them weren't granted access to an INC fraction, for reasons of having the possibility to take over the family farm or out of assumptions that family planning would get in the way of a venture of three girls.

Having a mission of providing access to land for smallholder family farmers, the INC is not a suitable tool to fight landgrabbing and on top of that only covers 3% of the country's agricultural surface. However, because all land with a certain quality first must be offered to the INC at market price, it can help with price transparency on Uruguay's land market.

The INC model is certainly interesting to be replicated in other countries. Certain adaptations to the country-specific circumstances will have to be made.

Findings suggest that the evaluation criteria of the aspirants must be revised because there are contradictions within the evaluation scheme. On top of that, inconsistencies in the interviews and inappropriate assumptions show that the interviews with the aspirants are not always carried out in a professional manner. The work of the INC has a long history and is a valuable institution for smallholder farmers in Uruguay. Continuous improvements within the institute will help establish more trust towards applicants but the public in general and make it a valuable role model for similar initiatives in other countries.

Keywords: land tenure, access to land, INC, young farmers, Uruguay