

Agricultural expert Shay Eliaz says that, with technology, the sector offers good opportunities with regard to quality of life. He adds that Latin America could become the world's pantry if it works on areas such as infrastructure and productivity.

“Modern agriculture, a good way to live”

INTERVIEW AGRICULTURE

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Shay Eliaz, Strategic Director at Monitor Deloitte, talks about the problems and challenges for the agricultural sector in Latin America and throughout the world, about new technologies and, in particular, how to attract young people to the profession, which is dying and not even leaving mourners behind.

What is the main problem facing the Latin American agricultural sector?

I think the only way to answer that question is that it is a mixture of a lack of infrastructure, productivity and waste. There is no single answer because it depends on which economy within the region you're talking about.

If we look at Brazil and Argentina, which are heavily involved in agriculture, they know how to do it and do it well, their results, their skills and their productivity are at a very high level.

These two countries are used to large estates, unlike other countries, such as Ecuador, Colombia and Peru, where the farms are smaller, they cannot be mechanized and, therefore, productivity is lower.

A region like Latin America has the land, water, resources and a young population that could get involved in farming, it can help solve the issue of the lack of food not only in Latin America but worldwide.

What is the potential for Latin America in the agricultural sector?

I made note of some statistics which I believe are significant. If we think about 2050, some years in the future, the global population will be 9.5 billion people. To feed all of these people, productivity will have to go up by 60 percent, more or less.

The region has 30 percent of the world's cultivatable land, with sufficient resources, such as water, which could help solve the problem.

Furthermore, it has a third of the water that can be used for this purpose.

If we think about small farms representing 50 percent of the current production in Latin America, and if the productivity of each of these small farmers can be increased five or tenfold, it is a lot on a global level.

What is the region like technologically?

By using modern methods, productivity could be increase for each hectare. And this helps productivity not just for the region but the whole world.

The other big problem, which is not talked about enough, is that if we think globally, the average farmer is fifty or sixty years old, more or less, and there are sons and daughters who don't want to go into the agriculture because it's not sexy, they don't know if they can make a living that way, and they prefer high technology.

Why don't young people like agriculture?

The problem is that when young people see their parents in agriculture, they just don't see it as a good future. If we think about agriculture from hundreds of thousands of years ago, it was always a family activity: they had children and knew they were going to take over the farm when they grew up.

Today, that is changing completely, and there are young people who simply do not want to go into agriculture because they do not see it as a way to earn enough money to live well.

Not to mention that working with technology is a little more striking and also has the appeal of living in large cities such as Medellin and Bogota.

How can we attract them to the profession?

Campaigning throughout the world to try to convince them that agriculture traditionally was not that great, but using modern methods, is a good way to make a living with good income. That it doesn't have to be as hard as it was before because it can be much more mechanized, automated and technological.

It is crucial that young people understand that they can have a very good career in agriculture and that it is possible to get ahead working in this area.

Is this a challenge facing the agricultural sector worldwide?

There is a continuous trend toward urbanization and people migrate to the city, which puts a lot of pressure on the food system. This means that more food is needed and more infrastructure to take it to the cities.

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40 percent of GDP on average is accounted for by agricultural exports in Latin America

The key to making progress in the agricultural sector is applying technology to make the work more productive and less difficult.

THE POVERTY OF THE FARMER

It strikes me as ironic that there are people producing food who themselves go to bed hungry.

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Helping rural communities

The Government must help the agricultural sector with policy. How can we ensure that rural communities are well funded, have access to the market so they can obtain products like seeds, herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers?

I believe that governments have to seriously consider how to create alliances that allow all these things to be done and don't just look out for themselves.

They also have to empower the private sector, because many field-based activities can be handled by private companies that are interested in helping.

Sometimes, the farmers can also group together to have a little more power.

The government's task should not be to give them everything on a silver platter, but to make it possible.

Content featured in the main photo

In Vietnam, the Government has given priority to agriculture, removed obstacles and the results are plain to see.

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EXAMPLES OF HOW IT CAN BE DONE

"There are farms that are managed practically without human involvement. Everything is automated," states Shay Eliaz.