

**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRARIAN REFORM
BRAZILIAN CORPORATION FOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH**

EMBRAPA'S PROCESS FOR CHANGE

Looking Towards the 21st Century

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Brazilian Corporation for Agricultural Research (EMBRAPA) started a new moment of its institutional history, when its present Board of Directors took office on May 18, 1990. Then, the new EMBRAPA President brought a proposal for institutional change which proved to be in accord with some profound social, economic, political, scientific, technological and institutional changes going on in the national and international scenarios. The implementation of that proposal, however, met some negative as well as favoring factors.

The barriers were associated with low budgets and salaries and with an administrative reform promoted by the federal government, on the Brazilian public sector, which imposed the dismissal of thousands of public employees, including over 700

* Synthesis of the seminar on the logic and the methodological strategy of the Brazilian Corporation for Agricultural Research (EMBRAPA) process for institutional change, presented at the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR), The Hague, The Netherlands, May 25, 1992.

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from EMBRAPA. Most of EMBRAPA's employees started associating the new administration with those events. The favoring factors were associated with a few important documents. Fortunately, over time, the favoring factors prevailed.

Regarding the internal environment, there were some internal reports, written by EMBRAPA's research center directors and a research report on researchers' evaluation. Regarding the external environment, there was an excellent study which designed alternative scenarios for the future of Brazilian agricultural research. The common point linking all these documents was the need for institutional change. Immediately, the new Directorate decided to start with a research project evaluation and with the conception of a proposal for institutional change under the conceptual and methodological guidance of strategic planning.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

Once the political decision to start the process of change was made, the first thing done was the establishment of guiding principles for the proposal of institutional change. They are:

1. The new institutional model for EMBRAPA must be an end-product of the change process.
2. Major institutional changes must be the subject of political and technical negotiation.
3. The process' methodology must assure the intense participation of EMBRAPA's employees.



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4. The process' methodology must assure the intense participation of EMBRAPA's clients.
5. The process must have conceptual and methodological unity in order to preserve EMBRAPA's institutional unity.
6. The whole process must always be based on technical, ethical and political criteria, never personal criteria.
7. The methodological strategy must favor the mobilization of the intelligence and creativity of EMBRAPA's human resources in the process.
8. The first step in the process must be the decentralization of conceptual and methodological competence to EMBRAPA's research centers to enable them to carry out their own planning and evaluation process.

STRATEGIC STEPS OF THE PROCESS

EMBRAPA's process for change has had important strategic moments. The first decision towards EMBRAPA's process for change was the creation of the Secretariat for Strategic Administration (SEA), in June 1990. Linked directly to the President of EMBRAPA, this Secretariat received the incumbence to coordinate the process for institutional policies, directives and strategies formulation and EMBRAPA's process for institutional change. SEA also played an important role in introducing at EMBRAPA some new work concepts. Strategic thinking, interdepartment partnership, criteria-based work, team-based decisions, strategy-based actions, process-based activities and concept-based strategies are some of these concepts.



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However, it was only in the beginning of 1991 that SEA conceived a global strategy to carry out EMBRAPA's process for change. This general strategy is constituted of several strategic steps. They are:

Project EMBRAPA

In April, 1991, the President of EMBRAPA published the document "Project EMBRAPA: agricultural research towards the 21st century" which became an invitation to institutional change. The document was successful in calling attention of all EMBRAPA's employees to the issue of institutional change and became a reference to any internal debate regarding that issue. The document also influenced the discussion of new concepts associated with the nature and trajectory of the institutional change EMBRAPA needed. Today, PROJECT EMBRAPA means the whole process of institutional change at EMBRAPA.

Seminar "Project EMBRAPA".

Under SEA's coordination, a high level team of scientists from EMBRAPA's headquarters designed a seminar called "Project EMBRAPA" to be presented at all EMBRAPA's research centers and at its headquarters, for all its employees, during the months of May and June, 1991. The seminar intended to be (a) an instrument for political negotiation through the proposal for institutional change it presented, (b) an instrument for technical negotiation by the conceptual and methodological competence the team tried to



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demonstrate and (c) an invitation to partnership in the process. All these objectives were reached by the seminar.

Lasting eight hours, it consisted of four parts. The first part synthesized the political economy of the international economic crisis and its impacts on public institutions of S&T. The 70's, 80's and 90's were approached at the international and national scenarios level, including a special analysis of their impact upon EMBRAPA. Then, the tendencies were projected beyond the year 2000. This part of the seminar tried to demonstrate that EMBRAPA needed to go through institutional change regardless of its past success.

The second part presented the evaluation logic and process which would be carried out within the institutional change process. Five levels of evaluation were proposed: researchers, research projects, research programs, research centers and EMBRAPA as a whole. During this segment, the team presented some results obtained from the previous research work to evaluate researchers at EMBRAPA. These results were very important to legitimize the need for evaluation at all levels so that EMBRAPA could know better its present institutional reality.

The third part approached major strategic planning concepts and methods to demonstrate that EMBRAPA needed to be tuned with its external environment in order to define its new mission,



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objectives, policies, directives, priorities and strategies. This segment was very important to show evidence that the methodology would assure the participation of EMBRAPA's employees and clients. Finally, the fourth part analysed the reformulation of EMBRAPA's planning system needed as a consequence of the proposal for institutional change. Some new elements to guide the debate on this issue were presented. By the end of the seminar, even after an intense debate, all present were invited to send further criticism and suggestions to SEA.

Training in Strategic Planning

By the end of each presentation of the seminar "Project EMBRAPA", the most common question was how we could participate in the process, if we did not have the "know how" in strategic planning. As part of the general strategy, the team assumed the commitment to decentralize competence in strategic planning. In order to accomplish this, three consultants from the University of São Paulo (USP) were hired to train a team of internal consultants in strategic planning, at EMBRAPA's headquarters, during July and August of 1991. The evaluation and planning instruments needed for the process of formulating strategic plans were produced during the training itself and by the trainees themselves. Then, the internal consulting team carried out regional training in order to prepare planning agents from all research centers, in the period of August and September of 1991.



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In December, 1991, the internal consulting team trained planning agents from the headquarters. All these activities were carried out under the guidance of the external consultants. Each internal consultant became responsible for giving conceptual and methodological support to two or three research units.

Internal Seminars

After the regional trainings, the planning agents carried out a one day seminar in order to inform all the employees in their respective research centers (research unit) about the logic and steps of the process of formulation of the Unit Strategic Plan (USP). During the internal seminar, the planning agents also discussed the methodology and instruments to be used in the process. By the end of the seminar, some work groups were constituted in order to start the process.

Formulation of Strategic Plans (Version 0)

The EMBRAPA Strategic Plan (ESP), version 0, was prepared during the training of the internal consulting team, July-August of 1991, to become the reference for the formulation of the Unit Strategic Plan (USP), from October 1991 to March 1992, and of the Headquarters Strategic Plan (HSP), from January to March of 1992. The headquarters only started the formulation of its strategic plan three months after the research units started theirs. The



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reason was that the headquarters had to wait for their major clients (the research units) to inform the changes they were proposing, as changes in the headquarters had to take into consideration changes being proposed by its internal clients.

Evaluation "Workshops"

From November 1991 to March 1992, all the research units went through an evaluation workshop. Each research unit invited an external evaluation mission to access its strategic plan and to participate on employee and client "panels" in order to present suggestions and recommendations for improving the unit strategic plan. The headquarters evaluation workshop occurred at the beginning of May 1992. Its external evaluation mission was mostly composed of directors of decentralized research units. Most external missions had scientists, managers of S&T, clients, and government and private sector representatives.

Formulation of Strategic Plans (Version 1)

The feedback provided by the external evaluation mission reports was used by EMBRAPA's research units and headquarters in order to improve their strategic plans. Their improved strategic plans (version 1) were then sent to SEA.



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Meeting for National Compatibilization of Strategic Plans

Under SEA coordination, the internal consulting team made a summary of each strategic plan. The whole set of summaries was sent to all research units so that each one had the opportunity to know what was being proposed by the others. Along with that set, the consulting team sent a set of questions to guide the reading of the summaries. Each research unit was expected to bring to a national meeting, its contribution to the compatibilization of the strategic plans. The answers to the questions sent by the consulting team provided most of the needed feedback.

Because the national meeting was a political event to produce a political product, only the Directors of the research units were invited to participate. Following the methodology formulated by the internal consulting team, under the guidance of the external consultants, the participants produced important documents to support the process of change. The most relevant of these documents was a "criteria matrix" to reformulate EMBRAPA's institutional model. The meeting took place in April 1992 and had two observers: a representative from the Union of EMBRAPA's Employees (SINPAF) and a representative from the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR).



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"Workshop" for EMBRAPA's Global Evaluation

From 21-27 June, the process reaches its climax with the realization of a workshop aiming at the evaluation of EMBRAPA as a whole. An external evaluation mission, composed of Brazilian and foreign participants, plays an important role by offering EMBRAPA suggestions on how to improve its strategic plan and how to design its new institutional model.

Based on the synthesis of critical documents produced in the previous steps of the process, information gathered from the special "panels" and visits organized with this objective, the mission will write a report with conclusions and recommendations which EMBRAPA's Directorate and internal consulting team will have as the most important reference for the implementation of the subsequent steps in the process. It is very likely that the President of Brazil, Fernando Collor de Mello, will receive the international evaluation mission in order to hear a first hand oral report on the importance of EMBRAPA's initiative and on the results of EMBRAPA's global evaluation.

Political Negotiation of the New Institutional Model

The evaluation mission report will be one of the most important instruments for political negotiation. Since structural changes are expected to be proposed, it becomes necessary to negotiate them with Brazil's President, and other government



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authorities and representatives from the political and private sectors. They must agree with the criteria for re-designing EMBRAPA's institutional model and, therefore, with the results of the application of such criteria as well as with the allocation of means to make it workable. A special strategy is being formulated with this objective in mind.

Formulation of Strategic Plans (Version 2)

Once the new institutional model receives political legitimacy, EMBRAPA's headquarters and all research centers contemplated by the new model will revise their strategic plan in order to incorporate the suggestions and recommendations from the report by EMBRAPA's global evaluation mission. Only then, the research unit strategic plans assume their final version (version 2). This is expected to happen in August-September 1992.

Implementation of the New Institutional Model

Immediately after the new model receives political legitimacy, the consulting team starts the set of actions aiming at its implementation. At the present moment, the SEA team for institutional development is formulating the methodology for the next steps regarding implementation of the new model. Another SEA team is formulating a computer program to make the quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the implementation activities possible. The same treatment should be applied to the activities incorporated into the strategic plans of EMBRAPA's headquarters



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and research units. Finally, the SEA planning staff is formulating a computer program for the creation of a "managerial information system" to support strategic decision-making at all managerial levels in EMBRAPA.

CONCLUSION

The process is not yet finished. Independent of EMBRAPA's own efforts to make institutional advances towards the 21st century, partners are indispensable in this challenging search. EMBRAPA is interested in starting an exchange of experience with other institutions undergoing institutional changes.