

By Peruvian Agri Institute director Juan José Gal'Lino

✘ Strategic planning is a common practice and is increasingly necessary for all businesses, especially for those that have reached a size where leading "from memory" is unmanageable. So, if a public or private company needs strategic planning, how can a country not need one, or an economic sector within a country that gives work to 30% of the population, as is the case with agriculture.

Despite this obvious need, we can say that a clear strategy does not exist for the sector, and every five years we launch into a new adventure. Worse still, within a period of government we have different ministers, and unfortunately different focuses with respect to what we should do with the sector.

This does not necessarily mean that governments or ministers have bad ideas. What it means is that they are not articulated and don't hold a development logic that would allow us to work towards the same objective. For this reason, we are urged to make the best effort possible to trace the lines of agricultural policy for the long term, which transcends the colors of political parties and who is in power, that is consistent at least with our climatic, geographic and social realities.

Why the weather?

Because we have been blessed with an enormous variety of climates and microclimates which allow for the development of a wide range of products, especially in the moments when markets need them. Therefore, the climate, more than a variable, is a fact that has to be taken into account when drafting a strategy.

Also, we can move in different directions to find the microclimates we need for this or that product, and having harvests that are either earlier or later. An agricultural strategy that doesn't take this factor into account does little good for the consolidation of the sector.

Why geography?

Because our geography is extremely complex, which is what generates climates and microclimates, and should be faced with an infrastructure development strategy that is very well structured, starting with roads. An agricultural development strategy that doesn't have road infrastructure development as one of its pillars, that doesn't allow and facilitate connection with "remote" zones doesn't make sense.

Here it should be noted that the places we call "remote" are not always far away in distance,

but very far in development and a lot of the time because of a lack of good road access. So, defining an agricultural strategy for Peru that doesn't consider this variable does little or nothing for this social inclusion that is so often spoken about.

Why social?

Why, because except for some coastal irrigation, the valleys of the coast, the inter-Andean valleys and our forest are characterized by small holdings and small farms - 84% of agricultural units have less than 10ha - and have the property lands are the hands of associations with many members. This is the reality we have to keep in mind when we define an agricultural strategy for the long term. Peru has a series of characteristics which allows it to position itself as very competitive in different markets.

Peru's benefits

Peru is an important counterseasonal supplier to the Northern Hemisphere. The success achieved with asparagus, avocados, citrus fruits, mangoes and grapes are an example of that. And if you've wanted to get early or late crops, it's only been necessary to move to nearby areas but that are different in climate.

We also have growing development in organic products that are precisely making the most of microclimates and positioning us in market niches. In commodities, where our country tends to not be so competitive, we have cases like organic coffee, where differentiation and specialization in our products allows us to obtain a special value above the average of this large market.

And, in a very large market like bananas, where you would think there isn't space to grow, there has been significant development in organic bananas. In recent years we have seen our country grow in a sustained way with macroeconomic variables under control, and there are those who venture to say that in five years we will catch up with Chile, or in 10 years we will be developed.

Optimism aside, what we should think about is not how much time it will take but how we are going to do it. While there isn't a defined route, a common north for which all of our actions can be pointed, decades could pass and we won't get very far except by pure luck.

The mistake of imitating aspiration

It is here that the mistake of wanting to "be" like this or that country is committed, and ends up in "doing" what that country does. Big mistake. Our strategy should be in agreement

with our reality, which is very particular. It doesn't involve imitating anyone, neither large powers, nor our South American peers. Let's analyze the case of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The fact that countries like the United States, Canada or Australia - countries clearly classified as developed - use them daily does not mean that this is applicable to our reality in an immediate way without a study on this. Brazil and Argentina are also using them, and these are realities that are a little bit closer and in the same hemisphere.

There is no guarantee that we should utilize GMOs with our eyes shut. Every one has their own associated climatic, geographic and social conditions that, with their own evaluation, can harmonize the management of transgenic crops. From this we don't want to say that Peru shouldn't use GMOs. What is meant is that in first place should be defining a long term strategy with a series of milestones that should be completed to reach where we want to be.

And when a legislative initiative like with GMOs is put to debate, the first questions should be is this part of the national strategy? Does this add value to the objective of our country? Is it compatible with the measures taken to reach our goal? If the answers are yes, then the initiative can only be supported because we know it is not an isolated measure but part of a strategy, and probably a milestone within the chosen path.

On the other hand, when like now we don't have a strategy, legislative initiatives are launched and passionate debates between promoters and opponents are taken on. Every one of their reasons are equally valid, but does not ask if the law contributes to meeting our national strategy. Let's define a strategy before legislating about it.

www.freshfruitportal.com