Participation of Small Farmers in the International Market: The Case of the Fruit and Vegetable Business in Mexico

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During the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations in the early nineties, the Mexican government argued that Mexico had comparative advantages over the USA and Canada in fruit and vegetable production. Traditionally, the comparative advantages of a product were determined by factors such as climate, soil, the location of the land in relation to distribution centres, and the availability of cheap labour. Yet, under conditions of new technological and structural changes, comparative advantages are no longer so static and based on natural resource endowments. Innovation, adaptation and improvements in existing technology and products can result in a shift in comparative advantages. The fact that nowadays semi-desert regions produce tomatoes and melons is an example of this. Thus, biotechnology can alter this balance.

The evolution of processing industries with their new textures, flavours, colorants, bacterial processes, enzyme use, industrial fermentation, and so on, are generating new products that can substitute produce such as cocoa, shrimp, coffee, citrus fruit, animal fodder, etc. This depresses prices and can even drive natural products out of the market. In this way technological development is constantly changing comparative advantages to the benefit of the only real comparative advantage: capital.

When analysing comparative advantages we have to consider the fact that there is no such thing as a free market. Markets are differentiated and are experienced differentially by farmers. Each region has different mechanisms and channels through which produce is marketed. These are influenced by the social actors involved and the relations developed among them. There are marked differences concerning the availability of information, financial resources, inputs, and communication infrastructure among communities.

Tariff barriers, in my opinion, are not the most important barriers. The non-tariff barriers do the most damage. The USA to protect their own production uses non-tariff barriers. A non-tariff barrier can shut down dozens of packing plants indefinitely and affect the production of hundreds of farmers. Up to now, the USA has decided on the required quality of the produce and regulations for the use of

fertilisers and insecticides. The products are usually checked at the border, with some exceptions, such as mangoes, which are checked at the packing plants.

Competition in the USA is tough. Mexican fruit and vegetables have to compete with produce cultivated in the USA, and with fruit and vegetables imported from other countries. On the other hand the domestic market, increasingly is being flooded with USA fruits and vegetables. Since NAFTA, the production of fruit and vegetables in Mexico has increased. However, the US winter market has its limits, and demand is not likely to increase much more. Overproduction is a problem nation-wide. In addition, the water shortages and rising price of inputs have limited and will continue to limit Mexican expansion. Environmental problems have not been treated adequately in the agreement. The question of how environmental conservation will be financed has been avoided.

NAFTA has had negative effects on grain farmers, who have to compete with cheap grains from the USA. The question is whether these farmers can switch from producing grains to producing fruits and vegetables for export and whether their production can be sustainable.

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Neo-liberal policies and free market (1982 onward)

The neo-liberal strategy, was based on structural adjustment policies designed by the IMF and World Bank to reduce the state's role in the economy and encourage competitiveness in the world market. This strategy gave full support to private capital and included: allowing agriculture produce prices to fall in line with the international market; dismantling of state enterprises; reducing subsidies and price-control over agro-products; and separating policies aimed at increasing productivity from those directed at relieving poverty and rural development (Robles and Moguel 1990: 10). The goal of food self-sufficiency was abandoned, agriculture was expected to turn to the international market to earn much-needed foreign currency. Furthermore, special attention was given to commercial produce for the international market such as fruits, vegetables, flowers and livestock. Produce which peasants were not accustomed to producing.

When Mexico became a GATT-country in 1986, restrictions on export and import produce and import quotas were reduced. Ensuing was NAFTA based on the premise that Mexico has advantages over the US and Canada, especially with regard to fruit and vegetable production. Mexican peasants were expected to stop producing grains, turn to these crops and compete successfully in the international market.

Since then traditional agricultural exports such as sugar are being substituted for off-season fruits and vegetables, horticultural produce and specialty crops, in order to take advantage of the expansion of fresh food and luxury good markets. Increasingly, Mexican agriculture is becoming part of the global economy, participating in international circuits of production and consumption.

Along these neo-liberal lines the government is up to now implementing changes in the agrarian structure which enable private capital, whether national or international, to invest in agriculture. A key factor is constituted by the changes done to the Constitution which allowed the privatization of the *ejido* land, giving private capital security and access to land.

The Impact of Neo-liberal Policies in the Ejido Sector

During the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, there was a lively debate in Mexico on the role that the *ejido* could play at the local as well as at the national level. Some authors viewed the *ejido* as only an instrument of state control, a formal structure with no content, devoid of potential for developing an efficient agricultural production (Morett 1991, Rello 1985, Warman 1975, 1991) and serving the interests of a populist government which continuously sought support in this sector. Others, such as Gordillo (1987, 1991) and Myhre (1994) thought that the *ejido* could be a strong political and economic tool in organising agricultural producers in Mexico. The more the *ejidatarios* control the production process and the marketing of their produce, and thus have a greater capacity for decision making, the more the *ejido* becomes a consolidated organisation for peasant representation. The more the *ejido* is subject to decision-making by outsiders, the more it functions as a mechanism of control. This chapter considers ejidatarios as engaged subjects, active actors rather than passive recipients. Ejidatarios around

the country have reacted and responded to neo-liberal policies in very diverse manners.

Lets look closer at some of the main neo-liberal policies: privatization of the *ejido*, reduction of subsidies and credit and free market.

The privatisation of the ejido

In anticipation of NAFTA, Mexican government altered the Constitution in 1991, reversing the *ejido* principle of community held land, the government announced the end of land distribution and the privatization of the *ejido*, which means that each *ejido* and agrarian community in a general assembly can now decide if they want to continue as such or as private property landholders (Salinas 1991). Other propositions were: *ejidos* and agrarian communities have the right to give as collateral their land for obtaining credit or for another use they see fit. The *ejido*, either as an *ejido* or as a number of private properties will be allowed to engage in different forms of association with private national and international capital. Agrarian courts were created in order to solve and settle questions related to plot boundaries, land ownership and the resolution of delayed proceedings.

Since its implementation we find the following reactions: economic differentiation within the ejido has increased. Between 1990 and 1994 the distribution of land in the ejido sector has been altered. The smallest farms, where households were below subsistence level were being abandoned and their owners were increasingly migrating. Their land was being absorbed by middle-sized and large farms as part of a process of consolidation of *minifundio* into larger farms. Similarly, natural pastures used for common cattle feeding, were being reallocated for cultivation as rainfed land (de Janvry et al. 1997:31-36). These reforms increased the land market as land rental transactions increased, even in ejidos where land sales had not taken place. One of the reasons that explain the slow changes in land tenure patterns has to do with the lack of stable non-farm income generating opportunities outside the ejido. The majority of ejidatarios complement their income with non-farm activities, however they are reluctant to sell their land as they perceive them as unstable. The privatization of the ejido land has led the way to the alienation of property

rights of collectives and associations in favor of individual owners and worsened the situation of the rural poor (de Teresa 1994, Scott 1994).

Reduction of subsidies and credit

In the previous decades official agricultural credit was given with a technological package (seeds, agrochemicals and cultural practices). Subsidized loans below-market rates and access to cheap state-produced or state-regulated inputs were the norm. Banrural, the main official credit institution, usually pushed its clients to sell their harvest to CONASUPO, the state's food-buying and distribution company, thus facilitating its hegemonic market position (Myhre:41, Rello 1987) In the least well off *ejidos* credit was used to bring some income into the household, particularly when money was scarce before the harvest.

Nowadays credit has been reduced significantly. Between 1988 and 1994 the number of borrowers fell from approximately 800,000 to 224,000. The government expected foreign investment to rise as a result of the changes in the Constitution, but in 1990, the official foreign investment in agriculture amounted to less than 1 per cent of total foreign investment in Mexico (Stanford 1996: 149). In the survey done by de Janvry et al. only 30.5 percent of the households had access to some type of credit (1997:103), and while availability of credit to agriculture increased during the years analyzed, credit available to the *ejido* sector declined, presaging a serious liquidity crisis and strong barriers hindering the ability to respond to the reforms by modernizing traditional crops and shifting to high -value crops with comparative advantages in an open economy (Ibid: 103).

At the same time, production costs have increased. Prices have gone up considerably, especially prices of capital goods such as tractors, agricultural implements and inputs such as fuel, fertilizers and insecticides as well as hybrid seeds. This has meant the decline in the use of these inputs by farmers especially in the *ejido* sector. For example, at the end of 1981 there were 162,533 tractors. By 1987 the numbers were reduced to 161,470 (Calva 1988: 38-42) and by 1991 to 110,428 (INEGI 1997:169). In the national survey implemented in 1991, less than half of the *ejidos* (46.4 per cent) used tractors.

De Janvry et al. (1997) came to the conclusion that there was either no change or a decline in the use of machinery in the *ejido* sector between 1990 and 1994. The use of tractors was replaced by labor. In the cases where *ejidatarios* could not hire labor, this meant an increase in the use of family labor.

The state's participation in input and product markets, through guaranteed prices and a vast infrastructure for marketing and storage, was also modified. Two state enterprises that produced inputs, the National Seed Company (PRONASE) and the Mexican Fertilizer Company (FERTIMEX), were affected by the reforms allowing private producers to participate and compete in the market (de Janvry 1997:18-19). The inflation suffered in Mexico has been augmented by the radical withdrawal of government subsidies for agriculture. Public expenditure for the rural areas, decreased in 1986 to half of the amount spent in 1981.

Concerning infrastructure, the construction of water projects and the maintenance and management of irrigation districts was in the hands of the National Water Commission, in the 1990s these districts were entirely turned over to the users. This has meant a reduction of the investment in irrigation infrastructure, the budget allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (SARH) decreased by 74 per cent from 1981 to 1987 (Calva 1988: 38-42) and 34 per cent from 1991 to 1995 (INEGI 1997:151).

The results of high input costs, scarce access to credit, technology, high yield seeds, can be seen in changes in the use of land. From 1990 to 1994 there is a strong expansion of the land used for corn cultivation: intercropped corn on rainfed land increased during this period 67% and moncropped corn in irrigated land increased 64 percent. The increase shows the absence of other productive alternatives and constraints set on *ejidatarios* to be able to adjust to other crops with higher value-added (De Janvry et al. 1997:62).

In this conditions can the *ejido* turn from producing grains to produce highly costly fruits and vegetables? This is a question I answer in the following section.

Peasants with irrigation and market competitiveness: fruit and vegetable production

The production and export of non-traditional products such as melons, tomatoes, brussels sprouts, broccoli, baby corn, etc., has increased in the last decades, substituting traditional exports. The production of fruit and vegetables is very heterogeneous. Fruits and vegetables are grown all over the country. In 1991 cultivating only 2.7 per cent of the national productive land, horticulture contributed 14.31 per cent of total production value (Gomez et al. 1992: 114). The production of fruit and vegetables has steadily increased in the last decades (almost quadrupled in the last 20 years). The main cause can be found in an increase in the national consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Most fruits and vegetables are labor intensive, providing employment for approximately 17.5 per cent of the total labor force employed in agriculture. A recent phenomenon is the increasing feminization of the labor force in this sector (see Barros 1998).

Fruit and vegetables account for almost 40 per cent of agricultural exports (Gomez et al. 1993:341). While the export of grains such as beans, rice and maize was almost non-existent in the last five years, the export of fruit and vegetables increased significantly. Productivity has also increased faster than in other crops such as maize and rice. The high productivity results form the use of modern technological packages. Research done by Gomez et al. shows that modern technology is mostly applied in the northern states of the country, where production is geared mainly to the international market, and where North American capital finances and markets most of the export production (Gomez et al. 1992:119).

Only approximately 3 per cent (841) of the *ejidos* grow fruits and vegetables. Of these *ejidos*, 282 produce horticultural products. We are not considering here the *ejidos* that grow sugar-cane, which account for 3.9 per cent of the total *ejido* sector. Popular crops for the domestic market are usually grown by *ejidatarios* on *ejidos* which are totally or partially irrigated. Some 30 per cent of the *ejido's* irrigated land is cultivated with fruits and vegetables. Only 28 per cent of total fruit and vegetable production in 1991 came from the *ejido* sector, and *ejido* yields are lower than yields on private property (Marsh and

Runsten 1996:173). Thus, the participation of the *ejido* sector in the overall national production of fruits and vegetables is small and even if the amount of families who produce this produce has increased from 14.1 percent in 1990 to 17.3 percent in 1994' (de Janvry et al. 1997:139) it is not the turn over that was expected.

Ejidatarios that manage to produce for the international market usually produce in small plots of land of one or two hectares. The *ejidos* and small private landholders with irrigated land who export their production, usually work under production contracts with transnational companies though some try to export their produce directly. In Mexico very little research is conducted on horticulture: most of the technological packages from the US are implemented through production contracts, processing industries or the Mexican associates of these companies. Peasants who cannot afford such modern and expensive technological packages, cannot attain the quality standards required in the international market, produce for the domestic market.

One of the most difficult aspects of the fruit and vegetable agribusiness for peasants has been financing. For example, the average investment required to produce one hectare of melon ranges from US \$500 to 700. A lack of financial resources forces many peasants to negotiate disadvantageous production contracts with brokers and even have dealings with brokers with dubious reputations. The availability of credit for fruit and vegetables from Banrural has, in all cases, been irregular, to say the least. One of the main reasons for this irregularity has been the discrepancy between national policies and peasants' real needs.

The main recipient of Mexican fresh and processed fruits and vegetables is the Unites States. In 1990, 85 per cent of the total exports went to the US and 10 per cent to Canada. There is a constant demand for Mexican winter fruit and vegetable production. Mexican producers have to respond to a fluctuating market. The flexibility of peasants producing fresh fruit and vegetables is limited in many ways. The perishability of the produce and the peasants' dependence on foreign capital are two major constraints. Land use has to be planned months ahead, based on earlier market trends. *Ejido* peasants lack adequate and up to date information. The market for perishables is difficult, due to

seasonal changes in supply, the need for fast and technologically equipped transportation from the packing plant to the market, and hourly changes in prices at the border.

Agricultural and agro-industrial exports are governed by internationally standardized technological requirements. Notwithstanding NAFTA, one of the main problems between Mexico and the US is the manipulation by the US of non-tariff barriers. All Mexican exports to the US are inspected by the United States department of Agriculture, and must pass through certified packing stations. This has frequently increased costs for farmers.

The Fruit and Vegetable Business in Mexico

This sector's growth demands that resources, which might otherwise be invested in the production of consumption goods intended for low-income groups, be redirected towards agricultural products for the national and international middle and high-income sections of the population. This occurs outside as well as inside the fruit and vegetable business, where the production of crops for popular consumption has stagnated, if not decreased. The production and export of non-traditional products such as melons, tomatoes, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, baby corn, etc., has increased in the last decades, substituting traditional exports. Traditional tropical exports are declining in importance due to oversupply and a stagnating demand (Llambi 1994: 195).

The production of fruit and vegetables is very heterogeneous. To start with, a multiplicity of crops is grown due, mainly, to the variety of climates in the country. There are from two to five different commercial varieties for each product. Fruits and vegetables are grown all over the country: in almost every region we find one or more of these products.

Since the end of the eighties there has been a restructuring of fruit and vegetable production. The north – Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California – are increasing their production of non-traditional fruits and vegetables such as peas, eggplant, grapes, and a kind of squash (called *cabocha* produced exclusively for the Japanese market).

Meanwhile, other states have reduced their export volumes considerably. In 1988, 27 of 32 states exported fruit and vegetables to the USA. By 1991, 11 of these had dropped out of the international market completely (Queretaro, Durango, Quintana Roo) or reduced their production for export significantly (San Luis Potosí, Aguascalientes, Chiapas, Mexico, Zacatecas, Morelos, Puebla and Hidalgo) (Standford 1996: 147).

The production of fruit and vegetables has been an important part of agricultural production. In 1991 cultivating only 2.7 per cent of the national productive land, horticulture (vegetable production) contributed 14.31 per cent of total production value (Gomez et al. 1992: 114). The amount of hectares and production of fruit and vegetables (with some exceptions, such as strawberries) has increased in the last decades (almost quadrupled in the last 20 years). The main cause can be found in an increase in the national consumption of fruits and vegetables. Export has also increased dramatically, going from 629,240 tons between 1980-1984 to 2'104,295 between 1995-1997 (de Grammont C. H., et al. 1999:XIV).

Fruit and vegetables account for almost 40 per cent of agricultural export (Gomez et al. 1993: 341). This sector has been growing steadily since 1966. Productivity has also increased faster than in other crops such as maize and rice. However, this increase has not been homogeneous. High yields are mainly found for export produce such as strawberries, tomatoes and melons.

This high productivity results from the use of modern technological packages. Research done by Gomez et al. shows that modern technology is mostly applied in the northern states of the country, where production is geared mainly to the international market, and where North American capital finances and markets most of the export production (Gomez et al. 1992: 119). In Mexico, very little research is conducted on horticulture: most of the technological packages come from the USA and are implemented through production contracts, processing industries or the Mexican associates of these companies. Farmers, who cannot afford such modern and expensive technological packages and cannot attain the quality standards required in the international market, produce for the domestic market.

Who is producing and exporting these fruits and vegetables? According to research done by de Grammont during the last decade of neo-liberal policies and free trade agreements, national statistics show a significant polarization in the

Mexican agrarian structure, dominated by large exporting enterprises: enterprises with more than a 1000 hectares that represent 0.28 per cent (12,487) of the total amount of enterprises, but cover 44 per cent (48'010,873 hectares) of the total amount of land. On the other hand, 59 per cent (2'620,399) of units of production have less than 5 hectares each and cover only 5 percent (5'574,769 hectares) of the national land used for forestry and agriculture. Of the total amount of enterprises, only 0.09 per cent market their produce in the national and international market (de Grammont 1999:5). The enterprises that are able to have a steady production for export are located in the states of Baja California, Jalisco, Estado de Mexico, Michoacan, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora and Tamaulipas.

Concerning the *ejido*¹ we find that only approximately three per cent (841) of the *ejidos* grow fruits and vegetables. Of these *ejidos*, 282 produce horticultural products. We are not considering here the *ejidos* that grow sugar-cane, which account for 3.9 per cent of the total *ejido* sector. Popular crops for the domestic market are usually grown by *ejidatarios* on *ejidos* which are totally or partially irrigated. Some 30 per cent of the *ejido's* irrigated land is cultivated with fruits and vegetables. Based on data given by SARH (now SAGAR), Marsh and Runsten (1996: 173) conclude that only 28 per cent of total fruit and vegetable production in 1991 came from the *ejido* sector, and that *ejido* yields are lower than yields on private property. Thus, the participation of the *ejido* sector in the overall national production of fruits and vegetables is small. Information on the number of hectares and yields for fruits and vegetables in the *ejido* sector is not available.

The *ejidos* and small private landholders with irrigated land who export their production usually work under production contracts with transnational companies, though some try to export their products directly. The case study presented belongs to the small group of *ejidos* that have irrigation, have been able to produce fruit and vegetables and penetrate the international market.

Most fruits and vegetables are labour intensive, providing employment for approximately 17.5 per cent of the total labour force employed in agriculture. A recent phenomenon is the increasing feminisation and flexibilization of the labour force in this sector: this has meant an increase on activities per worker, higher

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¹ The *ejido* is a kind of land tenure which grants rights of usufruct to agrarian reform communities, in which there are individual or collective plots and common land.

intensity and greater responsibility in the areas of quality control. This increase in the workload comes with the same salary and work conditions (see Lara 1999).

Transnationals and small farmers

Transnational enterprises relate to farmers in different ways. Transnationals have developed strategies to ensure a constant supply of raw materials for their agroindustries: mainly production and marketing contracts. Generally, foreign companies do not rely on intermediaries for the acquisition of the necessary raw materials but have their own brokers. This is one of the main differences between transnationals and national enterprises, for the latter usually acquire their inputs through intermediaries. The costs of producing fruits and vegetables are very high, therefore national enterprises cannot afford to invest large amounts of capital in agricultural production, nor do they want to take the risks involved.

Farmers who supply transnationals are generally capitalist entrepreneurs, with medium to large landholdings, irrigation, and elaborate and expensive technological packages. These farmers use the most advanced techniques for agricultural production. Working with transnationals means good business for the capitalist producers, since transnationals strive for a combination of regularity in supply and price, which does not always coincide with the lowest price.

In general, transnationals prefer not to work with *ejidatarios* or small landholders, for they do not meet their demands. However, throughout the country there are brokers and representatives of small and medium foreign companies who buy fruits and vegetables from *ejidatarios*. These companies supply larger companies and retailers, and wholesale markets and supermarket chains throughout the USA. They deal with farmers either through production contracts or consignment sales. Together with marketing contracts, these instruments further vertical integration, serving US interests by securing steadier, higher quality supplies, with less risk to the brokerage houses.

The main recipient of Mexican fresh and processed fruits and vegetables is the United States. In 1990, 85 per cent of the total exports went to the USA and 10 per cent to Canada and by the end of the 1990s, 98 per cent went to the USA. All tomatoes, 94 per cent of strawberries and all watermelon and cucumber are exported to the USA.

Mexican producers have to respond to a fluctuating market. Exports depend on the demands made by the US domestic market and production within the USA, and other countries. The flexibility of small and medium farmers producing fresh fruits and vegetables is limited in many ways. The perishability of the product and the farmers' dependence on foreign capital are two major constraints. Fruit and vegetable production does not permit day-to-day manipulation of the market by farmers, as might be the case with non-perishable commodities. Thus, land use is planned months ahead, and based on earlier market trends, prices, supply, and input costs. An important problem faced by farmers is the lack of adequate and up to date information. For brokers, retailers and foreign companies as well, the market for perishables is difficult, due to seasonal changes in supply, the need for fast transportation from the packing plant to the market, and hourly changes in prices at the border.

All Mexican exports to the USA are inspected by the United States Department of Agriculture, and must pass through certified packing stations. This has frequently increased costs for farmers. Exports are governed by internationally standardised technological requirements.

Is NAFTA a Real Alternative for Peasants?

The adoption of neo-liberal policies exacerbated the impact of globalization in the rural areas. The abrupt restriction of state resources for agriculture has deepened the rural crisis specially for peasants in the *ejido* sector and the rural communities. The unilateral commercial openings towards the US and Canada, since NAFTA, has had negative effects, especially in the *ejido* sector. *Ejidos* that mainly produce grains have not been able to compete with the highly technological and subsidized agricultural production of the US. In the last decade Mexico has tripled its imports of basic grains, where imports went from 738 million dollars in 1986 to 4,427 million dollars in 1996 (Rudino 1997:22). The same applies to fruits and vegetables where peasants not only have to compete with fruit and vegetables produced in the US but with fruit and vegetables produced in Mexico by large landowners and other countries.

As said before, the privatization of the *ejido* was mainly intended to make Mexico's rural areas attractive to foreign investors. Nevertheless several case studies have shown that foreigners are not interested in owning land and

bearing all the risks this entails. On the contrary, they prefer to work with production contracts and, to be able to leave for another region should the contracts prove no longer profitable. Mexico cannot change the objectives and dynamics of foreign companies, but could develop policies to strengthen peasants' bargaining position vis-à-vis foreign companies (Barros 1998).

The Mexican government has argued that Mexico has comparative advantages over the US and Canada in the fruit an vegetable production. When analyzing comparative advantages we have to consider the fact that there is no such thing as free market. Markets are experienced differentially concerning the availability of information, financial resources, inputs, and communication infrastructure.

The question is whether peasants from the *ejido* sector can switch from producing grains to producing fruit and vegetables. We have already seen how peasants cannot respond quickly to market fluctuations and how even *ejidatarios* with irrigation have turned over to corn cultivation instead of fruit and vegetables. Large amounts of capital are needed and TNCs are not generally interested in working with small farmers. Without the support of the state, the prospects for small farmers in small communities appear rather grim.

Environmental Problems

The fruit and vegetable business has had important environmental repercussions. Land erosion and uncontrollable crop disease are found in many communities that venture into this business. In La Loma, almost 1,000 hectares of melons were replanted with sugar-cane for farmers were not able to halt the infestation of crops. Farmers either need to change to a more resistance crop, or the quality of their produce becomes so low that it cannot enter the international market as in the case of Tlaca. Farmers continually fight crop disease, pests and the deterioration of their land.

The main factors that cause environmental degradation are the following:

(a) Mono-cropping eventually leads to land erosion. Why, then, do farmers persist in cultivating only one crop? Because they depend on foreign companies for financing, and have to produce whatever these companies require. Moreover, brokers and intermediaries usually specialise in only one or two products. Farmers are not able to change this situation due to a lack of alternative financial opportunities and adequate information about market possibilities. We have already seen the problems farmers encountered when they tried producing cherry tomatoes.

- (b) Fruit and vegetable produce must meet international standards and, therefore, tend to require non-traditional inputs, which have an adverse effect on the land. Such crop varieties are also more susceptible to local diseases and pests.
- (c) The SARH (now SAGAR) reports a decrease in underground water levels in all regions. There are better irrigation methods that waste less water, but they are too expensive for general use. Most small farmers use the wasteful method of land flooding. The increase in winter fruit and vegetable production has meant an increase in water use, which has now become a grave problem meriting far more concern.

Most foreign companies and brokers are interested in short-term profits at minimal cost. This has meant intensive use of land. Invariably, after a foreign company has been active in a region for some years, natural resources suffer from over-exploitation, and exhibit signs of environmental degradation and soil erosion, while the frequency of crop diseases and pests increases and water resources are depleted. It is usually three or four years after crop disease starts to appear in the fields that the companies disappear with whatever produce they can extract. Experience indicates to them when productivity is likely to decrease and when crop disease will get out of control or be to expensive to fight, as happened in La Loma. As Raynolds argues in her analysis of oriental vegetable production in the Dominican Republic: 'What is at stake here is not only short-term foreign exchange earnings and domestic employment, but the long-term productivity of critical natural resources' (1994: 232).

This is a very common pattern in small communities. Having gone through the same processes in other regions, brokers and company representatives already know the symptoms. The following excerpt from an interview with a broker in

Jalisco reflects an attitude typical of foreign companies' views on Mexi natural resources:

Broker: When crop disease appears we already know it is the beginning of the end. That is why we keep moving around the country in search of new land. This is how we are able to compete in the USA, by keeping costs low and producing as much as possible.

Question: But, by doing this, in the long run you will also lose. Irrigated land in Mexico is not unlimited. There will come a time when you will not find new land.

Broker: Oh well, then I will look for another job in the USA.

This broker's attitude reveals an ideological conception of capitalist accumulation whereby one is motivated to get as much profit as possible with the least capital, effort and time. These cases reflect small farmers' incapacity to accumulate capital and achieve a sustainable production.

The withdrawal of subsidies in the eighties and inflation, together with a decrease in the accessibility to credit due to the implementation of neo-liberal policies, have led farmers to use less inputs and labour, crops becoming more susceptible to diseases. At the same time, there is little awareness of sound ecological methods.

While this is happening in the production sector, what is happening in the marketing sphere. I will introduce the reader to small scale marketing, which is different to that of large transactionals.

The objective of this paper section is to present, from an historical perspective, the connections between the fruit and vegetable wholesale markets in Los Angeles and Tijuana and the development of transnational social networks in the border region. y analysis is based on tow markets as

case studies: the 7th street market in Los Angeles and the Miguel Hidalgo market in Tijuana. The interrelation is seen from the perspective of small family firms. I present how they have emerged, putting special attention in the strategies and negotiations developed by the actors involved in order to penetrate and compete in the international market.

An important factor in the development of small scale fruit and vegetable import and export activity in the region, has been the migration of Mexicans to the USA. Marketing has become an alternative for Mexicans to US institutions mans of self-employment. I emphasise the social, economic, political and cultural conditions that have allowed immigrants of Mexican origin in the region to become entrepreneurs. What were the structural conditions that allowed their development and which were the strategies and struggles that the actors, individually or collectively, developed in order to penetrate the sector and increase their room for manoeuvre. This study contributes to the understanding of the condition under which Mexican immigrants have been able to develop their entrepreneurial capacity and the strategies they have used in order to compete successfully in the fruit and vegetable market, where the creation of social networks plays a crucial role.

One of the main strategies followed by small enterprises has been the creation of transborder social networks in the region. Between Tijuana and Los Angeles important commercial networks have been developed though the years. The border has shown and increasing integration between individualism, families, organisations, economies and culture.

The family plays a very important role, reduces transaction costs and stimulates marketing (see Ben-Porath 1980). We will see how the organisation of economic activities around kinship, friendship and ritual ties is not a retrograde way of organising the economic activity, but a way to face a series of problems and obstacles that the international fruit and vegetable marketing presents. The family is the part of the local, where identity predominates.

Changes in migration patterns and USA policies towards migrants, have had an impact on migrants expectations and perspectives for the future, on the family structure and relations in the nuclear and extended family in Mexico and the USA. Structural changes in the wholesale marketing on Los Angeles and

international policies such as NAFTA have also influenced the small scale fruit and vegetable business.

The growth of the population of Mexican origin and Latin-Americans in general in southern California has created an important demand for Mexican produce.

According to the US Bureau of Census by 1997 out of 28,438 million people of Hispanic origin in the US, 63.43% were of Mexican origin (18,039,000). They reside mainly in five southern states: Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas. From this, California and specially Los Angeles county provides residence to more than 2,5 million individuals of Mexican origin (Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants) (1990 US Census). The Mexican population has grown rapidly in recent years. Mexicans come to the US taking advantage of the quotas set aside for the reunification of families and as undocumented immigrants (Waldinger et al. 1990:74)

it is estimated that today only 10 to 15 percent of documented or undocumented migrants of Mexican origin work in agriculture in the state of California, Texas and Arizona (Wallace 1988:664 cited in Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:25).

It is important to mention several changes in migration patterns that researchers have found among the population of Mexican origin. These changes have to do with macro-structural conditions in the US and Mexico, as well as changes in the individual expectations and possibilities of the actors concerned.

I have divided the presentation in three stages, the first goes from 1950 to 1979,, the second covers the 1980s and the third the nineties.

FIRST STAGE 1950 - 1979

Between 1942 and 1964 the Bracero Programme began, where almost five million temporary labourers and almost five million undocumented Mexicans were deported in the same period (Samora 1971:57). The bracero programme was directed to men, a flexible seasonal labour was needed that cold be coordinated with seasonal fluctuations in agriculture and where the cost of reproduction would be externalised to Mexico.

Macro structural transformations in both Mexico and the US allowed for changes in migration patterns. Concerning the US the explanation has to do with labour-market segmentation and what has been called dual economy: global fragmentation of production processes, income polarisation and the expanding role of producer services in the economy (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:27, Portes & Bach 1985). On the side of Mexico we find that an increasing debt and unemployment and the deepening of the economic crisis, led many Mexican men and women to leave their homes and migrate to the US.

At the end of the fifties we witness an important transition in Mexican migration patterns, with an increase of permanent migrants, which meant an increase in the number of women and children emigrating to the USA. This has to do with the reinforcement of the social networks in the USA.

Although most of these Mexicans started working in the rural areas, by the end of the sixties a great proportion of Mexican immigrants had found their way into the urban areas and were increasingly working in plant nurseries, construction firms, markets, shipyards, restaurants, hotels, motels and car washes. This is the case of Pepe who migrated illegally to the US in 1967, he comes from Michoacán. His family had a small shop in Michoacán. He says he arrived to Los Angeles at noon and at twelve midnight he was already working loading and unloading trucks in the market, his uncle had come with the Bracero program, had first worked in agriculture where he met a broker that introduced him to the wholesale market in Los Angeles. Pepe worked in the market for over twenty years before being able to start his own business.

Los Angeles has been since the beginning of the century an important agricultural commercial centre. Jack's uncle remembers when he first came to Los Angeles fleeing from the Revolution, his third job was in the market. Then the produce was brought on carts mainly pulled by horses. He remembers how great quantities of produce were bought and sold. Wholesale marketing culture existed in Los Angeles decades ago. Mexicans started infiltrating this market, mainly through entry-level jobs since, at least, since the 1920s.

The most important markets were the seventh street market and ninth street market. These markets specialised on wholesale marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables brought from California, as well as from other states from the union. Mexican produce was only sold during the winter season and were

generally brought through Texas. As marketing of Mexican produce started to increase, produce was brought from other entry points in Arizona and California. These markets supply other states and export to other countries. Los Angeles has become one of the largest fresh fruit and vegetable wholesale markets in the world (see Alvarez 1990).

The case of Tijuana is different. Tijuana started as a small border town, isolated from the rest of the country by a mountain chain. The first wholesale market that was constructed in the region was the Braulio Maldonado in Mexicali in the fifties. Traders form Mexicali took produce to Tijuana where street vendors sold them in the small town of Tijuana. This is the case of Luis, who started is days as trader selling chiles in the streets of Tijuana. Luis emigrated from Zacatecas when young and stayed in Tijuana.

By the end of the fifties the number of street traders had grown and a group of them decided to organise themselves and settle in one place, letting consumers come to them. In 1955 they created the traders union Miguel Hidalgo during the first years they had to move several times due to problems with neighbours and local government, until they constructed a small retail market in the sixth street in 1958, where they remained until 1983.

In the fifties their produce came from Mexicali and California, where traders such as Luis, started to make contacts with packers and brokers from California. Produce such as oranges and avocado came from California and chiles and onions from Mexicali. Luis was one of the first who established networks with distributors from California that had warehouses in san Diego. His network was very small at that time, it consisted of two distributors in san Diego who sold him avocado and other vegetables and two distributors in Mexicali that supplied him mainly with chiles and onions. In his case his relations were formal directed to the commercial activity, supported by a growing friendship among the members of the network. Luis was learning about the fruit and vegetable business and his business was prospering.

As Luis, there were several cases of traders that preferred to buy their produce in the USA than to venture to cross the Rumorosa, where the road at that time, was dangerous for its users.

In the seventies, the inhabitants of Mexican origin in Los Angeles had increased, the markets offered employment opportunities for documented and undocumented Mexicans.

In Tijuana the population was also growing, many of which were emigrants that were waiting for an opportunity to cross to the USA. The markets in Tijuana kept being mixed. They sold mainly at retail fruits, vegetables and dry goods. In the seventies interesting changes started to occur. On the one hand a variety of tropical produce, not produced in the USA, such as bananas, tamarind, jicama, mangoes, pineapples, watermelon, started to arrive to Tijuana and from there enter the Los Angeles market.

Traders such as Luis started to export with increasing frequency to Los Angeles. The production of tomatoes for export in the valley of san Quintin promoted export marketing. The road between Tijuana and Mexicali was improved and with it trade. However, still now, the networks were fragile and unequal, as traders in Tijuana bought and sold to distributors with grater economic power than theirs.

Markets in Tijuana and Los Angeles became an employment possibility for many Mexican that emigrated from south and centre Mexico in search of employment. Many of them started at job entry-level jobs such as loading and unloading, they were hired by the hour and slowly, some of them, started to climb the job ladder until becoming buyers and sellers of a firm. This allowed actors to know the business, make contacts with brokers, distributors and consumers. As we will see further ahead, with time, some of them were able to use the acquired knowledge and contacts made to start their own firm. I found several cases where if a firm went bankrupt, a close worker would take over, using the contacts his boss had, to start his own firm.

Crucial in this business is the capacity of actors to acquire the necessary knowledge and build networks through which information, produce and capital flows, even when they are employees. For example, it is more important to have good connections than to have capital. When someone starts as broker, they mainly work on consignment (they have stepped payments, 2 to 6 weeks), or under commissions, therefore they do not need large amounts of capital, even if they want to secure supply buy negotiation production contracts with producers, the initial payments are low.

SECOND STAGE: 1980s

In the eighties important changes occurred, that had an impact on the fresh fruit and vegetable business. On one hand changes in USA policy towards immigrants, brought changes in the possibilities and expectations of Mexican ion the USA and structural changes in the wholesale markets opened new possibilities for small scale entrepreneurs in the market.

The increasing change from seasonal migration to actual settlement, has led to a serious xenophobic sentiment against Mexicans in the US. A result of this was the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) and proposition 187. As Hondagneu-Sotelo mentions; 'the xenophobia of this period ...represented less a response to undocumented migration per se than to undocumented immigrant settlement. While many US citizens welcomed the labour services performed by immigrants, they remained more apprehensive about the permanent incorporation of Asian and Latin American immigrants and refugees in the United States' (1994:xv). Migrants documented or undocumented, became more integrated into the economic, social and cultural life of the US (Massey et al. 1987).

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, was intended to curve undocumented immigration by imposing sanctions (civil and criminal penalties) on employers who knowingly hired undocumented immigrant workers. It also included provisions for an amnesty-legislation program, for undocumented immigrants who could prove continuos residence in the US since January 1982 and for those who could prove they had worked in agriculture in the US for 90 days during specific periods: 2.3 million Mexicans applied. As Hondagneu-Sotelo comments, among other researchers, by granting legal status, the legislation recognised and accelerated the further integration and permanence of long-staying, previously undocumented immigrants in the US. (1994:26). This is the case of people in the market, who obtained their nationality through the amnesty law.

These changes in migration status changed the expectations and aspirations of immigrants concerning their stay in the US and their

entrepreneurship. It is no longer a place to migrate, get a temporary job and go back to Mexico as soon as possible as their fathers did. Now they are searching for more stable jobs and the wholesale market offered possibilities of acquiring an economic independence from US institutions. For example, Kiko arrived to the US 20 years ago, first he only wanted to work, save money and go back to Mexico, he came illegally and was deported several times until finally he got a job in the market and was able to stay for longer periods. However, he mentions that the laws became so strict that he decided to take advantage of the 1986 amnesty and became a citizen of the US. That is when he started thinking seriously in trying to open his own business in the wholesale market. He mentions that he did not want to stay in the US but now that he is a citizen and has a business, he has to stay. His expectations have changed and he sees his life in the US as permanent.

Contemporary Mexican immigrants are characterised by a significant presence of women and entire families, increasing integration into permanent settlement communities and employment in diverse sectors of the economy (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Bustamante and Cornelius 1989). This is the case of Susy, a single women from Michoacán who came to visit her sister in 1985 and decided to stay. Her sister and brother in-law had a small shop of Mexican products in East Los Angeles, they bought their fresh produce from the Seventh Street Market, after some years they decided to rent a stall in the market and try their luck in the wholesale business. Susy is in charge of the stall, while her sister is in charge of the supermarket and her brother and brother-in-law are in charge of buying the produce for the two businesses.

In 1986 the Wholesale Terminal Market was constructed. This event brought important changes. The construction of the new market, better adapted to the technological necessities of modern wholesale marketing, changed the market structure and character, specially to the Seventh Street Market. Once this market was constructed, large firms from the Seventh Street Market and Ninth Street Market moved in. This left vacant considerable amount of space in both markets for new entrepreneurs in the industry. Thus, the Ninth Street Market became occupied mainly by Asian firms and the Seventh Street Market by Mexicans firms .

The high concentration of Mexicans, and Latinos in general, in Los Angeles, allowed for the development of Mexican markets around the Wholesale Terminal Market, the most important being, the Seventh Street Market (see Alvarez 1990, 1994).

In the Seventh Street Market we mainly find small and medium firms. Two of the medium-sized firms are subsidiaries of the large firms in the Wholesale Terminal Market and the rest are family enterprises. One of the most visible changes that have taken place in the Seventh Street Market, has been the proliferation of small enterprises, for instance Alvarez found in 1988 a total of 36 business (Alvarez 1990:113), by the summer of 1997 there were 66 businesses, that means that the number of firms almost doubled in 9 years. This growth is not unique of the Seventh Street Market, the number of warehouses located outside the market has also increased, Alvarez mentions that there are `a total of some 45 establishments' around the main market (1990:117), by 1997 according to people interviewed and direct research there were around 65, of which the majority were owned by Mexican immigrants. This increase has even attracted the attention of local news papers, where articles on the growth and industrial strength of the area have been published, mentioning the important role that Mexican entrepreneurs have played in this development (Los Angeles Times, Sunday August 3, 1997, p. D12)

Winter vegetable and fruits export increased, Tijuana became an important point of entry to the USA of Mexican produce. By 1983 the traders association Miguel Hidalgo constructed a new market in the Zona Rio. Trades, brokers and distributors start to buy produce further away from the border regions such as Sinaloa, Jalisco, Colima, Morelos, being able to trade cheaper produce that would give them a competitive edge with the large firms in Los Angeles. This is the case of chucho. Chucho was born in Baja California. His father was a trader and he and his siblings followed their father's steps. They open a warehouse in the Miguel Hidalgo market. His brothers took on the trade in Tijuana and chucho, being the youngest decided to try his luck in Los Angeles. In 1984 he drove to Los Angeles in an old truck full of chiles to sell in the seventh street market. He knew some warehouse owners to whom he managed to sell part of the load. But at the end of the day he had to start selling his produce in the street corners of east Los Angeles. He did not wanted to

return to Tijuana having failed, so he offered warehouse owners to sell the produce they had not been able to sell in the streets. Slowly he built a network of warehouse owners who trusted him. He again went for produce to Tijuana and this time they bought the whole load. In 1990, he decided to rent a space in the market and open his own business. In search of cheaper produce, a brother and a cousin go from town to town around Mexico searching for cheaper produce and good quality, another brother and a sister take care of the warehouse in Tijuana, where they select the best produce for Los Angeles and the rest they sell in Tijuana. Chucho sells the produce in Los Angeles. His main consumers are restaurant owners from the east side of Los Angeles. He brought his aunt from Mexico so she would help him look after the business in the market, that is take care of workers and consumers that come to the market and take care of business by phone. As the business grew he hired a cousin as buyer in California who searches for packers and producers in California, which enables him to have produce to sell all year round. Chucho has created a solid family enterprise, with an extended network, through which resources, information and capital flows, supported by solid kinship ties.

The changes that have taken place in the seventh street market have brought changes in the relations inside the market, important difference have developed. For instance medium and large firms worked under a certain code of honour that has been disappearing, where their certain ties of co-operation and trust had been built in the market. The trust and co-operation has been displaced from the market as a whole, to trust and loyalty inside the firms tied by kinship, ritual and friendship ties.

THIRD STAGE 1990s

After the large firms left, spaces in the market were open for rent for anyone who wanted to venture into the business. Through the years access to spaces has changed. At the beginning there was a fixed size for all, which meant the necessity of certain amount of capital, but with the years the company that owns the market rents smaller spaces and even some firms sub-let part of their space. This is the case of Susy, who unable to pay the full rent of her stall,

rents part of it to an even smaller firm. This has enabled many Mexicans and Latin Americans to try their fortune in the fruit and vegetable business.

In the late nineties, the changes in the seventh street market described, produced changes in the relations inside it. The firms are getting smaller, ever smaller spaces are being subrented. In 1997-98 from 66 firms, there were 10 medium size firms, 39 small ones and 17 micro-firms. This last ones were recent, changing the character of the market from only wholesale, to medium sale and even retail sale. The quality of the produce has decreased, about 50 percent of the produce sold is of second and third class.

This has affected negatively the medium firms, as the reputation of the market has changed and so are the consumers. Before the terminal was built the medium firms benefited from the clients and distributors the large firms brought to the market. Now these have gone to the terminal, and more and more consumers and distributors are appearing that buy or sell produce with lesser quality, quantity and price. This mean the competition for lower prices is stronger as micro-firms do not pay overhead expenses and therefore can offer lower prices for their produce.

The proliferation of small firms has produced important changes in the market, as one stall owner told me in an interview:

Since they built the New Market everything has changed.

There are so many new firms of recently immigrated Mexicans that do not know how business is done here. The market has lost its `code of honour'. The immigrants do not follow the rules, they do not play fair, many come and go, and this is reflected on all of us. This market is a wholesale market and they are converting it in a retail market of small stalls. Clients are not coming as before (meaning mainly the large supermarket chains) because we are loosing our reputation as a wholesale market.

The market has become a platform for Mexican entrepreneurs to increase their opportunities, such is the case of Pepe. He started carrying and loading trucks, then he rented a small warehouse outside the market. In 1992, with a loan from his brother, he was able to rent a space in the Seventh Street Market. Now he has an enterprise specialised in chilies. At the beginning he sold to the Mexican

and Latin American community but soon was able to export his chilies to Europe and Japan, which have become his main clientele. The market provides a mechanisms for effective transmission of skills and a catalyst for entrepreneurial drive.

Many firms acquire a competitive edge by introducing cheaper produce from Mexico. The fact that Mexico is so near by, increases the chances of Mexicans to succeed in this business. They can either bring cheaper produce from Mexico by using their networks in Mexico and/or they can bring into the business relatives either from Mexico or the US and reduce their costs. In the market there are other firms that are not Mexican: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, and these too buy certain produce from Mexico, hire Mexicans for the lower paid jobs, though they hire co-ethnic, who are mainly kin, for the posts of more responsibility and confidentiality.

Competition has forced many firms to search for alternative markets, some have been able to export their produce, others have reached other ethnic minorities such as the Armenians'.

This is the case of Fernando from Zacatecas, his father grows chillies in Zacatecas. Fernando after twenty years, opened his own firms, rented a warehouse and sold chillies brought from zacatecas. Competition was very strong and decided to try to export. In 1996 he tried with success the European market. He has a well built family enterprise where his father and relatives grow and buy chillies from other producers in Zacatecas, which are sent to Tijuana where they are received by a brother in his warehouse. He has several selection bands where he selects the best produce for export and sends it to his brother. In Los Angeles they once more go through selection bands, the best are sent to Europe and the rest are sold in Los Angeles.

During the winter season large amounts of fruits and vegetables are imported from Mexico. An important point of entry has been Tijuana. Tijuana brokers², buy produce from Mexican farmers and rent warehouses in Tijuana's Market

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² From 32 warehouse owners interviewed between 1997 and 1998, 35 percent had started this way their business in the 7th street market. hopwever one has to consider that this is a very flexible business, some years brokers rent a space in the market, others they do not. in the summer of 1998, 20 percent of those interviewed in the summer of 97 had left the market.

There has been an increasing demand for Mexican produce by the non-Mexican community. Mexican produce can be now found in most supermarket chains in Southern California. This increased demand for Mexican produce is what many Tijuaneros are counting on, as one of them once told me:

We first started selling all sorts of produce, the government (in Mexico) had told us that what we need to export horticultural produce such as broccoli, asparagus and Brussels sprouts, which are of great value in the US. But we have Los Angeles near-by, and what they want are Mexican produce, they want cactus leaves, they want green tomatoes and chillies, they want to eat Mexican, not fancy horticultural produce that only the rich gringos eat. So we specialise in our produce, Mexican produce.

The increase in the demand has affect Tijuana in two ways. On the one hand it has fomented export, an increasing number of traders take a risk in the business. From 58 firms in the Miguel Hidalgo market, about 30 percent export fruits and vegetables regularly. The Miguel Hidalgo market, among others, benefited from the increase in Mexican consumers that live in southern California and travel regularly to Tijuana to buy Mexican produce that are cheaper than in the USA. According to estimates given by traders interviewed, about 60 percent of their weekend sells come from Mexicans that live in the USA and come to buy to Tijuana their weekly or monthly supplies.

Nafta has brought changes to the border. The number of wholesale markets has increased in the last years as well as independent warehouses around the city. The Miguel Hidalgo market constructed a second market, only for wholesale marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables. Trucks unpack, select and pack again to be introduced to the USA. In 1995 the Benito Juarez wholesale market was built, in 1998 the Alamos and there are plans to built another wholesales terminal on the way to Tecate.

The markets of Los Angeles and Tijuana are synchronised, for example, trucks and furthons arrive with produce from Mexico in the morning, during the day they are unloads, in some cases produce passes through selection bands, pack and reload into trucks that can cross the border. They start their way to Los Angeles in the afternoon arriving at night. By three in the morning they

have already been unloaded in the market, where traders are ready to start business.

1997 28,438 millions of Hispanic origin 63.43 percent were of Mexican origin (18,039,000)

Residing mainly in: California, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas

California and specially Los Angeles County provided residence to more than 2.5 million individuals of Mexican origin (plus undocumented)

FIRST STAGE (1950 - 1969)

Migration	Los Angeles	Tijuana	Rural Areas
1942 - 1964 Bracero Programme 5 million Mexicans • seasonal labour co- ordinated with agricultural fluctuations • externalise labour reproduction costs to Mexico	Mexicans have worked in the market at least since 1920s in entry-level jobs. Since the beginning of XX century Los Angeles fresh fruit and vegetable wholesale markets have been the largest in the world.	Small border town, isolated from the rest of Mexico by a mountain chain called Rumorosa. Tijuana only had street vendors 1955 creation of the traders Union Miguel Hidalgo 1956 - 1957 Coahuila Street	Revolution • irrigation • irrigation • small and medium producers did not benefit from green revolution • brokers from Texas negotiated production contracts • producers were labourers in their own land Emigration to the
1960sreinforcement of social networksincrease	7th Street Market 9th Street Market Central Market Only winter fruit	1958 - 1957 6th street 1966 Union	
number of women and children	and vegetables came from Mexico	between traders in Mexicali and Tijuana	
migration to the cities		Produce came from Mexicali and San Diego, for example onions and chillies from the first, oranges and avocados from the last.	

information

SECOND STAGE 1980s

Migration

change from seasonal migration to increasing settlement

1986 immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and proposition 187 (to curve undocumented immigration by imposing sanctions)

Amnesty legislation programme

2.3 million Mexicans applied

Changes in migration status brought changes in expectations and aspirations

- no longer seasonal work
- search for self employment
- market offers space for entrepreneurs

Presence of women in enterprises

Los Angeles

1986 new Wholesale Terminal:

- large companies changed to new terminal
- space for medium and small firms

7th street market: firms of Mexican origin

9th street market: firms of Asian origin

7th street market

1988:36 firms and 45 warehouse in surroundings

1997:66 firms and 65 warehouses

> in surroundings

The market area becomes an economic enclave for Mexicans and increasingly for Latin-Americans

Tijuana

1983 new market in Zona Rio

Increase exportimport to Los Angeles

reinforcement networks with producers from other states in Mexico and with firms in Los **Angeles**

Rural Areas

policies

- withdrawal of state from the economy
- withdrawal subsidies. credit and general support to small producers
- ecological deterioration:
- monocroppin
- plagues
- diseases
- **lowering** if underground water levels
- increase production costs
- disappearanc organisations
- brokers disappear with last crop

Neoliberal

THIRD STAGE 1990s

Migration

Los Angeles

Miguel Hidalgo market:

Tijuana

New leaders:

Rural Areas

Migration increases Strong

networks

The first small firms emerge.

> 75 % fresh fruit and vegetable

those that have contacts in the US and border

Changes in the markets composition:

> wholesale and retail

Fruit and vegetable production in small communities depend on these networks to obtain credit, markets and some technical

assistance

- aoes from wholesale market to medium-sale market
- retail starts to appear

By the end of the decade:

- firms get smaller
- spaces are subrented
- from being mainly a Mexican market, it is becoming a Latin-American market
- produce diversification
- new consumers such as Armenians

Strategies:

- searching for different markets such as European, Canadian
- Being near the border gives them a competitive advantage, where cheaper produce can be bought
- social networks are reinforced across the border, supported by kinship,

1994 NAFTA export import

- activity increases transactions
- and procedures are simplified
- new markets and warehouses around the city: (Benito Juarez, Los Alamos, etc)

Networks increase and extend geographically to centre Mexico

friendship and ritual ties such as godparents

godparents

• small firms pay in cash to attract suppliers and producers

REDES SOCIALES EN EL COMERCIO INTERNACIONAL DE FRUTAS Y VERDURAS. EL CASO DE LAS PEQUEÑAS FIRMAS TRANSNACIONALES

Magdalena Barros Nock

Con el Tratado de Libre Comercio, las transacciones comerciales en la frontera norte entre México y los Estados Unidos, se han incrementado. La frontera norte ha ido cambiando y mostrando cada vez más, una mayor integración entre individuos, familias, organizaciones, economías y culturas de ambos países. Las actividades y transacciones comerciales en la frontera, no sólo son más numerosas, sino que así como crecen y proliferan, también constriñen, aumentan y se impactan mutuamente (ver Rosenau 1993:10). Estas redes sociales transnacionales juegan un papel importante en la integración de espacios transnacionales y muestran como los productores y comerciantes están enlazados con mercados transnacionales en la economía global.

Mi objetivo es presentar la creación, desarrollo y funcionamiento de redes sociales alrededor del comercio de frutas y verduras a pequeña escala entre Los Angeles, Tijuana y las zonas productoras en México. El análisis se centra en las redes sociales que han creado y desarrollado pequeñas empresas familiares transnacionales para poder competir en el mercado internacional. El presente capitulo se basa en trabajo de campo realizado en los mercados de abasto de Los Angeles y Tijuana y con productores de frutas y verduras en los estados de Colima y Morelos.

Estas redes son complejas y dependen de la manipulación de recursos financieros y humanos, donde el tiempo y espacio son cruciales para la actividad transnacional (Alvarez 1998). Estas pequeñas empresas familiares (que se denominan firmas), son flexibles e inestables, no tienen un ingreso fijo y su negocio es vulnerable a las fluctuaciones del mercado, cambios ambientales y malos negocios con socios, entre otros. Voy a describir como hombres y mujeres han podido desarrollar sus empresas familiares transnacionales en un mercado competitivo, señalando los factores que han promovido sus negocios, así como los obstáculos a los que se enfrentan.

El negocio de las frutas y verduras requiere de un trabajo de equipo y redes solidadas entre los integrantes de la red, es decir, los dueños de las firmas importadoras/exportadores que tiene bodegas ya sea dentro de los mercados de abasto o fuera de ellos en Los Angeles y Tijuana, los vendedores en los mercados, brokers (intermediarios que compran y venden mercancía a nivel internacional), intermediarios en las zonas de producción, empacadores y productores. Una red transnacional implica que todos los actores que participan en la red, de los dos lados de la frontera, son necesarios e influyen el desarrollo de la red. Las relaciones dentro de la red, se rigen por una serie de códigos morales, reglas y normas, explícitos e implícitos alrededor de los cuales las

expectativas y objetivos de los actores se encuentran y permiten el desarrollo y expansión de la red. Dentro de la red existe una interdependencia funcional, una estructura de poder, así como flujos de capital, información y mercancías.

Identifico los factores y circunstancias que llevan a la creación, cambios e incluso desaparición de redes sociales en el comercio de frutas y verduras, las negociaciones entre los integrantes de la red que la hace más estable o inestable. Las relaciones comerciales no son el resultado automático de la competencia existente, influyen en ellas las características de los actores que intervienen, así como factores sociales, culturales y políticos. Factores no económicos como son la confianza, la lealtad, proximidad cultural y geográfica, son cruciales para entender la creación, desarrollo y éxito de las redes. El análisis de redes sociales permite presentar estas características y factores de una manera sistemática. Una red se puede definir, en términos generales, como un grupo de actores autónomos, cada uno participando parcialmente pero con un objetivo común en las actividades del grupo (Beije & Groenewegen 1992:90). Es necesario tomar en cuenta quiénes son los actores que participan, su posición en la red, sus estrategias y expectativas, el control que tienen sobre los recursos e información, y las relaciones entre los integrantes de la red. Las relaciones personales dentro de la red presentan una mezcla de aspectos instrumentales, afectivos y morales. En las redes encontramos relaciones formales que se refieren a relaciones que se establecen dirigidas a una actividad en concreto, como son las relaciones entre bodegueros y las relaciones con consumidores; y relaciones informales basadas en lazos familiares y rituales como el compadrazgo, amistad, lugar de origen, proximidad cultural y geográfica, con las cuales se garantiza cierto nivel de confianza, lealtad y honestidad dentro de la red.

Las redes sociales en el comercio son una mezcla entre cooperación y competencia. Los actores que intervienen tienen constantemente que defender o mejorar su posición frente a competidores, para lo cual implementan una serie de estrategias que tienen como objetivo obtener costos mas bajos y mayores ganancias que las que obtendrían si no pertenecieran a la red. Una de las características básicas de estas redes sociales es la flexibilidad y capacidad de cambiar, crecer o disminuir, pueden funcionar por unos meses y por otros no, según las necesidades de sus integrantes y del mercado.

El desarrollo de redes sociales, implica una variedad de acciones por parte de los actores involucrados, tienen diversos niveles de organización que dependen del grado de interdependencia y confianza entre los actores que participan en la red. Las relaciones dentro de la red y sus características, influyen en la densidad de las redes. Puede haber redes sólidas donde sus integrantes interactuan de manera constante y esta interacción esta reforzada por lazos de parentesco, compadrazgo y amistad, o redes menos densas y más inestables donde los integrantes interactuan con menos frecuencia y la confianza entre ellos es débil. Estas redes aparecen y desaparecen constantemente.

De la posición de los individuos en la red depende su acceso a recursos e información que circulan dentro de la red. Aquellos que tiene posiciones equivalentes tendrán un acceso mas directo a los recursos de la red, por ejemplo si la red esta sustentada en relaciones de parentesco y un hermano se encarga de la bodega de Los Angeles y otro de la bodega en Tijuana, los dos tendrán un acceso similar a información y recursos propios de la red. Mientras que aquellas pequeñas empresas que no tiene lazos fuertes dentro de la red, tienden a recibir la información fragmentada y sus relaciones con todos los miembros de la red son más frágiles, pudiendo causar la desintegración de la misma. Cualquier intercambio dentro de la red implica dos acciones, la de dar y la de recibir. Las relaciones dentro de la red son asimétricas, ejerciendo los actores diferentes niveles de poder e influyendo de manera distinta en la organización y desarrollo de la red. El poder de ciertos actores sobre la red se refleja en el grado de control sobre el flujo de mercancías, recursos financieros y humanos, manejo de la información, así como en la autonomía o dependencia de los actores en la red.

El análisis se basa en información sobre las actividades que los diferentes integrantes de la red llevan a cabo; los recursos que controlan; el acceso a información y su conocimiento sobre otros integrantes de la red; y el papel que juegan en el flujo de mercancías, información y capital. Los integrantes de la red, utilizan su experiencia y conocimiento sobre la red, así como sus relaciones con otros miembros de la misma, para realizar sus objetivos y expectativas (ver Hakansson 1986:14 citado en Beije & Groenewegen 1992:96).

El comercio de frutas y verduras a pequeña escala, tanto en Los Angeles como en Tijuana, esta integrado, en su mayoría, por hombres y mujeres que emigraron a la frontera norte en busca de oportunidades de trabajo. Como veremos mas adelante, las políticas migratorias de los Estados Unidos han

influido el desarrollo de pequeñas empresas familiares en el comercio de frutas y verduras. La frontera ha dejado de ser una línea divisoria, convirtiéndose en una región fronteriza, donde los habitantes de uno y otro lado conviven e interactuan tanto en sus vidas cotidianas como en el desarrollo de sus negocios.

La presentación se divide en dos partes. En la primera, describo los mercados de abasto de Los Angeles y Tijuana, señalando sus principales características y desarrollo. En la segunda presento dos estudios de caso de

Las redes sociales

Como se dijo anteriormente, el negocio de frutas y verduras es una actividad de equipo, las redes son cruciales para su buen funcionamiento y sus integrantes pasan buena parte de su tiempo haciéndolas, manteniéndolas, y dándoles fuerza y durabilidad. Para muchos, es su entrada al negocio y a los Estados Unidos. Existen diversas arenas donde los actores están en constante interacción y negociación sobre productos, precios y la calidad de éstos. Los actores utilizan ocasiones informarles para incrementar sus redes y adquirir información, tales como pequeñas reuniones en el mercado cuando terminó el día de trabajo, en el cumpleaños de alguien o cuando un juego de fútbol se televisa durante horas de trabajo.

Uno de los objetivos más importantes de una red, es mantener un flujo constante de mercancías, que va de los agricultores a los consumidores en Los Angeles. Para esto se necesita de un equipo donde cada integrante desempeñe funciones especificas en la red.

Es común que relaciones informales sean el comienzo de una cooperación entre individuos que con el tiempo se llegue a desarrollar en una red. Pero más importante que una relación de amistad o de paisanos, los lazos de parentesco y compadrazgo juegan un papel muy importante en la creación, desarrollo y mantenimiento de una red. Uno de los objetivos de contratar a parientes es poder trabajar con un equipo de personas de confianza, honestas y leales. El comercio de frutas y verduras en pequeña escala se basa en gran

medida en relaciones de confianza, en tratos de palabra, por lo tanto la honestidad y confianzas entre los compradores y vendedores en los diferentes niveles de la red son de crucial importancia. Los códigos morales que rigen las relaciones de parentesco, donde se espera lealtad y honestidad entre los miembros de una familia, hace más difícil, aunque no imposible, que sus integrantes traicionen la confianza puesta en ellos por su familia.

Las pequeñas empresas familiares transnacionales tienen diversos orígenes, algunas se inician en México y se extienden hacia los Estados Unidos y otras surgen de inmigrantes mexicanos en los mercados que se extienden hacia México en busca de productos más baratos.

A continuación presentare dos casos³, el primero es la empresa familiar Modelo, que inicio su red en Tecomán y se extendió hasta Los Angeles exitosamente. La segunda es la empresa familiar Sierra, integrada por inmigrantes que probaron su suerte en el comercio al mayoreo en Los Angeles, pero que por una serie de factores que mas adelante veremos, no han tenido éxito.

Primer Caso: Familia Modelo (Cuadro 1 y Diagrama 1)

La familia Modelo viene de Tecomán , Colima. El padre de la familia, llamado José, un hombre ya mayor, es ejidatario y pequeño propietario. Cuando se introdujo el riego en sus tierras empezó a sembrar plátanos. Los plátanos en Tecomán tuvieron un auge muy grande en los cincuenta y sesenta, pero el incremento de plagas y pestes, llevo a muchos productores a sustituir el plátano por limón mexicano. José se especializo en el plátano por muchos años y en las dos últimas décadas ha introducido limón mexicano en sus tierras.

José tuvo 17 hijos, los dos primeros hijos (Raúl y Pablo) se dedicaron a la agricultura en Tecomán con su padre. Sin embargo, la agricultura no fue suficiente para mantener a toda la familia. En 1980, el siguiente hermano, Pedro, decidió irse a Guadalajara y tratar de vender la producción familiar en le mercado de Guadalajara, dos años después puso su bodega, donde vendía productos que le enviaban sus familiares tanto de sus propias tierras como de

otros productores. Conforme el negocio prosperaba, los mayores fueron comprando tierra.

Jorge, uno de los hijos menores, contrajo matrimonio a los 17 años, tuvo que dejar la escuela para trabajar con su hermano en Guadalajara y mantener a su esposa. Con su ayuda, su esposa estudio la carrera de contadora. En 1988 decidió migrar a los Estado Unidos en busca de trabajo. Llego a Los Angeles donde vivían parientes de su mamá, provenientes de Jalisco. Conoció el mercado de la Calle Siete. Al ver el éxito que tenían los productos de origen mexicano en Los Angeles se intereso por exportar la producción de su familia. Estados Unidos no le gusto y prefirió alquilar una bodega en Tijuana donde estaría la base de su negocio. Para 1990 estaba exportando a los Estados Unidos. Su esposa María se encarga de la administración: inventarios, facturas, transacciones con los bancos y salarios.

Debido a problemas que tuvo con los bodegueros de Los Angeles, donde no le pagaban lo que habían acordado por el producto, o se tardaban mas de lo convenido en pagar, decidieron, él y su familia, que seria provechoso mandar a otro de los hermanos a Los Angeles, y vender directamente su producción al consumidor en Estados Unidos. Su hermano Rafael, unos años mayor que él, emigro como indocumentado a los Estados Unidos. Pronto empezó a vender la mercancía que sus hermanos le enviaban en los pequeños comercios a menudeo, llegando incluso a vender en las esquinas de Los Angeles. En 1995 rentaron una pequeña bodega a las afueras del mercado de la Calle Siete. Un año después rentaron una bodega dentro del mercado. Tener una bodega en el mercado trae ciertos beneficios: Un mayor acceso a información y la presencia tanto de compradores que viene al mercado en busca de productos, como de distribuidores que ofrecen sus productos a los bodegueros.

Los hermanos establecidos en la frontera, aunque su especialidad son los plátanos y el limón mexicano, pronto tuvieron que diversificar la oferta de productos. Decidieron integrar a la red a dos primos (Hugo y Sebastián) quienes se dedicarían a recorrer la república en busca de productores de frutas y verduras.

³ Los nombres y algunas fechas se han cambiado ya que los informantes pidieron permanecer anónimos.

En un intento por desarrollar su negocio, extendieron sus redes de abastecimiento hacia los empacadores y productores norteamericanos. En los meses en que los productos eran mas caros en México o de menor calidad que la requerida, le compraban mercancía a los empacadores. Para ello contrataron como comprador de productos en Estados Unidos a Juan, a quien conocieron en el mercado de Los Angeles y con quien habían entablado una relación de amistad y compadrazgo.

El poder de ciertos integrantes sobre la red, tiene que ver con el uso de los recursos financieros y humanos con que cuentan y los contactos que logran establecer. Tanto el padre, quien había juntado un grupo de agricultores que exportaran sus productos a través de sus hijos, como los primos brokers, necesitaban de capital para poder llevar a cabo sus actividades. Los hermanos en la frontera controlan los recursos financieros y los contactos con el consumidor final. Cuando el capital empezó a llegar de la frontera, les dio a los hermanos menores mayor injerencia sobre los asuntos familiares, la toma de decisiones y la red misma.

En este caso, la red se ha extendido considerablemente y los lazos son fuertes debido a que la mayoría de los integrantes que llevan a cabo las funciones básicas de la red, es decir, bodegueros, contadores, brokers, vendedores e incluso algunos productores son parientes, compadres y amigos. A continuación describiré las funciones de cada integrante de la red y los recursos que controlan.

Rafael se caso con una mexicana inmigrante, llamada Adela, que trabajaba en el mercado. De hecho fue hasta que se caso que se aventuro a poner una bodega dentro del mercado. Esto es común en el mercado de la Calle Siete, donde en mas de 60% de las pequeñas firmas y micro-firmas, sus dueños esperaron a contraer matrimonio para abrir su negocio. Esto tiene que ver con varios factores, siendo uno de los principales la necesidad de alguien leal y de confianza en la bodega, que ayude en la administración y se encargue de vigilar a los trabajadores. Adela lleva la administración y atiende todos los asuntos que se presentan en el mercado. Ella habla ingles y conoce bien la manera de hacer las cosas en Los Angeles. Ha guiado a su marido en los misterios del comercio Angelino. Rafael tiene dos trabajadores de planta, uno es Juan que le ayuda a buscar distribuidores en Estados Unidos y el otro le

ayuda a encontrar clientes en Los Angeles. También contrata trabajadores temporales, alrededor de 4 personas, que lo ayudan a descargar y cargar los camiones, seleccionar⁴, lavar, empacar, reparar cajas y pesar la mercancía.

Rafael abastece a dos restaurantes y un pequeño supermercado en el lado este de Los Angeles. Su vendedor constantemente busca nuevos clientes tanto en Los Angeles como en otras ciudades de estados Unidos, han llegado, por ejemplo, a vender limón mexicano en Chicago. De Los Angeles sale aproximadamente el 70% del capital que se usa en la red.

Jorge tiene su bodega en Tijuana, en ella tiene dos seleccionadoras, donde selecciona la fruta y verdura de mejor calidad para enviar a Los Angeles y el resto lo vende en Tijuana. Contrata personal temporal para desempacar, seleccionar y volver a empacar, el numero de trabajadores es de acuerdo con la mercancía existente. Tiene un camión y un chofer que trabajan con él llevando y trayendo productos. Generalmente no se da abasto con un camión y tiene que contratar camioneros. Estos juegan un papel importante en el abastecimiento de los productos. Tener un chofer confiable y responsable es una ventaja. Los choferes pueden incurrir en una serie de acciones que no benefician a las firmas, por ejemplo, pueden tener un accidente en la carretera y perder toda la carga, o apagar la refrigeración para ahorrar gasolina afectando la calidad de los productos que llevan.

Su esposa lleva la administración, se encarga de los asuntos bancarios y de los salarios. Él dedica su tiempo a buscar clientes en Tijuana, supervisar a los brokers que trabajan para él, llevar a cabo los tramites aduanales y tramitar los permisos necesarios para exportar. Jorge supervisa el funcionamiento general del negocio y la red. Su parte de las ganancias la recibe después de que su hermano venda y cobre la mercancía en Los Angeles.

El papel que juegan los dos primos, Hugo y Sebastián, es muy importante ya que de ellos depende la obtención de los productos. Ellos necesitan mantener relaciones financieras con los productores para garantizar el flujo constante de productos de buena calidad. Una de sus estrategias es negociar contratos de producción con los agricultores, creando así una base económica que lleva a un mayor control sobre el productor. Los brokers manipulan el dinero a que tienen acceso, así como los precios negociados con los productores y con sus primos en la frontera, para obtener ellos una ganancia adicional al salario que reciben. En ocasiones, al mismo tiempo que negocian y compran productos para sus primos, quienes son su prioridad, hacen transacciones para otras firmas y llegan incluso a transportar los diferentes pedidos en los mismos camiones, ahorrando en los costos de transporte.

Los brokers aunque juegan un papel crucial, no son los que controlan la red y su injerencia en la toma de decisiones dentro de la red es menor, ya que dependen del capital que sus primos les suministran para comprar los productos y

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⁴ Las pequeñas empresas por lo general no tienen empaques en las zonas de producción. Algunas rentan empaques por temporadas o le pagan a empacadores por el trabajo. En ocasiones se llevan la mercancía sin seleccionar y empacar, actividad que realizan en la frontera. Otras veces, la mercancía no llega bien seleccionada y la tienen que seleccionar y empacar de nuevo. Dentro del mercado de la Calle Siete hay tres clases de productos según su calidad, estas firmas manejan productos de segunda y tercera clase.

negociar contratos de producción con los agricultores.

Brokers que trabajan para pequeñas firmas, generalmente trabajan con péquenos productores, ya sea ejidatarios o pequeños propietarios, quienes dependen de estos brokers para exportar su producción. Estos negocios pueden ser beneficiosos para los productores, si tienen la suerte de trabajar con brokers e intermediarios honestos, otros caen en las manos de brokers corruptos, que se llevan la producción a los Estados Unidos y nunca llegan a pagarle al productor (Barros 2000). La manera en que los brokers trabajan, yendo de pueblo en pueblo, tratando de sacar la mayor ganancia posible, ha traído consecuencias graves para el medio ambiente, produciendo en muchos casos erosión en la tierra, contaminación de los acuíferos, plagas y enfermedades, las cuales o se vuelven incontrolables o combatirlas sube los costos de producción hasta convertir el producto incosteable (Barros 2000a). Sin embargo no se puede negar que estas pequeñas firmas y sus redes transnacionales son una alternativa para el pequeño productor.

Los familiares en Tecomán, han formado una red con otros ejidatarios y pequeños propietarios quienes exportan a través de la familia Modelo. Sin embargo, debido a que los hermanos en la frontera se están diversificando y comprando productos en otras regiones de México, los limones de Tecomán están dejando de ser el producto mas importante de la firma. Esto significa que cada vez menos productores de Tecomán, incluyendo a los familiares, mandan productos a la frontera para exportación. Pedro, el hermano que tiene una bodega en Guadalajara, en ocasiones envía productos a sus hermanos de la frontera, aunque no es un flujo constante de mercancías.

Para 1998, los hermanos en la frontera decidieron rentar una bodega fuera del mercado de la Calle Siete, ya que la renta que pagan era demasiado alta (5500 dólares al mes). Ya no necesitan del mercado para conseguir clientes o información. La familia Modelo ha podido crear y desarrollar una red transnacional teniendo acceso a mercados nacionales y a Los Angeles. En un principio, el núcleo de la red, es decir los integrantes de la red que mayor influencia y poder tenían sobre la red eran el padre y los hermanos mayores en Tecomán. Sin embargo una vez que el comercio internacional adquirió fuerza, el poder sobre la red paso a los hermanos menores en Los Angeles y Tijuana.

Ellos tienen acceso al mercado internacional. Esta pequeña empresa transnacional ha logrado funcionar exitosamente dentro de la economía global.

Sin embargo este no es el caso de todas las firmas pequeñas, a continuación presentare el caso de una familia que no logro tener éxito en el negocio de las frutas y verduras frescas.

Segundo Caso: Familia Sierra (Cuadro 2, Diagrama 2)

Ricardo nació en Michoacán, emigro a Estados Unidos en 1974 cuando tenia 18 años. Su primer trabajo en Estados Unidos fuer de jornalero, después de dos años se fue a trabajar al mercado de la Calle Siete de Los Angeles de cargador. Trabajaba por hora, con el tiempo lo fueron conociendo los bodegueros, hasta que una firma lo contrato de tiempo completo. Durante estos años conoció el negocio de las frutas y verduras. A los 28 años se caso con Beatriz, proveniente de Jalisco, cuyo padre había venido en tiempos de los braceros y se había quedado. Beatriz tiene tarjeta verde para trabajar. Con la amnistía de 1986, Ricardo y Beatriz consiguieron su ciudadanía. Su padre era comerciante, tenia una pequeña tienda de abarrotes en el lado este de Los Angeles, donde habitan la mayoría de los mexicanos que residen en Los Angeles. Cuando Ricardo y Beatriz se casaron, Ricardo fue a trabajar con su suegro y cuando este murió, Beatriz y él heredaron la tienda. Sin embargo sus ganancias eran pocas, Ricardo había visto muchos casos de firmas que tenían éxito en el mercado de la Calle Siete y con ganancias mayores a las que él

No queriendo dejar a un lado su tienda, ya que le permitía tener un ingreso fijo mínimo, invitaron a la hermana de Beatriz, Alejandra, quien residía en Jalisco, a que se viniera a Estados Unidos y se encargara del comercio al mayoreo. Alejandra vino a Los Angeles con visa de turista y se quedo. Empezaron su pequeño negocio al mayoreo comprando productos de los grandes productores y luego revendiéndolos a medio-mayoreo y menudo sacando así alguna ganancia. Pronto se hicieron de conexiones con brokers y empezaron a comprar la mercancía directamente de ellos, sin embargo aun así las ganancias eran bajas.

En 1990 subarrendaron un espacio en el mercado de la Calle Siete, consolidando una micro-firma. No tenían refrigerador, era solo un espacio rodeado por una reja que habían rentado a un bodeguero. No tenían trabajadores permanentes, contrataban trabajadores por hora cuando era necesario descargar y cargar mercancía. Tienen una combi como único medio de transporte.

Para abaratar los costos de los productos decidieron expandir su red hacia México y comparar productos de los mercados de Tijuana. Mandaron llamar al hermano de Alejandra y Beatriz, Germán, para que trabajara como comprador/broker, y se encargara de hacer negocios en Tijuana e incluso de ser posible comprar directamente a los productores.

Probaron varios productos, pero como no tenían refrigerador, sus opciones eran limitadas, trataron de vender sandia, mangos, tomates, pero todos se maduraban más rápido de lo que podían venderlos. El producto que más les acomodo, considerando su situación, fue la cebolla. Así Germán se dedico a buscar productores que le quisieran vender cebolla.

Aun dentro del mercado donde hay mas oportunidades de conseguir una clientela para sus productos, no han podido hacer contactos estables con consumidores. Teniendo que vender la mayor parte de los productos al menudeo o medio mayoreo. Tener una persona de confianza, que se dedicara a encontrar clientes fue muy difícil y además no podían pagar un salario permanente. Así Alejandra se encargo de la venta del producto, de la

Germán hizo amigos en los mercados de Tijuana. Necesitaba donde dejar las cebollas en caso que no las pudiera pasar al otro lado rápidamente y donde seleccionarlas y empacarlas de ser necesario, antes de entrar a los Estados Unidos. Así conoció a Pepe con quien hizo negocios.

De esta manera la familia Sierra logro crear su micro-empresa familiar y formar una red social que les permitiría mantener el negocio por algunos años.

tener negocios con empacadores de cebollas en Estados Unidos, de manera que traía cebollas de México y de Estados Unidos. Sin embargo no logro hacer contactos sólidos. En busca de mejores precios se extendió hasta el centro del país, llegando hasta Morelos, abarcando una considerable área geográfica. En el estado de Morelos negocio la compra de cebollas con cinco intermediarios, quienes a su vez compraban cebollas de los ejidatarios y pequeños productores. Cuando podía, ya que su capital era muy

reducido, les adelantaba dinero para que ellos a su vez, adelantaran dinero a los productores. Sin embargo, los intermediarios con quien trabajaba no eran de confianza y tenia conflictos constantes con ellos. Usaban el dinero para negocios personales y vendían las mejores cebollas a otros brokers, lo cual implicaba que Germán no tenía un abasto constante y de calidad de cebollas, quedando mal con sus clientes en Los Angeles. El no tener parientes, compadres o amigos que quisieran trabajar con él y hacerse cargo de algunas regiones, lo llevo a constantes perdidas y conflictos con la gente que trabajaba para él. La red que formo la familia Sierra no pudo mantener un control sobre los negocios llevados a cabo en regiones distantes a la frontera, ni pudo superar los problemas provocados por la deshonestidad de algunos de sus trabajadores y abastecedores de cebollas. Cuando el flujo de mercancía no es constante, los bodequeros de Tijuana y Los Angeles se ven forzados a comprar productos de los grandes bodegueros para mantener el negocio funcionando o abastecer un pedido urgente y retener al cliente, lo cual reduce sus ganancias e incluso puede provocar pérdidas.

Alejandra intento como estrategia subarrendar un pedazo de su pequeña bodega a dos hermanos salvadoreños, la idea era que ellos vendieran productos de Alejandra además de otros productos que ellos escogieran. De esta manera Alejandra recibiría un ingreso por la renta y tendría dos vendedores que la ayudarían a colocar sus productos. Sin embargo el negocio con los salvadoreños no prospero, según Alejandra estos le robaban mercancía, y no le pagaban por el producto al precio que habían acordado.

Al mismo tiempo Germán empezó a tener problemas con sus intermediarios en México y vender solo cebolla producida en los Estados Unidos no daba el margen de ganancia necesaria para continuar con el negocio al mayoreo. Así en 1998 tuvieron que cerrar el negocio, dejar el mercado de abastos y retraerse en el negocio de abarrotes que tienen Ricardo y Beatriz. Ellos aun no pierden el interés en el mercado al mayoreo, simplemente sufrieron, según ellos, un pequeño revés. Este es un ejemplo de una micro-firma, que trato de extender su red hacia México para abatir costos, pero sus redes no fueron sólidas y las relaciones y objetivos que unían a los integrantes no permitieron mantener una red transnacional.

En este caso vemos los problemas a que se enfrenta una empresa pequeña cuando no cuenta con un equipo de trabajo confiable, leal y honesto. Ricardo opina que es solo cuestión de encontrar la gente adecuada, tanto en Estados Unidos como en México. Actualmente están haciendo planes de trabajar con dos compadres que también viven en Los Angeles y sus familias

en México, quienes tienen tierras y están en contacto con otros productores, pero estos son solo planes.

Conclusiones

Los cambios en el mercado de abastos de Los Angeles, dieron lugar a un incremento en el número de inmigrantes de origen mexicano que decidieron probar su suerte en el mercado como empresarios. Así mismo, la creciente población latina en Los Angeles y la cada vez más popular comida mexicana, impulsaron el comercio de productos típicos mexicanos. Las características de la frontera entre California y Baja California, han dado lugar a que pequeños empresarios y los integrantes de sus redes, encuentren un nicho dentro del negocio de frutas y verduras. En busca de mejores precios, las pequeñas empresas familiares utilizan la proximidad con México, para hacer contactos directos con bodegueros de Tijuana e incluso con productores.

La estrategia principal de estos pequeños empresarios ha sido consolidar redes sociales con lazos de parentesco, compadrazgo y amistad, jugando la familia extensa un papel muy importante. Esto nos muestra la importancia que aspectos culturales y sociales tienen en las relaciones económicas.

Estas redes sociales son determinantes en el desarrollo de las pequeñas empresas. Por medio de éstas se intercambia mercancías, se distribuyen recursos financieros y humanos y se comparte información crucial para el negocio. Las relaciones dentro de la red se rigen por códigos morales, donde la lealtad, confianza y honestidad se valoran como requisitos esenciales para que funcione la red y como parte integrante de las relaciones de parentesco.

La creciente competencia ha llevado a estas pequeñas firmas a buscar nuevas alternativas y estrategias, como son el diversificar la producción y buscar nuevos mercados. El tener que extenderse geográficamente, así como el contar con escaso capital financiero e infraestructura para desarrollar y mantener sus redes, provoca que estas redes sean inestables y débiles, existiendo un alto índice de fracasos.

Para abastecerse de productos, han tenido que extenderse por México en busca de pequeños y medianos productores que les vendan productos más

baratos. Generalmente estas pequeñas firmas y micro-firmas no logran comprar productos de grandes productores, ya que éstos prefieren negociar con las grandes firmas americanas y mexicanas que les ofrecen un mercado seguro. Así mismo, las grandes compañías transnacionales no están interesadas en negociar con productores pequeños. Las pequeñas firmas exportadoras/importadores y sus brokers se han convertido en un canal alternativo para la exportación de la producción de pequeños y medianos agricultores en el campo mexicano.

Cuadro No. 1 Miembros de la red social de la Familia Modelo

Nombre	Relación	Función	Ciudad/País
José	Papá	Agricultor	Tecomán
Pablo y Raúl	Hijos mayores	Agricultor	Tecomán
Jorge	Hijo	Bodeguero	Tijuana
María	Esposa Jorge	Administradora	Tijuana
Rafael	Hijo	Bodeguero	Los Angeles
Adela	Esposa	Administración	Los Angeles
Pedro	Hijo	Bodeguero	Guadalajara
Hugo	Primo	Broker	México
Sebastián	Primo	Broker	México
Juan	Compadre	Comprador	Estados Unidos

Cuadro No. 2 Miembros de la red social de la Familia Sierra

Nombre	Relación	Función	Ciudad/País
Ricardo	Cuñado de Alejandra	abarrotes	Los Angeles
Beatriz	Hermana de Alejandra	abarrotes	Los Angeles
Alejandra	Cuñada	bodeguera	Los Angeles
Germán	Hermano Alejandra	broker	Morelos/México
Pepe	Amigo	bodeguero	Tijuana

Diagrama No. 1 Red y Flujo de mercancías de la Familia Modelo

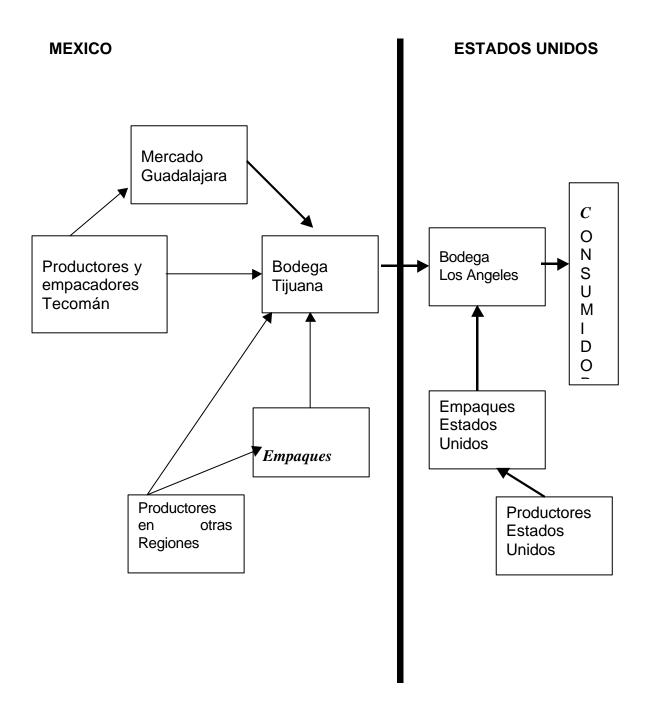
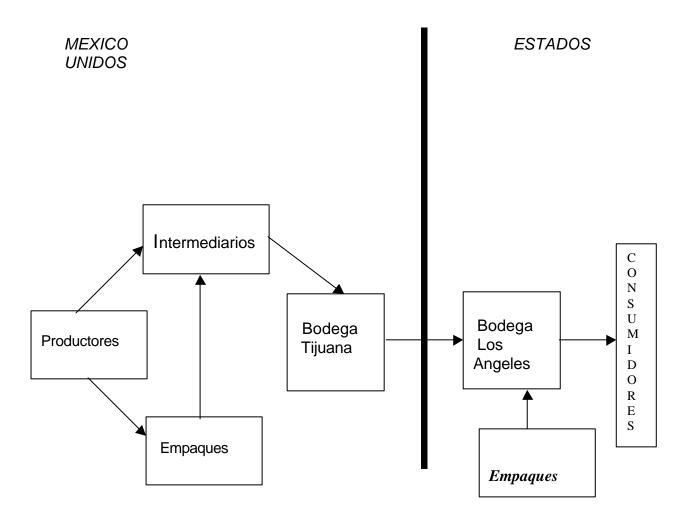


Diagrama No. 2 Red y flujo de mercancías de la Familia Sierra



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