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**CONCEPTUAL DOCUMENT OF THE CAMPAIGN IN FAVOR OF AN  
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FAMILY FARMING-IYFF**

**May 2009**



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## **INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FAMILY FARMING**

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## **1.- Introduction**

### **Family farming in the world**

Since the beginning of Humanity, rural communities have been developing and modernising their own coexistence culture with the natural environment surrounding them. In this context, family farming –productive unit rooted in the profound links between a piece of land and the family that owns it- represents a sector of great symbolic and strategic value because of its economic, social, cultural, environmental, territorial, and food security functions.

Family farming is much more than an agrarian economic model: it is the basis of sustainable food production, of environmental management of land and its biodiversity, the fountain of important cultural dimensions of each people and, all things considered, a fundamental pillar of the integral development of all nations.

Deplorably the existing world reality is marked by the existence of extensive rural poverty, extreme in many cases, which is suffered by more than 900 million rural inhabitants on the different continents. In spite of programmes, organised during many years, for the eradication of poverty, this dramatic reality, not only continues to exist but also is in great danger of increasing due to national policies wrongly designed or badly implemented, to the present food and financial crises, or at least, of becoming a chronic reality.

The governments of a great number of countries, for different reasons, are not really supporting the rural sector despite the fact that, in many cases, this sector hosts a very high percentage of its population and natural resources. The lack of all kinds of infrastructure, the absence of technical assistance, of access to credit and to markets, make true rural development impossible.

In general terms, agrarian production is an unstable sector subjected to meteorological variations, technical and socio-political factors as well as the instability of the prices which the market fixes. All this makes family farming suffer serious ups and downs in its profitability and viability.

Some problems have been accentuated, in the case of women farmers, with regard to their lack of access to and control of the resources linked to the land, to technology, to training and to credit. A quarter of the world population is composed of women farmers, often heads of families, which represent some 1,600 million people (Women World Summit Foundation, Geneva).

In the last two years many different causes, greater supply than demand, natural catastrophes, non food cultivation, speculation, etc., have produced a vertiginous increase in the price of basic products such as cereals, edible oil and milk.

We are talking about a crisis that has been described, in numerous forums, as a world-wide food emergency. We must not forget that while the percentage of disposable income destined to food consumption is between 10 and 20% in developed countries, it reaches 70-80% in the poorest countries of the world. This means that their food security is especially vulnerable in the face of any variation in prices that is not accompanied by an increase in family income.

Even in situations of increase in prices, farmers in general and family farmers in particular have not been sufficiently compensated, taking into account that their inputs have also suffered large increases. In this context, they are not responding with an



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increase in their food production, given the fact that they have to face another series of limitations such as access to inputs, information or technology as well as the absence of adequate infrastructures or credit services and marketing.

The progressive deterioration in farming income and its effects on rural economies is causing the disappearance of many family farms due to the migrations to the cities. As a consequence of this, the world rural population has decreased from 86% in 1900 to 52% in 2001. Even if we consider this fact as a general migration of population to the cities because of industrial development and services on some continents, the fact remains that many developing countries do not offer any alternative to rural poverty, except overcrowding in huge marginal neighbourhoods, a precarious informal economy or illegal migration.

“The global food system has become such a dominant force shaping the surface of this planet and its ecosystems that we can no longer achieve sustainability without revamping the food system. At the same time sustainable food systems provide great hope for building a sustainable future, a future in which all can lead satisfying lives within the means of the biosphere.” (Redefining Progress-Agriculture Footprint Brief, 2003)

For this reason, to guarantee the existence of an efficient and sustainable family agriculture is an essential objective to obtain a generalised and just development model at world level.

The achieving of this vital objective necessarily involves an ambitious programme of concerted action on the part of institutions, governments, rural organisations –farmers trade unions, federations of cooperatives, etc-, and diverse associations which promote, in a decided manner, effective policies in favour of the rural world.

Family farming, a reality present on all continents and in a massive manner in developing countries, is, today, subject to great challenges and grave uncertainties.

To create real hope of progress and quality of rural life demands of the Community of Nations an initiative of great significance in its favour, as the official declaration by the United Nations of an International Year of Family Farming.

### **An International Year for the future of family farming**

In the words of Jacques Diouf, the General Director of (FAO), “the time has come to re-launch farming, and the international Community should not squander the opportunity”.

For our organisations, coordinated by WRF, the celebration of an International Year dedicated to family farming would create a unique opportunity to develop means, which would assure in the medium and long term, a prosperous and sustainable family agriculture development and, as a result, in the rural areas on all the continents, especially, in the developing countries.

The FAO has recently emphasised that the “confrontation because of the lack of food and the consequent rise in international prices require strategies such as the strengthening of family agriculture”.

This proposal by the WRF in favour of the declaration by the UN of an International Year of Family Farming is intended to give a decisive boost to its potential and development which, at this moment, face, among others, the following challenges:



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- The difficulty of access, at fair prices, to resources and production inputs (land, water, pastures, seeds, equipment, etc.).
- In the crucial issue of access to land –often exposed to a very serious legal insecurity- many small agricultural families, indigenous communities and shepherds are deprived of their assets through the forced “acquisition” of their land to establish vast domains of export oriented industrial crops, nourishing a growing spiral of precarious day-labourers, rural exodus and new forms of rural marginalisation and urban poverty.
- Aging of the rural population and the migration to cities because of lack of rural employment, pushing many rural women to remain in charge of agricultural activities.
- Scarce incorporation of young people in agriculture.
- Effective recognition of the role of women in agriculture.
- Lack of or insufficient participation of small farmers in the making of decisions and policies that affect them, and, particularly, in the area of fixing agricultural prices along the distribution chain, starting from the local markets.
- Volatility of prices, subject often to speculation.
- Inclemency of the weather, and impact of the negative effects of the climatic change, including the serious alteration of landscape, plants and fauna, provoked by the industrial plantations on national eco-tourism assets and on the natural equilibrium.
- Lack of access to services of marketing, extension, information and farming capacity and of credit and finance, unfair competition due to subsidised imports, etc.
- Interference of middle men with big commercial margins, detrimental to food producers and to consumers as well.
- Absence of fair access to all levels of education and to health services.
- Lack, often total, of equipment, infrastructures and basic services

In the measure in which family farming, on a world level, has greater access to resources and productive inputs at fair prices, improved policies and support services, it will be able to raise the living conditions of rural women and men, as well as those belonging to indigenous communities, addressing also in a more adequate and efficient manner the consumer necessities, contributing in this way to prevent food crises.

In this context, apart from other factors, the strengthening of the whole rural and farmers’ organisational tissue –trade unions, cooperatives, technical extension offices, etc-, represents a key factor in the way towards a prosperous and solid family farming sector.

For its part, the International Evaluation of Knowledge, Science and Technology in Agricultural Development (IAASTD), points out that “in agriculture, the current dominant focus, industrial on a grand scale, is not sustainable for it depends on cheap petroleum, produces negative effects on the ecosystem and worsens the growing lack of water”.

Far too often, the effect of family farming on the world food supply and on rural development, as a whole, is underestimated and often ignored. The decisions about the policies that affect it are very often taken far from its reality and its voice, on many



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occasions, is ignored. The International Year of Family Farming will provide the opportunity to promote agreement among the authorities -whose job it is to formulate farming policies-, countrymen and countrywomen, their rural associations as legitimate representatives, and other entities.

The focal point of the International Year of Family Farming which we are proposing is based on a positive and dynamic approach, demonstrating to civil society and its numerous institutions, not only the challenges and difficulties of family farming, but also its great contribution, real and potential, to the world's food, to the fight against poverty and to the fulfilling of the Millennium Development Goals.

Family farming, along with being the greatest source of employment in developing countries, represents the social base on which the Right to Food should be made a reality as recognised in the Charter of Human Rights, 1948.

To sum up, the International Year will be the driving force behind a number of initiatives and stakeholders cooperation in favour of family agriculture. This impulse should be maintained after its celebration to optimise the results achieved and to critically follow-up its public policies, its programmes and the development of its agreed projects.

Essentially, we are promoting family farming as an authentic model for real farming development, directed to the service of Humanity through the commitment of millions of men and women producing harvests sufficient to feed the world.

At the same time, we are decidedly promoting the role of country peoples' organisations –trade unions, farmers federations, unions of cooperatives, etc-, as the true leaders in rural development, including their participation in the forming of agrarian policies, social reviews, etc.

## **2.- Objectives**

The prime objective of the International Year of Family Farming is to promote, in all countries, real active policies in favour of the sustainable development of farming systems based on the family unit, provide guidance to put them into practice, to boost the role of farmers organisations and to raise the awareness on the part of civil society of the importance of supporting family farming. And all this is to fight against poverty, to seek food security and to achieve an active rural world based on respect for the environment and the biodiversity.

This progress in the development of family farming will directly contribute to the Millennium Development Goals: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to reduce infant mortality, to guarantee the protection of the environment, to promote equality of men and women, to ensure the autonomy of women and to encourage a world-wide association for development.

This International Year is not seen as an end in itself but as the beginning of a process in which, through a succession of events, family farming and its many professional associations will be recognised as the leading force of their own rural development.

The breakdown of the analysed IYFF objectives is as follows:

1. To promote, at all levels, active policies in favour of the sustainable development of family agriculture, demanding the adoption on the part of governments and international institutions of concrete and operative means and



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strategies by establishing and implementing adequate policies, making the necessary financial allocation for these ends.

2. To strengthen the legitimacy of rural associations and farmers' organizations to represent the interests of family farming, making possible that their propositions and demands could be included in the agrarian policies.
3. To increase the awareness on the part of civil society and all social agents of the decisive role of family agriculture in the sustainable production of food and in the conservation of the ecosystem and biodiversity.
4. To achieve recognition of the role of women in family farming and to make possible the implementation of their specific rights in this matter.
5. To reduce/minimise the migration of small agrarian producers and indigenous communities to the cities, for reasons allied to rural poverty by bringing about policies in favour of rural youth, and agricultural and rural employment.
6. To advocate and defend the international commerce of food products based on the rules that encourage rural development and food security in all countries, stop speculation, and promote equal access to markets and the protection of family farming in all the continents, -with special attention to developing countries- against dumping and subsidised food imports.
7. To promote the different forms of research and technology, including the acknowledgement and promotion of local knowhow, linked to sustainable rural development endowed with the necessary human and financial resources to achieve their end and to apply their results and advances to that purpose.

### **3.- Results**

Among the IYFF's foreseeable results the following achievements are contemplated:

1. Outstanding recognition of the United Nations, of international organisations, of governments and of civil society, of the essential function of family farming as a sustainable rural model, as an efficient producer of food, as a source of income, as a fountain of cultural values, of agrarian know-how and as a guarantor of the preservation of the environment and biodiversity.
2. The creation, enlargement or strengthening of national and international platforms - with the participation of governments, rural organisations, development associations, experts, etc. – as instruments to develop policies and strategies to defend a sustainable future for family farming, including the regulation of a just food international market.
3. The approval of substantial budgets in different countries and in international organisations aimed to providing better and greater infrastructures and services in rural areas and in family agriculture.
4. Greater social and political recognition and legitimisation of farmer's organisations as useful partners with public powers in everything related to the elaboration of agrarian policies in favour of family farming, effective legal protection of agricultural land owned by family farms, and rural development in general.



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5. Progressive recognition of the specific status of rural women and the creation of supporting tools directed to investment, credit, ownership, etc. for women in the farming sector.
6. Increase in rural employment, especially among young people of both sexes, by means of “an appropriate selection of investments, with intensive labour as an important ingredient, in agriculture and other non farming rural activities (World Bank Report, 4-12-08, concerning “Youth and employment in Africa, the potential, the problem, the promise”).
7. Technical and economic boost to agrarian research in aspects that deal with the strengthening of family farming, such as access to quality seeds, to other productive resources, reduction of post harvest losses, technologies aimed at reducing time, effort, and risks endured by women and men farmers
8. Increase in the training programmes and the reinforcement of skills, among small farmers (both men and women), dialogue among different forms of local knowledge, and in this way, improve the accessibility, quality and quantity of information about family farming, about its integral definition, the rights of the rural world, etc.
9. Increase in social awareness about the importance of family agriculture, not only in food production, but also in the sustaining of rural areas, in the battle to eradicate poverty and in other great current challenges facing Humanity such as the climatic change.
10. Increase communication at world, regional and national level that foments the will, on the part of urban society, to encourage the rural areas in general and family agriculture in particular, its social, environmental and economic benefits, and potentialities, and to do everything possible to prevent its limitations and its “bottle necks”,



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#### **4.- Calendar of activities until June, 2009**

##### **May-June 2009**

- Getting other agencies support to IYFF
- Approaching governments to introduce IYFF
- Meetings with the FAO and the IFAD, Rome,
- Preparation of the visit to the UN quarters in New York and of the documents to be presented.
- Application for interview to officially present the IYFF request in the UN quarters

##### **June 2009**

- Official introduction of the IYFF request in New York

#### **5.- Activities to be performed during the international Year of Family Farming- IYFF**

- The commitment on the part of the institutions and governments in favour of family farming, expressed with the formal approval of the IYFF, has to be explicitly stated by the ad-hoc Committee of the UN – that its General Secretariat will establish to take it forward by means of diverse activities programmed on a world, continental, regional and national basis, conferences at different levels, seminars, symposiums, publications, meetings, etc.
- On our part, WRF and the other associations joined in the Campaign, will maintain their initiatives to popularise the IYFF among their members and in civil society as a whole and as a political lobby in the face of the different administrations to facilitate the advancement of the IYFF's objectives and also regularly taking part in the activities programmed by the UN.
- The national and regional committees in favour of the IYFF which have been formed during the previous campaign will also participate in the designing of activities to be realised during the said year once this has been approved by the UN.
- The national and regional activities to convert the IYFF in an efficient and enduring instrument in the service of family agriculture must permit or strengthen efficient coordination and concerted plans in the long term among the different social realities and continents involved in the IYFF. Wherever possible these collaboration plans will be carried out through the interested organisations or by existing national and regional platforms or alliances under the impulse of our Organising Committee.
- The Web page of the IYFF will be kept permanently up-dated. This will be created after the constitution of the Campaign Organisation Committee. It will serve as a coordination and informative service about the activities that are proposed or that take place, as a means of spreading communication material, including general



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information for journalists/reporters, for educators, the public and all those sectors and entities interested in family farming.

- In this Web page a forum of interchange and debate about the IYFF, about family farming in particular, about its problems and opportunities, open to all men and women linked to family agriculture and to all interested people and entities, can be promoted.
- A world-wide press campaign linked to the development of the IYFF, and nourished by news about the conferences, symposiums, applied investigations, exhibitions, all kinds of cultural activities, educative, artistic and literary competitions, photographs, paintings, documentals, etc.
- The creation of a permanent evaluation system of the different initiatives to promote family farming which governments and international organisations carry out.
- Schedules of visits to rural areas by school, educative and social institutions, consumers associations, trades unions and employers associations, etc. will be encouraged in all countries, to get directly in touch with family agriculture, and in this way, creating bonds of collaboration and a greater understanding of the multiple facets and challenges of this model of rural development.
- Meetings and alliances between men and women from the North and South involved in family farming, represented by their professional associations, cooperatives and their entire organisational framework will be promoted within the structure of the IYFF. These will serve to tackle its diverse problems and aspirations with the prospect of promoting just international trade, based on the food security of all countries and the viability of their farming in all latitudes.

### **6.- Procedure**

The procedure to obtain the official declaration of the IYFF by the UN includes these principal procedures:

- Elaboration of the necessary documents/ data.
- Through the WRF Campaign Organising Committee, a powerful social movement in favour of the IYFF will be promoted based on the participation of numerous rural organisations, others linked to the rural world, etc.
- Contact with diverse governments will be made to obtain their support as sponsors, in favour of the UN decision.
- Official presentation of the proposal. In the General Assembly of the UN, that, in the last resort, declares an International Year, at least two years in advance. But a long term previous run of work is required to reach the General Assembly.

We, in the WRF, believe that this project to promote an International Year of Family Farming could sum up many of our common objectives.

It is for this reason that we promote its declaration and ask for the necessary support.