Science Societies

Graduate students use modern methods to bring agronomic knowledge to Brazilian producers

By Susan V Frisk ACSESS Public and Science Communications Director

August 1, 2021



Carlos Bonini Pires discussing a podcast project with Rafael Ramon. Photo courtesy of Wagner Squizani.

Graduate students work what seem like endless hours on their research. Finding time for hobbies is hard, but a group of Brazilian students studying in the United States is finding ways to bring their knowledge back home through podcasts and YouTube videos.

Carlos Bonini Pires, who studies at Kansas State University, is the founder of "Agro Connection" along with former graduate students who lived in France and the U.S.: Rafael Ramon and Alexandre Rosa (**https://agroconnection.net**). He recently recruited Fernanda S. Krupek, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lucas Munaro, University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign, Leonardo M. Bastos, Kansas State University, and Luis F. Bonini Pires, Federal University of Santa Maria–Brazil, to participate in a spin-off Agro Connection YouTube channel (**https://bit.ly/3wdecIV**).

I chatted with Carlos and Fernanda to ask some questions about their outreach initiatives. Here are their abbreviated answers:

Susan: Carlos, why did you start your podcast?

Carlos: I always felt that that there was a gap between producers and academia—and it's bigger in Brazil than the U.S. In Brazil, there is little time allowed for doing what in the U.S. we call extension outreach. Also, as a scientist, I feel it's necessary to communicate. Our podcast was created to fill a gap with Brazilian growers and connect Brazilian farmers with U.S production. Our work is all about connection, Brazil—U.S. Our next step will be to bring information from Brazil to the U.S.

Susan: So how did the podcast come to be?

Carlos: There are tons of Brazilians in our fields around the world who left Brazil to study abroad. I was in the Everglades with a friend, Marcio Gonçalves, who does podcasts in different languages. Marcio said: 'Why don't you create a podcast about soils?' And I was like…hmmmm. So, in five seconds I had the podcast designed in my mind. I knew who to invite to help, I knew who to interview, I knew the topics, I saw the possibility of helping Brazilian producers and agronomists, taking to Brazil information generated by Brazilians that are in U.S., Europe, and Australia. I invited a friend that is better at strategic thinking (I am more of the executing, influencing, and relationship-building type). To grow fast, I needed someone with characteristics that I don't have.

Susan: What's the format of your podcast?

Carlos: Our podcast is an interview conversation. We have two parts, starting with the life of the interviewee. Then we discuss the topic and their specialty. Brazilians want the history because they can use that as an example. If we use an example of me studying at K-State, I would discuss how I learned how I could come to the U.S. to study, why I did it, how I learned English, and so on.

Susan: Where does the YouTube channel come in?

Carlos: Our YouTube videos provide more technical information for Brazilians to learn about the U.S. growing season. For example, Brazil and U.S. are number one and two in soybean production (depending upon the year), so how the U.S. soy season is going is relevant to Brazilian growers. Things like how corn is growing here affects the price in Brazil. So, it's relevant to them. Also, they are curious about what farmers do in U.S. And we know the opposite is true as well. So here comes our goal of reversing gears and bringing information from Brazil to the U.S.

“ Brazil and U.S. are number one and two in soybean production (depending upon the year), so how the U.S. soy season is going is relevant to Brazilian growers. ”

Susan: Fernanda and Carlos—why do you think public outreach is important?

Fernanda: There is a great and growing need to improve links between scientists and society (both farmers and the general public), but it’s even bigger in Brazil. The public is uninformed about the work going on in institutions. Carlos and I are both at land grant institutions with extension and communications departments, but in Brazil, the setup is different. Doctoral students in Brazil rarely receive communications training; we need to advocate for outreach activities and time to do so.

Carlos: Short answer: The general public has no idea what university researchers are doing. We stay at our desks or communicate with our team. The pandemic brought examples of this gap. Outreach is important because we are contributing to society and future generations, and the public needs to have access to this information.

Susan: Ok, back to the podcast—how do you do this with guests all over the world? You said some are in Spain and France?

Carlos: I host with Raphael who is in Brazil, which is only a two-to three-hour time difference. We record the podcasts with Zoom, which allows more interactions than

only the phone call. We can see each other's expressions, and that comes through in our voices, which helps with the podcast format. I record separate audio tracks, which makes my life easier in editing. When we have to interview someone from Europe (a seven-hour time difference), we do that in the early morning on the weekends.

Fernanda: One of the great things this pandemic has taught us is how to be flexible, and Zoom meetings help.

Susan: Is this income-producing for you?

Carlos: Not now but maybe in the future. I do get the opportunity to network with wonderful specialists in all topics. I'm happy that I get to speak with them for an hour, plus some social time! Can you image talking to someone you admire and who is an expert in your research topic? That's our payment.

Susan: What are your secrets to balancing your graduate work and these producer outreach projects?

Carlos: No pain, no gain. I have no idea how I manage it, but I do. I have my fiancée and dog, then my Ph.D. Then the podcast and YouTube channels. I never work Sundays…maybe later at night. I try not to work nights except on YouTube projects. Because I work 12-hour days at grad school, I'm learning to let go of perfectionism. I'm also grateful to my Ph.D adviser, Chuck Rice, who sees the value of these projects and also knows I get my work done. The good thing is that I'm bringing these communication skills to my Ph.D. research, producing extension and outreach material by myself.

Agro Connection recently won first place for its podcasting from the Agribusiness Press Award, Brazil. The Agro Connection video channel ranked in the top three. Although Carlos Pires feels he's the one who is very fortunate to have these friends and fellow graduate students that he connects with, it is this writer's opinion that this group of grad students, including Fernanda Krupek, are giving back more to society than they know! We are fortunate to have them as members.



Fernanda Krupek making one of her YouTube videos while in the field. She schedules her video production along with her fieldwork to make the most efficient use of her time. Photo courtesy of Osler Ortez.

Fernanda: One way to balance graduate work and public outreach more efficiently is through the effective use of existing resources. In this case, time is our precious resource. For YouTube, I plan my recordings around when I already plan to be in the field. It takes an extra 30 minutes or so to record, but I'm already there. I like to work on my Ph.D. commitments in the morning when my brain is fresh and then work on any outreach projects in the afternoon. Another way is setting priorities. Many goods come at a cost, and outreach is not an exception. Outreach requires time, commitment, and effort. When moving in this direction, it is critically important to set priorities and ensure a balance. Learning how to say "no" when needed and "yes" when possible is important. So, in my case, my Ph.D. commitments such as data analysis and writing I would do early in the morning with fresh brainpower. Public outreach I envision more as a hobby that I have a lot of fun doing it and would

do in the afternoon. I am glad I am working with Dr. Andrea Basche, who is an excellent communicator and values the importance of outreach. I encourage students to find mentors (could be their adviser or someone else) who can support them and help them gain outreach skills.

“ One way to balance graduate work and public outreach more efficiently is through the effective use of existing resources. In this case, time is our precious resource. ”

Susan: Why did you choose a podcast versus another medium, like blogging?

Carlos: Podcasts are easily accessible, they are portable, and you only need a cell phone. It’s a purposeful way to use the time for the listeners. Most of the ag people are in a rush, and they can listen and run equipment; podcasts allow for multitasking. In addition, we can more easily transfer emotion through our voices. I find that harder to do with writing. Listening to a podcast is a good way for some people to learn.

"Podcasts are easily accessible, they are portable, and you only need a cell phone. It’s

a purposeful way to use the time for the listeners"

Fernanda: I echo that the voice effect is important on podcasting as well as allowing listeners to multitask. For YouTube, we can add in visual elements like graphs that help our farmers to see locations we are discussing in the U.S. and other information.

More student articles

Back to issue

Back to home

Text © . The authors. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Except where otherwise noted, images are subject to copyright. Any reuse without express permission from the copyright owner is prohibited.