Social trust in small dairy farmer organization in Brazil

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The objective of this study was to analyze the social trust in a group of dairy farmers, in the State of São Paulo. In this paper, Association of Dairy Producers is named (ADP). ADP is like most small rural organizations founded in Brazil that emerged in order to meet the exigencies for being eligible for public policies. This work had three stages — identifying the producers, applying the surveys, tabulating and analyzing the data. ADP did not provide us some basic information about producers (like phone numbers) and this point suggested a lack of trust. To identify the producers it was necessary to visit the expansion tanks to contact them. Another situation reinforced the first impression about the lack of social trust: a farmer did not authorize the researcher’s entry for applying the surveys for those producers that used the tank installed in his land. The surveys were then applied in the places where just four (of the total of five) expansion tanks were installed. 68.75% of the producers who used those four thanks answered the survey. One question was “In general, would you say that most people can be trusted or you must be very careful in dealing with people?” 81.8% of respondents said we must be very careful when treating people in general. This is the indicator of social distrust. Although the lack of social trust, 54.4% of producers trusted entirely in the ADP; 22.7% partially trust; 13.6% were indifferent; 4.5% had low level of trust, and 4.5% did not trust. When voluntary participation in the ADP was questioned: 68.2% of the sample answered that “actively participate”, 31.8% “participate without acting”, and none of the interviewees admitted not participating in it. 81.75% of the respondents viewed ADP in a positive way and 18.25% believe it was in a bad situation, and maybe it will stop working. One factor that might have influenced this divergence in the responses was that ADP was going through a transition by the time of data collection and then ADP became a cooperative (selling products to institutional markets). For 18.25% of the producers, the main cause to distrust in the recent created agricultural cooperative was the requirements to become a member and the delay in finishing the construction of the dairy plants. The results suggest that producers show a social distrust, having many doubts about the vantage or disadvantage or even the risks of being members of the agricultural cooperative, but the vast majority trusts in the ADP.

Key Words: social capital, social trust, agricultural cooperative.