



WORLD RURAL FORUM

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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FAMILY FARMING

1. Introduction

Family farming around the world

Family farming is a strategic sector because of its economic, social, environmental, territorial and food security functions. The rural communities of the world have been developing their own culture of coexistence with the environment that surrounds them since the beginning of mankind. Family farming is much more than a production model, it is the core of food security and the development of peoples.

Family farming also has strong advantages with regard to exploiting terrain and labour (it offers more jobs per unit of capital invested).

Regrettably, the reality of today's world is marked by the existence of extensive rural poverty, in many cases extreme, which 900 million rural inhabitants suffer in different continents.

The WRF believes that the development of family farming can contribute directly to reduce poverty since this activity continues to be the main source of income and employment in rural areas.

However, family farming is not only a production model; it is also a life model, which currently finds itself in grave difficulty of development and survival all over the planet.

In general terms, agricultural production is an unstable sector subjected to meteorological variations, technological and socio-political factors, as well as the instability of prices fixed by the market, which causes family farming to suffer serious profitability and income fluctuations. Some problems are pronounced, as in the case of women farmers; such as access to and control of resources such as technology, education and financing.

During the last two years, there has been a dramatic increase in the price of basic products such as cereals, edible oil and milk. The elevated price of food, although it can mean an opportunity for the development of the farming sector, has aggravated the food insecurity dramatically, producing strong internal tension in many countries. This situation of insecurity is particularly dramatic among the poorest consumers, who devote 60% or more of their negligible resources to the purchase of food. A food crisis that has been classified as being a worldwide food emergency in numerous forums.

Despite the increase in prices, small farmers' incomes have not been sufficiently rewarded, since consumables have also suffered from strong increases. Neither are they responding by increasing their production, since they must confront another series of limitations such as access to consumables, information or technology, as well as the absence of adequate infrastructures or marketing services, etc.

The progressive deterioration of farming income and its effect on rural economies forces many smallholder family farms to disappear through the migration from the country to the city. Consequently, the world's rural population has gone from representing 86% of the population in 1900 to only 52% in 2001.



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Therefore, the existence of a sustainable shareholder family farms demands the need for a co-ordinated action by institutions, governments, organizations, associations and people. Because the family farm is a present reality in all continents, submitted to strong pressures and which needs and deserves special dedication, the type that an International Year can provide.

An International Year for the Future of Family Farming

In the words of Jacques Diouf, FAO Director General, “the time has come to re-launch agriculture and the international community should not miss the opportunity”. For the WRF, establishing an International Year dedicated to Family Farming will constitute that unique opportunity to develop measures that will assure long-term sustainable development of family farming and, consequently, rural environments in both developed and developing countries.

The International Year’s main objective is to provide orientation for the efficient and sustainable development of small scale farming systems and the improvement of small farmers’ situation, all with the view of fighting against poverty, the search for food security and the sustainability of a living rural environment. This will contribute directly to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger, Reduce Child Mortality, Ensure Environmental Sustainability, etc.

The WRF has recently emphasized, “ the confrontation because of the food shortage and the constant rise in international prices requires strategies like the strengthening of the smallholder family farm”. The International Year’s exact proposal intends to boost the development of family farming which is faced with the following challenges (among others): difficulties in obtaining productive consumables and resources (land, water, seeds, etc), aging and migration towards cities, volatility of prices, meteorological inclemency, lack of access to services of marketing, land, information and training, loans and financing, etc. Insofar as the small farmers have greater access to resources and productive consumables and better policies and support service they will be able to respond to the needs of consumers and confront, and also prevent, the repetition of food crises like the one we are living right now, in a better fashion.

The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), points out that “the current dominant focus of industrial large scale farming is not sustainable because it depends on cheap fuel, it has negative effects on the ecosystem and aggravates the growing water shortage”.

The function of the small farmer in world agriculture and rural development is often underestimated and even ignored. Decisions on policies that affect them are not designed for their realities, and in many cases their voice is ignored. The International Year provides the opportunity to promote coordination among authorities in charge of formulating policies, the farmers and society in general. Agricultural policies and rural development intend to reflect that spirit of defending family farming, aspects like the provision of services to the rural population, the generational changeover or support of investment, micro credits, etc.

The International Year's focus must be positive, not only showing society the challenges or difficulties of family farming, but their functions and their leading role in the world food supply, the fight against poverty and the Fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals.



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Family Farming is a main source of employment in developing countries but it also makes up the necessary base to fulfil the Right to Food, a right recognized in the Human Rights Charter of 1948.

In short, the International Year would be a catalyst for a long-term action dedicated to the defence of the small farmer. Said boost would have to be maintained to take advantage of the results obtained and start up the policies, programmes and projects agreed to.

2. Objectives

The International Year is not seen as an end in itself but the start of a process which, through a series of events, offers family farming the opportunity to be a lead player in its own development. The intent is to draw the attention of governments and institutions, media and society in general to the specific problem of the majority of the rural poor population, to reinforce policies and action programmes and strategies and tools that guarantee a decent future for millions of small-scale farmers.

The International Year's main objective is to provide orientation for the efficient and sustainable development of small-scale farmers and improve the situation of small farmers, all with the view of fighting against poverty and hunger and the sustainability of a living rural environment.

The break down of the objectives would be:

- Promote the sustainable development of the smallholder family farm.
- Increase public awareness on the role of the small farmer.
- Promote the recognition of women's role in smallholder family farming.
- Promote Government and international institutions' adoption of policies and strategies focused specifically on the development of smallholder family farming, carrying out the necessary budgetary allocations for this purpose.
- Foster an effective and lasting international association among the various agents that intervene in the rural world: farmers, producer associations, rural development associations, cooperatives, processing industries, governments, etc.

3. Foreseeable Activities

The commitment of institutions and governments with smallholder family farming must be established during the international year and lasting actions that benefit the small farmer and the world food security must be developed from it.

The activities that can be designed are at a national scale as well as regional and international. National and Regional Committees would be established to design the activities.

The national and regional activities must allow the establishing of effective associations and long-term collaboration plans between the different realities and continents.

Activities will be started up with ample participation, searching to create synergies and benefits for all small farmers, among them:



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- Formulation of programmes, projects and plans that support the sustainable development of smallholder family farming.
- Movement of resources towards smallholder family farming development programmes.
- Education, broadening and training activities.
- Promotion based on local knowledge and technological improvements, with sustainability and viability studies, technical guidelines and specialized publications.
- Foster a regulatory environment at a local, regional and international level that discriminates positively towards the small farmer.
- Generate, spread and exchange information
- Carry out a media campaign at a worldwide level.
- Organization of conferences, exhibitions, cultural acts, artistic competitions (literary, photographic, painting, documentary, etc).
- Establish an International Year web page that is an instrument of organization and coordination, informative service on activities, a means of spreading communication material; including general information for journalists, educators, the public and all those interested in family farming. A debate forum for farmers all over the world could be included.

4. Results

Among the foreseeable results considered:

- Creation of national platforms as instruments to develop strategies and policies destined to obtain future sustainability for smallholder family farming.
- Boost investigation and investment in aspects that concern small farmers like access to productive resources and infrastructures and mechanization that suit them.
- Increase collaboration between institutions, governments and small agricultural worker organizations.
- A considerable increase in small farmers' voices in situations where policies that affect them are decided.
- Promote the coordination and synergies among different agents which act directly and indirectly in the development of the smallholder family farm.
- Increase support of long-term investments in smallholder family farms.
- Recognition of rural women's status and the creation of investment support tools, credits, ownership, etc for women in the agriculture and livestock sector.
- Increase capability and training programmes among small farmers.
- Improve the accessibility, quality and quantity of information on family farming, the challenges they face, etc.
- Create awareness about the importance of family farming, not only in the world food supply, but also in the sustainability of rural areas, in the fight against poverty and other great challenges of humanity like climate change.



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- Increase public awareness about the need to preserve and take advantage of the traditional knowledge of small farmers and respect for their practices and experiences.
- Increase communication at a world, regional and national level that encourages the willingness of urban society to support the rural environment in general and specifically smallholder family farming.