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## **SETTLED WOMEN AND QUILOMBOLAS IN ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTION: RESULTS OF UNIVERSITY EXTENSION ACTIONS**

MULHERES ASSENTADAS E QUILOMBOLAS NA PRODUÇÃO DE ALIMENTOS  
ORGÂNICOS: RESULTADOS DE AÇÕES DE EXTENSÃO UNIVERSITÁRIA

MUJERES ASIENTADAS Y QUILOMBOLAS EN LA PRODUCCIÓN DE ALIMENTOS  
ORGÁNICOS: RESULTADOS DE LAS ACCIONES DE EXTENSIÓN UNIVERSITARIA

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**Abstract:** The objective of this article is to present the results of extension activities developed by university professors and students, together with women and men living in

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areas of agrarian reform and quilombola territories, organized around organic production, in the cultivation of vegetables, legumes and fruits, as well as involved in the production of honey and milk. The intention was to point out the dynamics of production and its results in the lives of people and the places where they live. In the quilombola territory, located near the city of Dourados, in Mato Grosso do Sul/Brazil, several extension projects are developed, among them: courses on food preparation, production pricing, organization of menus for meal preparation, production of vegetables, legumes and fruits with an organic base; courses on bread and biscuit production techniques; courses on use/transformation, commercialization of production and value addition. As a result, it was found that the actions developed with settled and quilombola women, involved in the organic production of honey, vegetables and legumes, are strengthening and enabling the production chain of healthy foods, from the production of honey, coming from the potential of the forests, as well as forming support networks with settled families, creating groups for production in community gardens and forming orchards with fruit trees.

**Keywords:** Organic agriculture, Women's empowerment, production.

**Resumo:** O objetivo do presente artigo é de apresentar resultados de ações de extensão desenvolvidas por docentes e estudantes universitários, junto a mulheres e homens que vivem em áreas da reforma agrária e de território quilombola, organizados em torno da produção de base orgânica, no cultivo de verduras, legumes e frutas, bem como envolvidos com a produção de mel e leite. Pretendeu-se apontar a dinâmica para a produção e de seus resultados na vida das pessoas e dos lugares onde vivem. No território Quilombola, localizado próximo à cidade de Dourados, em Mato Grosso do Sul/Brasil, são desenvolvidos diversos projetos de extensão, dentre eles: cursos para preparo de alimentos, precificação da produção, organização de cardápio para o preparo de refeições, produção de verduras, legumes e frutas orgânicas; cursos de técnicas de produção de pães e biscoitos; curso de aproveitamento/transformação, comercialização da produção e agregação de valor. As ações desenvolvidas com mulheres assentadas e quilombolas, envoltas com a produção orgânica de mel, hortaliças e legumes estão fortalecendo e viabilizando cadeia produtiva de alimentos saudáveis, desde a produção de mel, advindo das potencialidades das matas, bem como formando redes de apoio com famílias assentadas, criando grupo para a produção em hortas comunitárias e formação de pomares com frutíferas.

**Palavras-chave:** Agricultura orgânica, Empoderamento feminino, produção.

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este artículo es presentar los resultados de acciones de extensión desarrolladas por profesores y estudiantes universitarios, junto a mujeres y hombres habitantes de áreas de reforma agraria y territorios quilombolas, organizados en torno a la producción orgánica, en el cultivo de hortalizas, legumbres y frutas, así como involucrados en la producción de miel y leche. El objetivo era señalar la dinámica de la producción y sus resultados en la vida de las personas y los lugares donde viven. En el territorio quilombola, ubicado cerca de la ciudad de Dourados, en Mato Grosso do Sul/Brasil, se desarrollan varios proyectos de extensión, entre ellos: cursos de preparación de alimentos, fijación de precios de producción, organización de menús para la preparación de comidas, producción de verduras, legumbres y frutas de forma orgánica; cursos sobre técnicas de producción de pan y galletas; curso de uso/transformación, comercialización de la producción y adición de valor. Como resultado, se constató que las acciones desarrolladas con mujeres asentadas y quilombolas, involucradas en la producción orgánica de miel, hortalizas y legumbres, están fortaleciendo y viabilizando la cadena productiva de alimentos saludables, a partir de la producción de miel, proveniente del potencial de los bosques, además de formar redes de apoyo con familias asentadas, crear grupos para la producción en huertas comunitarias y la formación de huertos con árboles frutales.

**Palabras clave:** Agricultura orgánica, Empoderamiento de la mujer, producción.

## INTRODUCTION

This article presents the results of three extension projects, developed with resources from the Office of the Vice-Rector for Extension and Culture of UFGD/PROEC, which were planned with women who are involved in the production of organic food in rural settlements and the quilombola community of Dourados/MS/Brazil. These actions are aimed at improving the production of basic foods, including vegetables, fruits, honey, milk and dairy products.

The results we present are from the following projects: Economic system for the production of gas and biofertilizer (SDG 12), Organic gardens: Alternative production for small producers in Mato Grosso do Sul and Quilombolas in the management of production and processing of food products (SDG 12). These projects are coordinated by professors from the School of Agricultural Sciences and the School of Human Sciences. In addition to these projects, there is a Programa Guarda Chuva, which houses several other projects that, with resources from the Fundação Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), promote the actions that are being developed. In order to carry out the activities,

groups of women and men who live and produce food in the following places were defined: in the rural settlement Cabeceira do Iguatemi, located in the municipality of Paranhos, in Mato Grosso do Sul; in the Areias settlement, located in Nioaque, at the entrance to the Pantanal in Mato Grosso do Sul; quilombola women, who make up the Quilombola territory, located in the municipality of Dourados/MS/Brazil.

In these places, two are agrarian reform settlements and one is a quilombola territory, where women take on the production of basic foods and, when possible, process them, aiming at better use and thus giving value to the products, facilitating marketing, carried out on the lots and/or at the fairs in the cities of the municipalities where they are located.

It is important to highlight that the activities developed with women are anchored in the principle of university extension, involving the exchange of knowledge, knowledge produced at the university (systematized based on methodological references), exchanged with the experiences accumulated by women from different groups, resulting from their work with food production. These are women with traditional knowledge, accumulated over time, passed down through generations and which still enhances the daily lives of communities. The combination of this academic and social knowledge has borne fruit in the approaches to food production and also in the production of academic knowledge. In this sense, university extension is fundamental, because it involves social demands, dialogues and joint actions, to transform social scenarios and also the dimension of knowledge itself, overcoming the hegemony of academic knowledge, in view of the protagonism of people's experiences. With the guiding thread of extension as a locus of exchange, we have organized this text into three parts: in the first, we analyze the condition of women; In the second, we present the places where they live and produce and, finally, we draw some conclusions about the results of the extension actions.

### **Historical and Current Contextualization of the Condition of Women in the Countryside**

It is important to highlight that settled women have historically been seen as “helpers” in production units, almost invisible in decision-making, especially because the legal structure of land ownership placed them in this position. Brazilian legislation began to recognize rural women as workers with the 1998 Constituent Assembly, when they joined forces in a movement of rural women and highlighted the need for their demands to be incorporated into the text of that important document. It ensured legal and social recognition as workers, guaranteeing access to rural credit, maternity pay, retirement and other benefits that placed them in a position of social and productive visibility.

These achievements represent the beginning of the empowerment of rural women, understood by Deere and León (2002, p. 52) as a process that requires a “transformation in women’ s access to both goods and power. At the same time, women’ s empowerment transforms gender relations and is, therefore, a precondition for achieving equality between men and women.” In 2003, through ordinance number 981 of the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform/INCRA, another important demand inherent to the ownership of settlement lots was guaranteed, when this became joint, enabling new measures to be incorporated. Later, in 2007, INCRA defined the woman's name as the first name in the ownership of the lots, recognizing their role in maintaining the lots.

In the history of extension actions and research with settlements, it has been observed that women from settlements and the quilombola community are active in the management of the lots, with some living combined shifts, when they are on the lot, with shifts outside the lot, and in this case there is still continuity of work, that is, when they display and sell their products for sale at urban fairs, earning an income. During these journeys, they combine the roles of women who leave their homes to take produce to the market with those who care for, wash, iron and use their traditional knowledge to create new products and earn an income. In this way, they also create new social and work relationships and transform the reality in which they live, creating new roles and becoming autonomous individuals themselves.

The settled women have maintained dialogues with rural extension and university professors, trying to acquire new knowledge that will enable them to enhance their knowledge, especially training and various courses, including those on making cheese, dulce de leche and bread, seeking to reinvigorate old techniques and even learning some innovative ones, aiming to make better use of the products they grow and also to expand the possibilities of selling their produce, improving income and quality of life on the lots. These are women who are developing organic food production, an activity that has been increasing in family farming, as highlighted in the study by Martins and Menegat (2022, p. 48), when they say that “rural people around the world have been engaged in a political debate in defense of a rural development project that is less aggressive towards nature and with higher quality products, focusing on the awareness that the environment is finite” , and that it is necessary to preserve it. In addition, the focus is also on the quality of the food produced, free from pesticides. It is worth noting that organic and/or agroecological food production is a process in the implementation phase, as highlighted by Menegat and Oliveira (2022a), configured in the composition of small production units, including settlement lots, especially those where women are. The discussion between

production and food quality is part of the family farming scenario, as shown by Oliveira, Gandra and Menegat (2022b), which has contributed to the supply of a large part of the food consumed on the tables of the Brazilian population.

## **Results of Extension Projects with Women**

### **Extension Actions with Quilombola Women**

In the Quilombola territory, located near the city of Dourados, in Mato Grosso do Sul/Brazil, several extension projects are developed, including: courses on food preparation, production pricing, organization of menus for meal preparation, production of organic vegetables, legumes and fruits; courses on bread and biscuit production techniques; courses on utilization/transformation, commercialization of production and value addition. In addition, the training actions for quilombola women allowed them to manage a canteen at the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD). Graph 1 shows the canteen's gross revenue figures. It is important to highlight that this canteen was made possible by an action developed by professors and students from UFGD, since it is a university extension project hosted by the Incubator of Social and Solidarity Technologies/ITESS/UFGD, with women being guided through the incubation model, receiving support regarding food preparation, pricing, hygiene control, among other items. This further deepens the importance and need for the development of partnerships in actions between the university and social groups.

The quilombola women organize themselves for the organic production of food to meet the needs of their families and the commercialization of the surplus, actions that have projected social visibility and greater autonomy in the implementation of projects and themselves as subjects of actions. It is important to highlight that production coming from family farming, as in the case of the women and men of the quilombola community, has contributed to the dynamics of the 79 municipalities that make up Mato Grosso do Sul, supplying, in part, the needs of the population.

In recent years, there has been concern about organic production, a modality that is currently being implemented and deserves incentives due to its importance because it is organized with the concern of producing healthy food, free from pesticides and with attention to the environment where it is cultivated, as can be seen in the work of quilombola women, in the production of vegetable gardens, as shown in figure 1.





**Figure 1.** Planting vegetables in the Quilombola territory

### **Extension Actions with Women in the Areias Settlement**

The Areias settlement is located in the municipality of Nioaque, Mato Grosso do Sul/Brazil. It was established in 2008 and distributed across 81 lots, each with an average of 10 hectares. A group of women and men was formed there to engage in the organic production of the following products: honey production; creation of an open-air vegetable garden, organically based on the production of lettuce, chives, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, peanuts, cassava, pumpkin, among others; installation of a greenhouse for tomato production; and cultivation of lemons.

The meetings and discussions with the group involved in the actions, which mostly involved women who demonstrated a desire to introduce production diversification into their activities, enabling the generation of family income, were the link that led university professors to establish partnerships between the women settlers and the university, creating means for joint efforts, intensifying projects and procedures to improve production conditions. The initial work involved the production of boxes for the installation of an apiary, with the purpose of capturing bees and using them to produce honey, a desire of the women to improve the diet of their families and sell the surplus. Alongside the apiary, a vegetable garden was installed for the production of vegetables and legumes, and, subsequently, a greenhouse was also built for the production of tomatoes, creating a controlled environment that made production viable.

At this stage, through a project by UFGD professors, they managed to acquire lemon seedlings, setting up an orchard. This entire sequence of projects was based on the plans that the groups demanded, and university professors created projects in search of funding, acquiring materials. Among the materials, they incorporated social technologies, such as the installation of a greenhouse for the production of vegetables and legumes and the construction of a biodigester, technologies for the production of cooking gas and biofertilizers for use in the vegetable garden beds, materials that made cultivation viable, with increased production and resulting in improved family income.

In the case of the greenhouse installation, it provided a controlled environment, free from environmental events, facilitating tomato cultivation, ensuring production free from susceptible weather conditions. In addition, it guaranteed production for the cold months (June and July), as well as for those months when the heat is intense (November to February).

The benefits also extend to another technology incorporated in that location, the biodigester, with which it is possible to produce biogas for cooking and biofertilizer, produced from the processing of animal waste (manure). Manure is an organic material found on the lots, which when processed in the biodigester, generates biogas for domestic use, reducing the financial cost involved in purchasing this item each month.

In addition, this processing process produces biofertilizer, another product rich in nutrients, essential for fertilizing the land, especially the vegetable garden beds.

It is worth highlighting that the inclusion of women as protagonists in the extension actions that were developed is based on the promotion of female representation in the field, enabling and giving prominence to a space that they already occupy, seeking gender equality. Let us look at some photographs of the production processes in the Areias settlement, in figure 2 A, B, C and D.





**Figure 2.** Collection of photographs of the activities carried out, where: A) Work in the Apiary for honey production; B) Tomato Production; C) Sweet Potato Harvest and D) Tomato Harvest.

### **Extension Actions with Women from the Cabeceira do Rio Iguatemi Settlement**

The Cabeceira do Rio Iguatemi settlement is located in the municipality of Paranhos, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, close to Paraguay in an area of land that is not suitable for the development of various types of crops. Therefore, UFGD professors developed several extension projects to identify which crops would be most suitable for the area, taking into account the climate and soil type of the region. The following actions were identified: organization of a vegetable garden for the production of vegetables, passion fruit production, pineapple production, garlic, onions, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and watermelons (Figures 3 and 4). A biodigester was also installed in that community, enabling the production of cooking gas and the use of biofertilizers (Figure 5), a low-cost technology that, combined with the technical guidance provided by the university's proposal team, combined with the

traditional knowledge of the women who settled there, has boosted production.

There is a fundamental principle considered in these actions, the union between the university and the countryside, in order to introduce new technologies and forms of agricultural production, respecting and aligning with the knowledge of the people involved. In this way, the university team's extension experiences are guided by social inclusion, sustainability and citizenship, aiming at improving technological and food production capacity, improving people's living conditions, one of the main goals of university extension.

There are several images captured that show the production that has been occurring in the groups, making new possibilities of belonging appear, among them: improvement of family nutrition, resulting in improved health of people through a healthy diet, composed of adequate food groups; improvement of the income of the families involved; female empowerment, creating conditions for belonging to the places through a life with dignity. Let us look at figures 3, 4 and 5, which show some images that illustrate the actions developed in the Cabeceira do Rio Iguatemi Settlement, mainly for food production.



**Figure 3.** Photos of some productions developed in the Settlement, such as: A) Watermelon Production; B) Carrot Production; C) Garlic Production and D) Onion Production.





**Figure 4.** Food produced in the Cabeceira do Iguatemi Settlement, being: A) Planting and Cultivation of Onions and B) Harvesting of Passion Fruit.



**Figura 5.** Biodigester installed in the Settlement for the generation of biogas.

The benefits of using biodigesters are also highlighted by Gandra et al. (2021), where, with the implementation of a biodigester in a Rural Settlement, the authors stated that this technology proved to be viable and efficient, bringing benefits to both producers and the environment. In this gathering of knowledge, the principle of action has been generational, democratic and prioritizing the rights to life with quality, respect and appreciation, regardless of the differences or specificities that exist between people.

In addition, it is possible to highlight the benefit and assertiveness arising from the extension actions carried out, since they contribute directly to the settled families, acting as a rural consultancy for them. Gonçalves et al. (2024) highlight the effectiveness of rural

consultancy, stating that through it, a tool is classified as extension, given its capacity to transmit knowledge and information.

Another important factor provided by the actions developed is the inclusion of technologies that are adapted to the reality of the settlers, providing an improvement in production and, consequently, greater revenue generation. One of the strategies is the adoption of organic systems. In an action also developed in the Cabeceira do Rio Iguatemi Settlement, Leite et al. (2023) highlighted the benefits of organic production, pointing out that the surplus produced by the families was sold to the Association of Organic Producers of Mato Grosso do Sul (APOMS), and, with this, adding value to the products, providing an improvement in living conditions and, consequently, enabling the producers to remain in the field.

When observing the benefits of extension actions for the women settlers, Silva et al. (2023) highlighted beekeeping as an activity capable of boosting income generation. In addition, the authors emphasized the work of women, since they present themselves as those who keep the group strong for the continuity of beekeeping activities.

In this sense, it is necessary to highlight and encourage actions that focus mainly on settled women, mainly aiming at greater financial autonomy, which will result in their leading role in the most diverse activities. These were some of the principles addressed in an action carried out by Cunha et al. (2023) in Mato Grosso, specifically for women camped and/or settled, when they held a course to qualify women as craft brewers. To this end, they held different lectures, addressing not only the technical elements to achieve the central action, which was beer production, but also composed discussions that involved the relationships in which women are involved, among them: Women's Health, Female Empowerment, Solidarity Economy, among others.

The authors also concluded that the beers developed by women, due to the workload they undertake, are filled with determination and resistance for life. Freedom and financial autonomy were also highlighted by Vieira et al. (2022) where the authors, through training on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighted, in a positive way, the process of organization and management of agroecological products by women farmers, also stating that these actions provided greater food security and sovereignty, in addition to financial emancipation and social inclusion.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The actions developed with settled and quilombola women, involved in the organic production of honey, vegetables and legumes, have been strengthening and enabling the production chain of healthy foods, as well as forming support networks between settled families and the academic community.

The participation of women in the new production processes has proven to be fundamental in organizing the actions developed and organized on the properties. With this, it is possible to create possibilities for generating extra income, producing conditions for development on the property and mainly for the people involved. All of these factors are important for the permanence of families on the lots and in the quilombola community, as they strengthen sociability essential for other production and marketing strategies and obtaining female autonomy in the field.

The extension actions are also contributing to expanding the possibilities in the training of UFGD students who participate in the actions, inserting them to act with citizenship in agrarian reform settlements, in an action-reflection on academic knowledge, and on the importance of sharing it socially, fostering a training where the known is dialogic, involving theoretical-practical references and awakening in the students the feeling of participation, autonomy and social commitment.

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