

# Globalization and Transformation in Rural Brazil: Agribusiness, Rural Labor Unions & Peasant Mobilization

Cliff Welch  
Grand Valley State University  
Professor Visitante, Bolsista da CAPES  
[welchc@gvsu.edu](mailto:welchc@gvsu.edu)

# Questions

- What is globalization in rural Brazil?
- How has agricultural work been transformed by the process?
- How have rural workers responded to these changes?

# Globalization: Agribusiness Model

- Deregulating to accept direct investment and imported food
- Recognizing intellectual property in genetic technology
- Trading access for open markets abroad,
- Generating nearly 40% of GDP



# Transformation



- Expanding agricultural lands
- Intensifying production through technological changes
- Increasing TNC control over political economy
- Increasing dependence on exports

# Impact on Rural Work

- Dispossession of small farmers
- Reduction of seasonal labor, minor expansion of skilled labor
- Decline of female participation
- Increase in forced labor (slavery)



# Responses



- Decline and fragmentation of rural union structure into SER and SAF



- Growth of rural poor organizations, particularly those in Via Campesina-Brasil



# Polemic:

## Food Sovereignty v, Food Security

- Via Campones – bottom up theory of development, produce 60% of food consumed, employ 70% of rural labor, ecological, small and inadequate investment makes future uncertain.
- Via Agronegocio – trickle down theory of progress, land and power concentration, against global trends of decline in commodity share of market, questionable sustainability.
- Battle over agrarian policy: manifestos produced by both sides, allies in state.

# Findings

- Globalization: deregulating to accept direct investment and imported food, pressuring to open foreign markets, recognizing intellectual property in genetic technology
- Transformation: expanding agricultural lands, intensifying production through technological changes
- Impact on rural work: dispossession of small farmers, reduction of seasonal labor, minor expansion of skilled labor & decline of female participation, increase in forced labor.
- Response: decline and fragmentation of rural union structure into SER and SAF, growth of rural poor organizations, particularly Via Campesina-Brasil
- Polemic: Via agronegocio and Via Campones – food security vs. food sovereignty.