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## **STRENGTHENING THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN BRAZILIAN ANIMAL SCIENCE: AN EXTENSION ACTION BY ABZ JOVEM**

FORTALECIMENTO DO MOVIMENTO ESTUDANTIL NA ZOOTECNIA BRASILEIRA:  
UMA AÇÃO DE EXTENSÃO UNIVERSITÁRIA DA ABZ JOVEM

FORTALECIMIENTO DEL MOVIMIENTO ESTUDIANTIL EN LA ZOOTECNIA  
BRASILEÑA: UNA ACCIÓN DE EXTENSIÓN UNIVERSITARIA DE ABZ JOVEM

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**Abstract:** The student movement plays a crucial role in students' academic and civic development, promoting engagement, representation, and the strengthening of professional identity. This study aimed to analyze the perception and engagement of Animal Science undergraduate students in Brazil regarding the student movement, with an emphasis on the role of the Brazilian Association of Animal Scientists (ABZ) and ABZ Jovem. Virtual presentations about ABZ and ABZ Jovem were held at different Animal Science schools, followed by an online questionnaire that received 933 valid responses. Results revealed a wide geographic distribution of participants, with most students between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> semesters in which 36.7% of them participate in student organizations and 72.9% are familiar with ABZ Jovem. Although formal affiliation with ABZ is low (17.9%), ABZ Jovem was widely recognized and positively evaluated, showing its central role in strengthening student representation and leadership in Animal Science. This extension action contributed to bringing students closer to their professional association and encouraging academic and outreach engagement all of the participants.

**Keywords:** Student engagement; Academic representation; Student leadership; Professional development.

**Resumo:** O movimento estudantil exerce papel essencial na formação acadêmica e cidadã dos discentes, promovendo engajamento, representatividade e fortalecimento da identidade profissional. Objetivou-se com este trabalho analisar a percepção e o engajamento dos estudantes de Zootecnia do Brasil em relação ao movimento estudantil, com ênfase no papel da Associação Brasileira de Zootecnicos (ABZ) e da ABZ Jovem. Foram realizadas apresentações virtuais sobre a ABZ e a ABZ Jovem em diferentes escolas de Zootecnia, seguidas da aplicação de um formulário *online*, que obteve 933 respostas válidas. Os resultados revelaram ampla distribuição geográfica dos participantes, com maior concentração entre o 1º e 5º semestres, sendo que 36,7% dos respondentes participam de entidades estudantis e 72,9% conhecem a ABZ Jovem. Apesar da baixa filiação à ABZ (17,9%), a ABZ Jovem foi amplamente reconhecida e bem avaliada pelos discentes, demonstrando seu papel central no fortalecimento da representatividade e do protagonismo estudantil na Zootecnia. A ação contribuiu para aproximar os estudantes da entidade de classe e para fomentar o engajamento acadêmico e extensionista de todos os participantes.

**Palavras-chave:** Engajamento discente; Representatividade acadêmica; Liderança estudantil; Formação profissional.

**Resumen:** El movimiento estudiantil desempeña un papel esencial en la formación académica y ciudadana de los estudiantes, promoviendo el compromiso, la representatividad y el fortalecimiento de la identidad profesional. El objetivo de este trabajo fue analizar la percepción y el compromiso de los estudiantes de Zootecnia de Brasil con respecto al movimiento estudiantil, con énfasis en el papel de la Asociación Brasileña de Zootecnicos (ABZ) y de la ABZ Jovem. Se realizaron presentaciones virtuales sobre la ABZ y la ABZ Jovem en diferentes escuelas de Zootecnia, seguidas de un formulario en línea que obtuvo 933 respuestas válidas. Los resultados muestran una amplia distribución geográfica de los participantes, con mayor concentración entre el primer y quinto semestre, de los cuales el 36,7% de los encuestados participando en entidades estudiantiles y el 72,9% conoce la ABZ Jovem. Aunque la afiliación a la ABZ es baja (17,9%), la ABZ Jovem fue ampliamente reconocida y bien evaluada por los estudiantes, demostrando su papel central en el fortalecimiento de la representatividad y del protagonismo estudiantil en la Zootecnia. La acción contribuyó a acercar a los estudiantes a la entidad profesional y fomentar el compromiso académico y extensionista de todos.

**Palabras clave:** Participación estudiantil; Representación académica; Liderazgo juvenil; Desarrollo profesional.

## INTRODUCTION

Animal Science is an applied field of knowledge that integrates biological, agricultural, and social sciences, focusing on the production, management, nutrition, welfare, reproduction, and genetic improvement of domestic animals of zotechnical interest. Its origins date back to 19th-century Europe, when the Frenchman Eugène Gayot systematized the first technical treatises on animal breeding, being considered one of the pioneers in the field. In 1848, the chair of Animal Science was created at the Agronomic Institute of Versailles, France, a milestone widely recognized as the beginning of Animal Science as a modern and autonomous science (SEMIL, 2022). From that moment on, Animal Science expanded to other European countries and, later, to Latin America, following the process of agricultural modernization and the growing demand for professionals specialized in animal production.

In Brazil, the trajectory of Animal Science has been marked by gradual and strategic advances throughout the 20th century. One of the first national institutional milestones was the creation of the Brazilian Society of Animal Science (SBZ) in 1951, which brought together researchers and professors from various areas related to animal production. The SBZ played an essential role in promoting scientific exchange, creating research networks, and advocating for the implementation of specific higher education courses in Animal Science in the country (SBZ, 2023). This articulation culminated in the creation of the first full undergraduate course in Animal Science in 1966, at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUC-RS), Uruguaiana Campus, a fact that marked the beginning of the autonomous academic training of animal scientists in Brazil (UFMS, 2021).

A few years later, in 1969, the Federal Council of Education (CFE) established the minimum curriculum and duration of the Zootechnics course through Opinion No. 406/1969 and Resolution No. 6/1969, consolidating the structure of higher education and defining the basic competencies of the profession (UFMS, 2021). From a legal standpoint, the profession was regulated by Law No. 5,550, of December 4, 1968, which officially recognized the zootechnician as a higher-level professional, granting them technical prerogatives and specific attributions (BRAZIL, 1968a). This legislation was later adjusted by Decree-Law No. 425/1969 (BRAZIL, 1969), and also interacts with Law No. 5,517/1968, which created the Federal and Regional Councils of Veterinary Medicine (CFMV/CRMVs) and included Zootechnics within the scope of oversight of the professional system (BRAZIL, 1968b). These legal milestones

established the basis for the consolidation of the profession in the country and for the strengthening of its technical and scientific identity.

The creation of the Brazilian Association of Zootechnicians (ABZ) in 1988 represented another important institutional advancement. ABZ emerged with the objective of promoting professional advocacy, valuing the career, supporting the training of students and recent graduates, and functioning as a link between academia, the market, and regulatory bodies (ABZ, 2023a). Currently, the organization works in partnership with ABZ Jovem—a directorate focused on national student representation—seeking to bring students closer to the institutional agendas of the profession and develop leadership, engagement, and civic participation skills (ABZ, 2023b). This closer relationship between professional associations and students contributes to reducing the gap between academic training and professional practice.

From an educational standpoint, the expansion of Animal Science in Brazil can be evidenced by recent data from the 2023 Higher Education Census (INEP/MEC), which indicates the existence of 131 undergraduate courses in activity in the country, 124 of which are in-person and 7 in distance learning mode, with a total of 19,889 students enrolled (INEP, 2024; ABZ, 2024). These numbers reflect the wide territorial distribution of Animal Science and its strategic importance to the national agricultural sector, which represents a significant portion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounts for a high generation of direct and indirect jobs (MAPA, 2023). The insertion of Animal Science in this context reinforces its role as an applied science, focused on technological development and the sustainability of production systems.

In parallel, the training of animal scientists involves not only technical skills, but also socio-emotional, leadership, and collective action skills. In this sense, the student movement emerges as a space for complementary training and the exercise of university citizenship. Student participation in entities such as academic centers, junior enterprises, athletic associations, Tutorial Education Programs (PETs), and national directorates favors the development of management, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills (SILVA et al., 2021). Furthermore, such experiences contribute to strengthening professional identity, stimulating academic leadership, and bringing students closer to professional associations, such as ABZ and ABZ Jovem (MARTINS et al., 2019).

Student involvement in these spaces also reinforces the inseparability of teaching, research, and outreach, a constitutional principle of higher education in Brazil and of the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (BRASIL, 1988; BRASIL, 1996), allowing students to experience practices that extend beyond the classroom environment and engage with

the demands of society. University outreach projects, for example, allow Animal Science students to work directly with rural producers, applying technical knowledge, building participatory solutions, and exercising their social responsibility. Experiences in student representation and student management contribute to developing negotiation, leadership, and political engagement skills, fundamental for future work in professional councils, cooperatives, public bodies, and agribusiness companies.

Despite the relevance of these experiences, studies investigating the profile, perceptions, and levels of engagement of Animal Science students in the Brazilian student movement are still scarce. This knowledge gap hinders the development of strategies to strengthen student representation and increase student participation in decision-making bodies and professional associations. Understanding how students perceive the student movement, what their motivations are, and what barriers they face in engaging is essential for building more effective institutional and associative policies that value student participation as part of the comprehensive training of animal scientists.

Given this scenario, it becomes necessary to develop studies that provide an updated and comprehensive overview of the participation of Animal Science students in student organizations and institutional representation activities. Such information can support the creation of programs to encourage student leadership, strengthen relationships between undergraduate courses and professional associations, and expand support networks for the training of young leaders in the animal science sector. Thus, understanding the profile and engagement of students in this context represents a strategic step towards consolidating Animal Science as a strong, united profession prepared for the current and future challenges of Brazilian agriculture.

Furthermore, by obtaining empirical evidence on this topic, the aim is to contribute to strengthening student representation, planning actions to enhance the value of the career, and developing a culture of leadership and proactivity among the country's future animal scientists.

Therefore, this work aims to provide a national overview of student participation in matters related to Brazilian Animal Science, identifying the levels of student engagement, their perceptions of the student movement, and the factors that influence their involvement in representative entities and activities, with an emphasis on the role of ABZ and ABZ Jovem. It also aims to identify the academic profile of participating students, map participation in student organizations, evaluate knowledge, the importance attributed to, and perceptions of the activities of ABZ and ABZ Jovem, and finally, gather suggestions from students to strengthen the student movement in Brazilian Animal Science.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was developed within the scope of the actions of the Brazilian Association of Young Zootechnicians (ABZ Jovem), integrating a national extension project aimed at promoting student representation and the integration of Zootechnics students from different regions of Brazil. The initiative's main objective was to present the professional associations in the field and, at the same time, collect relevant information about student engagement in undergraduate Zootechnics courses in the country, offering a comprehensive view of student participation in the student movement.

The outreach activity was structured around virtual institutional presentations conducted by members of the ABZ Jovem executive board, using the Google Meet platform, between March 2023 and November 2024. These presentations were aimed at classes from various undergraduate courses in Animal Science, encompassing public and private institutions from all regions of Brazil (North, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast, and South). To organize the schedule, prior contact was made with student organizations via email, and the presentations were scheduled according to their responses, in order to reach a diverse and representative audience.

Each meeting, lasting approximately 60 minutes, followed a pre-standardized script, designed to ensure uniformity of information transmitted and standardization of the institutional approach. Thus, the study is characterized not only as an extension activity of a formative nature, but also as a data collection strategy that makes it possible to understand, in a systematic way, the level of engagement and perceptions of Animal Science students in relation to the representative entities of the category.

The presentations were organized into three main thematic blocks:

1. Overview of Animal Science in Brazil: historical context of the profession, evolution of undergraduate courses, data on the number of active courses, territorial distribution, and professional profile of animal scientists.
2. Brazilian Association of Zootechnicians (ABZ): history of creation, institutional objectives, organizational structure and main actions aimed at valuing the profession and defending professional prerogatives.
3. ABZ Jovem: origin and structure of the national student board, forms of student participation, main projects developed and their relevance to complementary training and to strengthening the professional identity of future animal scientists.

At the end of each presentation, students were invited to complete an online

questionnaire created in Google Forms , which was filled out immediately during the meeting. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information about the students' academic profile, their experiences with the student movement, and their perceptions of the professional associations in Animal Science, serving as an evaluative and diagnostic tool for the extension activity.

The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions, organized into six thematic blocks:

- Academic profile (state, institution, and semester completed);
- Student participation (current or previous involvement in academic centers, junior enterprises, athletic associations, PET groups, ABZ Jovem, and other student organizations);
- Professional training (presence of the subjects Introduction to Animal Science and Ethics Applied to Animal Science in the curriculum and the importance attributed to them);
- Academic management (the course coordinator's background and the importance attributed to having a zootechnician in that position);
- Trade associations (affiliation as a member of ABZ, prior knowledge of ABZ Jovem and assessment of its relevance);
- Institutional evaluation (perception of ABZ Jovem's actions in 2023 and suggestions for activities in 2024).

Data collection occurred continuously throughout the year 2023-2024, resulting in 933 valid responses from students from different states and higher education institutions in the country. The data were organized in spreadsheets and analyzed using two complementary approaches:

- (i) quantitative analysis, with descriptive statistics (absolute and relative frequency) to characterize the profile and level of student engagement;
- ( ii ) qualitative analysis, based on the reading and thematic categorization of open-ended responses regarding suggestions and perceptions of respondents.

The methodology adopted enabled the development of a nationwide outreach program, integrating students from different regional backgrounds and strengthening the dialogue between students and representative entities of Animal Science.

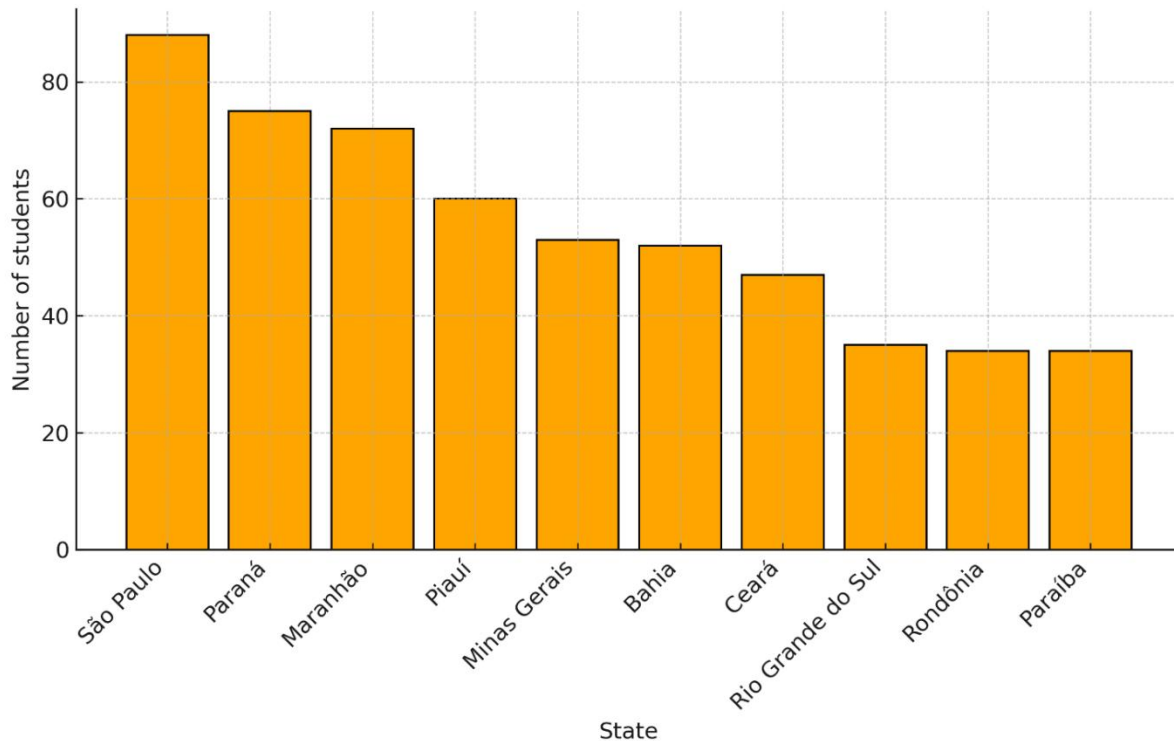
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outreach activity garnered broad national support, with the participation of 933

undergraduate students in Animal Science programs distributed across different regions of Brazil, demonstrating the initiative's reach and impact. The high number of responses shows the students' interest in topics related to student representation and the role of professional associations in the field.

Among the states with the highest number of participants, São Paulo (88), Paraná (75), Maranhão (72), Piauí (60), and Minas Gerais (53; Figure 1) stood out. This distribution pattern reveals, on the one hand, the strong presence of students from consolidated and traditional courses in the Southeast and South regions, and, on the other hand, the significant participation of students from the Northeast, which indicates the advance of the interiorization and recent expansion of Animal Science courses in this region, in addition to the strong politicization of the region.

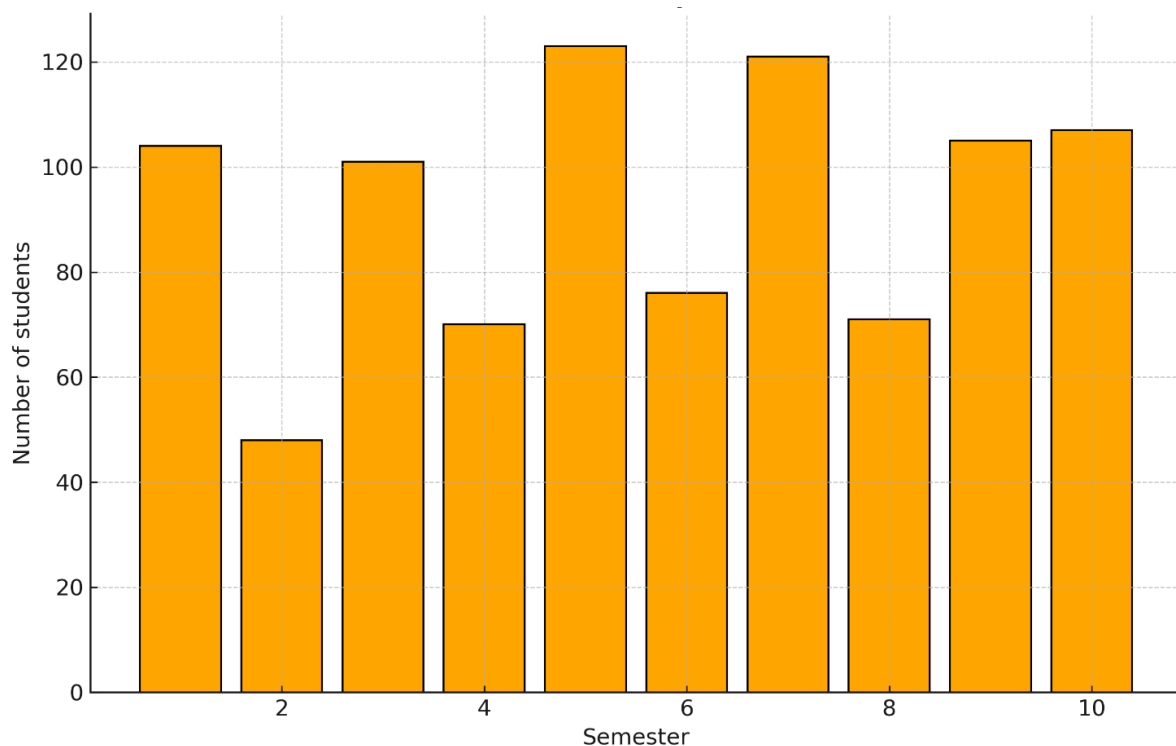
This result demonstrates that the strategy of conducting virtual presentations allowed for overcoming geographical barriers and reaching academic audiences from different institutional and regional contexts, strengthening the integrative nature of the extension activity. Furthermore, the diversity of geographical origins of the respondents contributed to greater representativeness and validity of the data obtained, allowing for a more reliable overview of the student reality of Animal Science in the country.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of Animal Science students participating in the survey in the ten states with the highest number of valid responses.

Regarding the academic profile, the participants were distributed throughout all semesters of the undergraduate program, with a higher concentration between the 1st and 5th semesters (Figure 2). This result indicates that students in the initial and intermediate phases of the course tend to show a greater predisposition to participate in extension activities and institutional surveys, possibly because they are in a formative stage marked by enthusiasm and curiosity about the profession.

Furthermore, the engagement of these students may be associated with recent contact with introductory subjects, such as Introduction to Animal Science and Ethics Applied to Animal Science, which generally address historical, legal, and institutional aspects of the profession, contributing to sparking interest in topics related to professional identity and student representation. This finding reinforces the relevance of promoting extension activities aimed at student integration right from the first semesters of undergraduate studies, taking advantage of this period of greater receptiveness and formative potential.

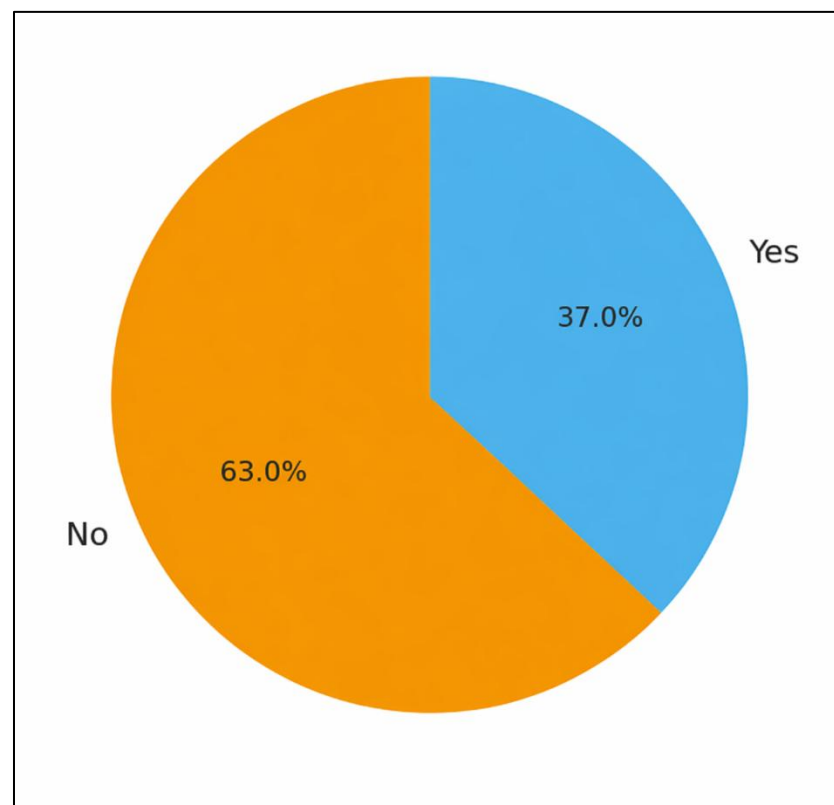


**Figure 2.** Distribution of students by semester

Regarding student participation, it was found that 36.7% of students reported being part of some student organization (Figure 3), with Academic Centers (101), Junior Enterprises (69), Athletic Associations (55) and PET groups (29) standing out as the most frequently mentioned forms of engagement (Table 1).

Although the majority of students (63.3%) are not currently linked to student organizations, multiple forms of engagement are observed, highlighting the plural nature of academic experiences and the different paths available for developing skills that complement technical training.

This result suggests that, even in smaller proportions, the presence of students involved in student organizations indicates the existence of active student representation and leadership groups in Animal Science courses, which can act as multipliers in student mobilization and in fostering closer ties with professional associations in the field.



**Figure 3.** Student participation in student organizations.

**Table 1.** Types of entities most cited by responding Animal Science students, in number and percentage.

Entity Type	Total	%
Not applicable	597	64
Academic Center	101	10.8
Junior Enterprise	69	7.4
Athletics	55	5.9

PET

29

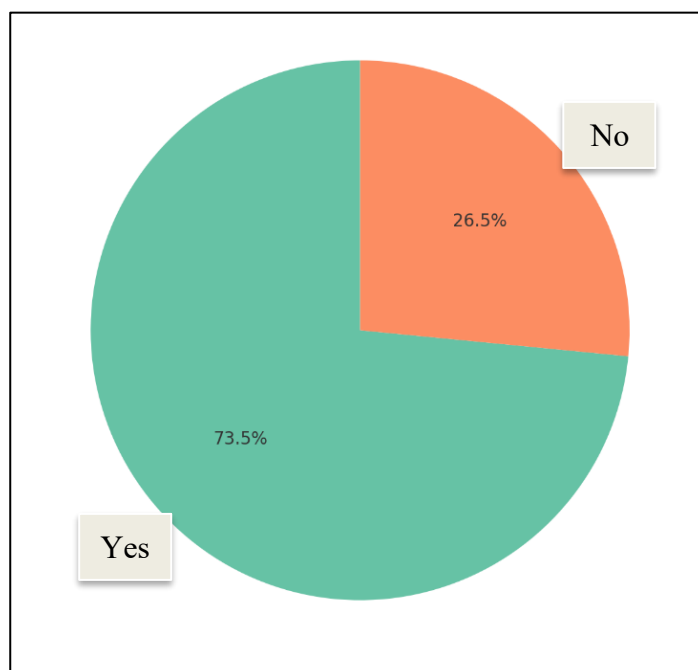
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Regarding the institutional affiliation of students with professional associations, it was observed that formal membership in the Brazilian Association of Zootecnicians (ABZ) is still low, with only 17.9% of participants declaring themselves members of the organization (Table 2). On the other hand, it was found that the level of knowledge about ABZ Jovem is high, with 72.9% of students stating that they were familiar with the national student board (Figure 4).

This result demonstrates that, even without a formal associative link, students recognize ABZ Jovem as a legitimate and relevant instance of student representation, which reinforces the importance of the outreach and connection work promoted by this board with undergraduate courses. The significant visibility achieved by ABZ Jovem can be understood as an indication of its strategic potential to stimulate student participation and strengthen engagement with ABZ itself.

**Table 2.** Number and percentage of responding Animal Science students who are members of ABZ.

ABZ Partner	Total	%
Yes	167	17.9
No	760	81.5

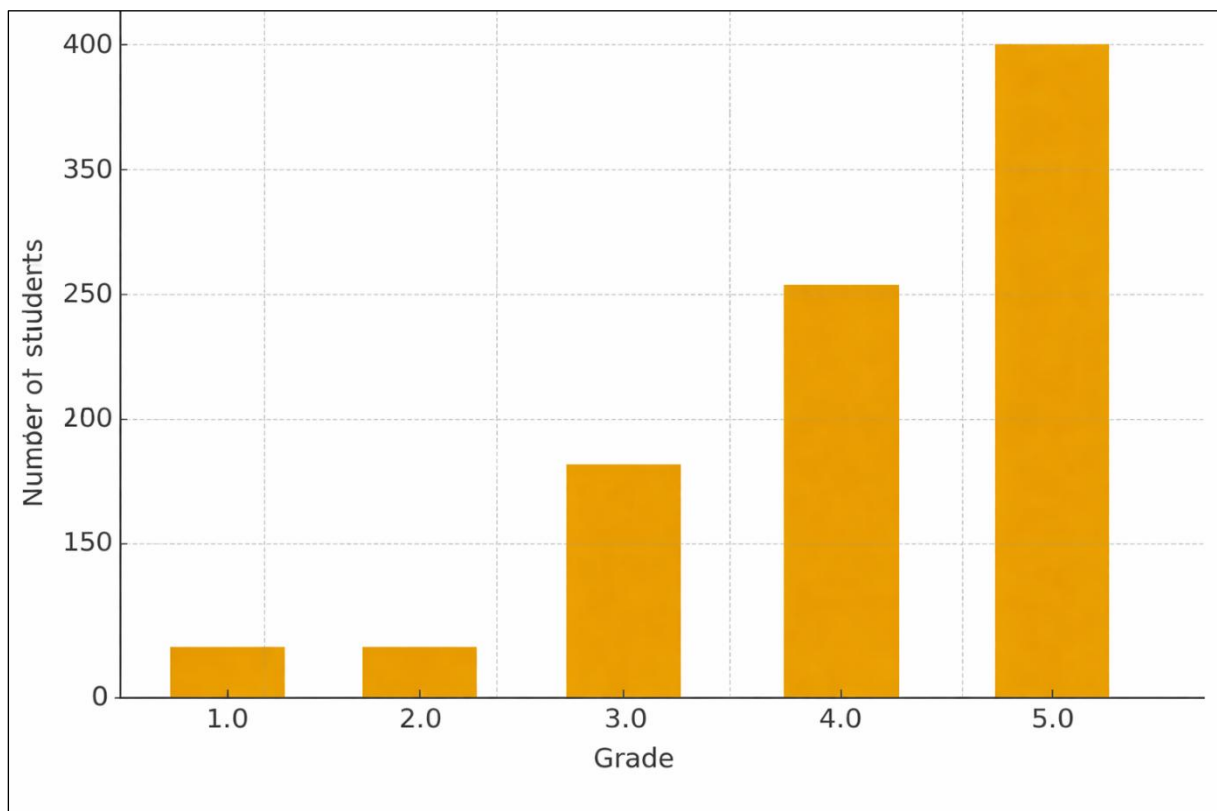


**Figure 4.** Student respondents who are aware of the existence of ABZ Jovem.

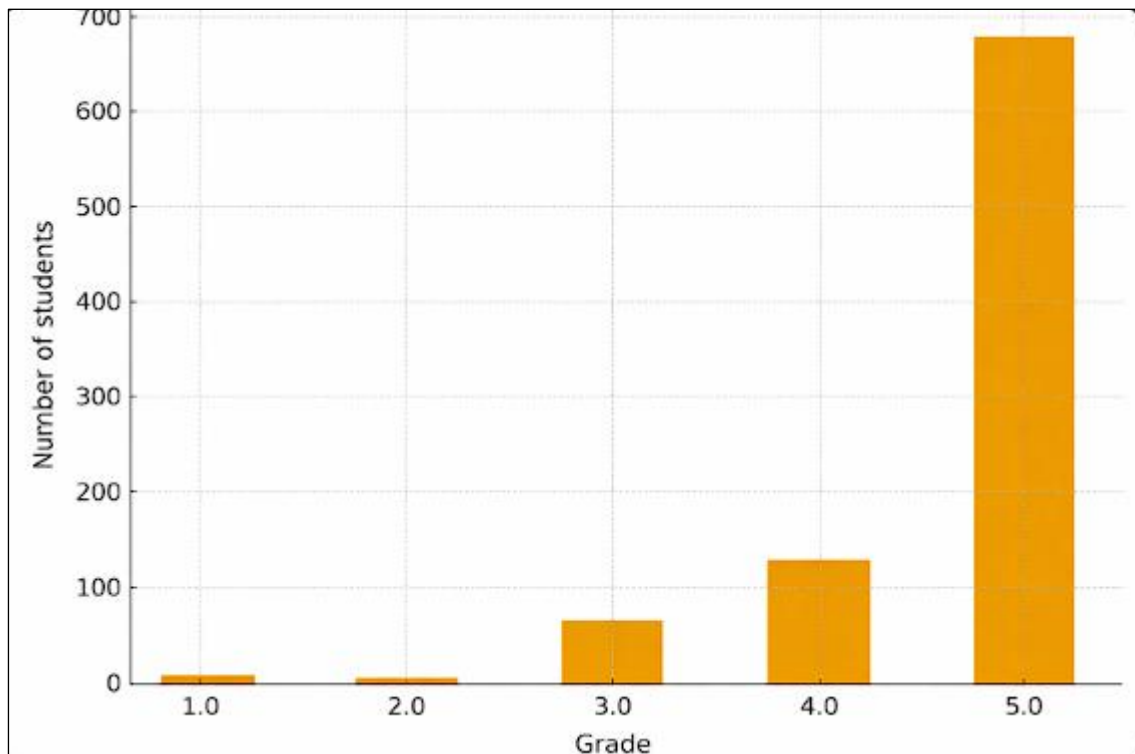
This perception is corroborated by the high value attributed by the students to the performance of ABZ Jovem. Among the participants, 73.1% gave the highest score (5) for the importance of the entity (Figure 5), while only 3.8% gave low scores (1 or 2).

Similarly, the evaluation of the work carried out by ABZ Jovem throughout 2023 also showed a largely positive trend, with 45.6% of respondents giving the highest score and 28.7% assigning a score of 4 (Figure 6), which represents an approval rate of over 70%.

This result demonstrates that students not only recognize ABZ Jovem as a legitimate body of representation, but also favorably evaluate its recent actions and initiatives, reinforcing the entity's strategic role in strengthening student engagement and building the professional identity of future animal scientists.



**Figure 5.** Importance attributed to ABZ Jovem by responding Animal Science students.



**Figure 6.** Evaluation by responding students regarding the ABZ Jovem project.

The results obtained in this study show that, although considerable challenges remain in expanding student membership in the Brazilian Association of Zootechnicians (ABZ) and encouraging broader student participation in student organizations, ABZ Jovem already plays a central role in the academic trajectory of zootechnicians in training. The significant proportion of students who stated they were familiar with the organization and who gave high marks to its relevance demonstrates that it has consolidated itself as a legitimate space for representation, complementary training, and national integration among students in the field.

Even without formal affiliation of most participants to ABZ, the perceived importance attributed to ABZ Jovem reinforces its potential as a gateway for students to connect with animal science professional associations, acting as an initial link between undergraduate studies and the professional world. This recognition is particularly relevant considering that the first years of university education are often marked by doubts about professional identity, job market possibilities, and the social role of the profession. Thus, contact with ABZ Jovem during undergraduate studies contributes to strengthening the sense of belonging to the animal science profession and to encouraging the construction of more engaged professional trajectories aligned with the ethical and associative principles of the profession.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that the student movement plays a structuring role in the training of animal scientists, acting as a space for the development of socio-emotional,

leadership, and collective management skills, which complement the technical skills acquired throughout the course. The diversity of entities mentioned by the participants, such as Academic Centers, Junior Enterprises, Athletic Associations, and PET groups, demonstrates that Animal Science courses offer multiple avenues for student engagement, allowing students to choose forms of participation compatible with their interests and profiles. This plurality of possibilities can and should be seen as an asset for training, as it offers practical experiences in organization, planning, and decision-making in real-world contexts.

In this sense, the value attributed by students to the actions developed by ABZ Jovem indicates that the initiatives of this board have managed to engage with the demands and expectations of students, promoting engagement and contributing to reducing the distance between undergraduate courses and the professional associations in the field. This early approach tends to produce positive medium- and long-term effects, such as an increase in ABZ membership rates, the formation of new student and professional leaders, and the strengthening of the category's representation in the national agricultural scene.

However, it is also recognized that there are still structural challenges to be faced in order to consolidate this movement. The low student membership rate in ABZ highlights the need for more effective communication and awareness strategies regarding the benefits of professional association, as well as the importance of joint actions between course coordinators and ABZ to encourage student participation in events, projects, and councils in the field. Another critical point identified is the concentration of engagement in the first semesters of the course, which suggests the need to structure continuous leadership training programs and maintain ties with students throughout their undergraduate studies.

Given this scenario, the results obtained allow us to point out some strategic paths for the consolidation and strengthening of the student movement in Brazilian Animal Science, among which the following stand out:

- Expand ABZ's outreach efforts to incoming students, taking advantage of the current period of heightened receptiveness and enthusiasm;
- To strengthen communication and integration channels between Animal Science courses, promoting the exchange of experiences and the building of collaborative networks;
- To encourage student membership in ABZ, highlighting its academic and professional benefits;

- and to expand projects that combine teaching, research, and outreach, providing formative experiences that connect students to the real demands of the agricultural sector.

Therefore, this study demonstrated that the student movement in Brazilian Animal Science is configured as a space for engagement, learning, and professional development, which contributes to the comprehensive training of future animal scientists and to the construction of a more solid, participatory professional identity connected to the contemporary demands of the profession.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that there is student participation in different states in matters related to Brazilian Animal Science through activities related to entities such as Academic Centers, Athletic Associations, Junior Enterprises, and Tutorial Education Programs ( PETs ), mainly in the first semesters due to the initial enthusiasm of the students who recognize ABZ Jovem as an entity for representation and strengthening of professional identity.

The diversity of forms of student organization (academic centers, junior enterprises, athletic associations, and PETs) shows that there are multiple paths for student participation, although it is still necessary to encourage the expansion of this participation.

In conclusion, strengthening the student movement in Animal Science requires strategies to engage with freshmen, greater dissemination of ABZ's actions, and encouragement of student membership, as well as the intensification of projects that integrate teaching, research, and outreach.

By valuing the voice of students, we reinforce not only academic representation, but also the commitment to training critical, engaged professionals prepared for the challenges of the agricultural sector in Brazil.

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