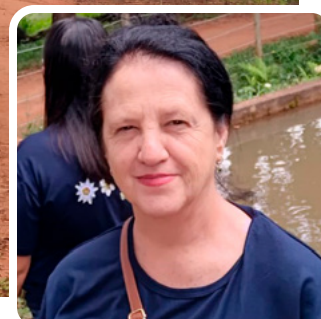


Listening First:

Understanding Women in Our Rural Communities

In recent years, an important question has been gaining more attention across the agricultural world: what is the real role of women in rural areas?

For many people, especially those far from the countryside, the answer might seem obvious. But here, in our communities, reality tells a more complex story. Women have always been present — working, supporting their families, and contributing to farm activities — yet, in many cases, their voices have not always been fully heard.



At COOMAP, we believe that meaningful transformation begins with a simple step: **listening**.

That is why we created the Women in the Countryside Program, an initiative designed to better understand the lives, challenges, and needs of women living in our communities. Over the past months, our team has visited several rural areas, including Mandaguari, Grama, Cachoeira, Pinhalzinho, Mamonas, Mata, Lagoa, Sertãozinho, Coimbra, Pontinha, and Armazém — reaching more than 100 women.

These visits are not formal interviews. They are conversations. Moments where women feel comfortable sharing their routines, their concerns, and their perspectives on life in the countryside.

We talk about daily life, family, health, work, and expectations for the future. We try to understand not only their role as producers, but also as mothers, wives, and individuals.

What we found is both simple and powerful: each woman has her own story, her own challenges, and her own way of contributing to rural life.

At the same time, many share similar feelings — a busy routine, limited time for themselves, and, in some cases, few opportunities to express their ideas or participate more actively in decision-making processes.

By listening, we are able to identify real needs and design initiatives that truly make sense for them. This is the foundation for everything that comes next — from training programs to community groups and income-generating activities. More than collecting information, these visits are about building trust.

Because when someone takes the time to listen, something important happens: people begin to feel valued. And this is exactly what we aim to strengthen — a sense of belonging, participation, and recognition for women who have always played a key role in rural life.

This is just the beginning of a journey that we are proud to be building together.

Grower of the month



Vera Lúcio



Living in the countryside means doing what you love.

A woman's perspective on life in the countryside

Born in 1962, Vera Lúcio Araújo Leal is a wife, mother of two, and grandmother of three. Raised in the countryside, Vera has spent virtually her entire life connected to rural life and farming. With simplicity, she welcomed us into her home to share a story shaped by family, hard work, coffee and the many changes she has witnessed over the years.

Vera started working at a very young age, helping her parents on the farm — something quite common at that time. Life in the countryside was not easy, and opportunities to generate income were very limited. Everything they produced was meant to support the family.

Even with these challenges, she managed to attend school up to the 4th grade. She lived in the Coimbra community and had to walk around 4 kilometers every day to attend school in Guaipava — both ways.

Coming from a large family, her childhood home was always full. Her mother had 12 children and raised two more. There was no electricity, no sanitation, and life demanded resilience from an early age. By the age of 11 or 12, Vera was already working in coffee fields. Over time, her father started planting coffee as well, and little by little, the family's situation improved. She continued helping on the farm until she was 19.

That was when she got married and moved to Guaipava, where she started a new life with her husband. Their home was simple — just four rooms — and in the beginning, there was no electricity or bathroom. As she puts it, "there was almost nothing."

Through hard work in the fields, the couple gradually improved their living conditions, expanded their coffee production, and acquired more land. Those were still difficult times, especially because there was no proper transportation to bring inputs like fertilizers. Electricity only arrived when their youngest daughter was already over one year old.

After more than 40 years dedicated to farming, Vera now looks back with pride at what they have achieved. Today, the family owns a car, uses solar energy, and she was able to see her son graduate. Her daughter chose to continue in coffee farming, carrying on the family tradition.

She highlights that COOMAP's support played an essential role in this journey — especially through technical assistance and the cooperative's initiatives. With this support, the family was able to invest in a tractor and, more recently, in new agricultural equipment, among other improvements.

Nowadays, Vera has slowed down her routine a bit, but she is still very active. During harvest time, she works on the coffee drying patio, takes care of the house, the animals, and also manages a blackberry plantation, which is part of COOMAP's fruit project. According to her, it is a demanding activity that requires constant care.



"And that's my daily life... we never really stop, because on a farm there is always something to do," she says.

Vera and her daughter are also active members of the Aflorar Women's Group, a space created to bring women together, promote learning, and encourage participation. She explains that, before joining these meetings, she used to stay more at home, but now she takes part actively, learning something new every time and finding a space where she feels heard.

She believes that women today face fewer challenges than in the past, with more access to opportunities, technology, and a stronger voice within the family. She also notices that husbands are more open to listening and valuing women's opinions.

"There was a time when I stopped going to the fields, and my husband told me: 'Vera, you need to go there and see what's missing, because every time you go, you notice things that I don't.' I even found it funny," she recalls.

For her, this exchange of ideas is essential. It makes her feel valued as a woman and as a partner, strengthening teamwork within the family.



When talking about life in the countryside, Vera leaves a simple but powerful message:

"Living in the countryside means doing what you love. There's no point in living in the city if that's not what makes sense to you. And women need to participate more, not give up. Sometimes we think it won't be interesting, but we have to go, to see for ourselves. If we don't like it at first, we can try again. It's important to get involved. Farming depends a lot on the weather, so things don't always work out — but that's no reason to give up."

Vera also highlights her mother as her greatest inspiration. She lived 100 years in the countryside and, despite all the difficulties of that time, always valued education and believed in a better future for her children.

"We have to be inspired by those who came before us and keep moving forward, doing what we love."