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Learning note

Blackberry Growers Association of Alta Campana



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Blackberry Growers Association of Alta Campana (Asociación de Moreros de Alta Campana)

Based on the information collected and the analysis done, the experience of Blackberry Growers Association of Alta Campana (ASOMORALCA) allows reflecting on some pertinent characteristics of the company's trajectory, which besides explaining its achievements, provides relevant learning and lessons for different actors which in one way or another cooperate in benefit of sustainable participation of small rural companies in various chains of value, particularly including leaders of producer organizations, teams in charge of cycles of design, implementation and assessment of public policies, and private sector actors.

1. Family production of blackberries is part of a complex institutional framework

The producers of Asociación de Moreros de Alta Campana were able to penetrate the blackberry market in a systematic and growing manner, at both the national and international levels. The latter market is quite demanding as to fruit management and quality, despite which the association was able to satisfactorily meet the demands. Internal organization has been fundamental, as each member produces individually, but following the guidelines of the buyers and technical assistants, and they were able to reach commercial agreements with large companies. Also essential were the relations the association had with support institutions in each of the phases. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through different programmes and entities (including alliances with the municipality) supports capital formation, training of human resources, provides part of the resources for financing, and delivers technical assistance in the spheres of management, production and sales. In summary, it accompanied the entire cycle realized by the producers of ASOMORALCA.

2. Education in management and technical assistance is indispensable

From the outset, ASOMORALCA's members received different assistance and training with the objective of strengthening the associative and productive capacities of small farmers, for them to penetrate the market in the best way possible. In this endeavor, Horticultural Association of Colombia (ASOHOFrucol), the municipality, the Risaralda Government Department, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) have been fundamental.

Also, ASOMORALCA's main buyer, Postobón, has also been continuously present in organizational training and in providing technical assistance.

3. Agreements with formal, large companies as a better way of selling

Initially, the ASOMORALCA members had bad experiences in sales, as buyers tend to take advantage of small producers and the market is entered into through commercial agreements that are quite weak, where it is easy for the buyers to pay less than what was agreed on, or even not to pay at all. The agreement with Postobón allowed ASOMORALCA to lessen uncertainty in the face of market volatility, besides obtaining better sale prices. Thanks to this agreement, the members have continuous demand for fruit with an annual fixed price.

4. Strengthening of internal management

The association's growth gradually forced the members to improve the association's internal management. What was initially the responsibility of the producers themselves, with manual, bad quality records, is now in the hands of external persons contracted specifically for handling the association's document and financial management. There is a Secretary in charge of managing the documents who is paid a monthly salary. The information is recorded digitally and there is an accounting system. Besides, an internal control system was created for achieving greater transparency in managing money and security.

5. Broad range of offer of services for members

The supply of services shows the commitment that the association has towards the members' quality of life. It is a way of showing concern, and at the same time ensures that people remain within the association. The services are mandatory and voluntary savings, an inputs store, and cash loans.

