

FROM THE EDITOR

The first issue of the *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* appears almost a decade after the formal establishment of the Research Committee on Sociology of Agriculture of the International Sociological Association, of which the journal is the official publication. It follows by almost two decades the establishment of an international network of sociologists who research issues pertaining to the sociology of agriculture and food. The delay between these two latter events and the publication of the journal reflects the growth of this substantive area as well as the existence of a critical mass of scholars interested in the topic. More importantly, the publication of the journal testifies to the increasing social importance that the issues debated within these pages have assumed in the international and national contexts.

After several years of informal work both within the domestic context and at the international level, the "Sociology of Agriculture" group was officially constituted as a permanent organization of the International Sociological Association at the X World Congress of Sociology held in Mexico City in 1982. On that occasion the basic research areas and theoretical emphasis of the group were reaffirmed. In particular, attention was paid to the definition of a common research agenda and to differences between the sociology of agriculture and the parent discipline of rural sociology.

Since then, the central themes of research of the "Sociology of Agriculture" group have

gravitated around the contradictory development of agriculture and the effects of its outcomes on various segments of the world population. More significantly, the investigation has emphasized the global dimension of agriculture. The transnational character of agricultural production and its regional, domestic and international consequences at both the empirical and theoretical levels have been recent foci of sociologist members of the Research Committee. Furthermore, the recognition of the systemic character of contemporary agriculture and the limiting nature of the agrarian question have forcefully proposed the introduction into the research agenda of the "food question." As a result, at the XII World Congress of Sociology it was decided to change the original name of the Research Committee from "Sociology of Agriculture" to "Sociology of Agriculture and Food." This change is reflected in the title of the journal.

This brief account of the investigative agenda of the Sociology of Agriculture and Food group makes apparent the significant scientific departure from the parent discipline of rural sociology. Differences exist at both the substantive and epistemological levels. Rural sociology has been traditionally concerned with rurality and has been understood as a discipline which studies phenomena as they occur in rural settings. Sociology of Agriculture and Food is not directly interested in the study of rurality. Though rural events may take center stage in some of its

studies, its emphasis is on the totality of the processes of production and distribution of food and their relationship to society. Nevertheless, it should not be considered a discipline separate from sociology. Rather, Sociology of Agriculture and Food aims to be a substantive area within sociology whose boundaries are set by the specific characteristics of the issues investigated.

At the epistemological level, Sociology of Agriculture and Food departs from the almost exclusive functionalist - positivist posture typical of rural sociological studies. Its roots lie in a large and diverse background which includes among others Neo-Marxism, Neo-Weberianism, Dialectical and Critical Theory and Phenomenology. In essence, studies within the Sociology of Agriculture and Food should continue the critical tradition of scientific investigation which has been a constant and important component of the entire enterprise of sociology. This critical posture would like to be reflected in the type of contributions published in the journal.

The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food though mirrors the activity of the international network of scholars affiliated with the Research Committee of Sociology of Agriculture and Food, it does not wish to be an "exclusive" publication. On the contrary, its aim is to provide new opportunities for scholars who share the same substantive interests, wish to contribute to the debate and wish to be part of an international socially concerned community. The absence of a specific journal which addresses issues in this general area with a critical and international view point has been one of the major motivations inspiring the undertaking of this initiative.

The general format of the journal is characterized by a principal section containing refereed articles. This section is titled "Articles"

and is accompanied by two other sections. The first of these, "The Forum" contains papers which specifically address current topics from a scientific view point. In this issue the theme of "Globalization and the State" is treated in three papers. The second section is called "Proposed Research" and contains research ideas and proposals. It is the objective of this section to inform readers of current research activities in order to develop information on new research directions and to stimulate scholarly cooperation.

It is important, at this point, to point out the bilingual character of the journal. The lack of a dialogue between an English speaking "North" and a Spanish speaking "South" has been a source of concern for many intellectuals interested in this scientific area. It is hoped that the establishment of a bilingual international journal will constitute a small yet important step toward the enhancement of a North-South dialogue which represents one of the fundamental objectives that the Research Committee on Sociology of Agriculture and Food would like to foster. While it is not the aim of the journal to publish the same articles in both English and Spanish, articles written in English and those written in Spanish will be published in their original languages along with translations of their summaries. In this inaugural volume, the articles contained in the "Forum" and in the "Proposed Research" sections are published in both languages.

Finally, at the outset of this new initiative and on behalf of the members of the Research Committee, I would like to thank Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo (CENDES) of the Central University of Venezuela and the College of Agriculture at the University of Missouri-Columbia for their institutional support. Their contributions are pivotal for the realization of the tasks at hand. ■