THE INTERVIEW
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General Secretary of the
MERCOSUR Confederation
of Family Farmer Producer
Organizations (COPROFAM)

FAMILY FARMING OBSERVATORY
Family Farming in Argentina

GOOD PRACTICES
Strengthening indigenous organizations and recovery of their traditional products in the high Andes of Ecuador and Peru.

DID YOU KNOW?
Bolivia’s Legislative Assembly is discussing a bill on Sustainable Family Farming for Integration and Food Sovereignty within the framework of the Law on Farming and Indigenous Communities and Economic Organizations (in Spanish, OECA).

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Family Farming Newsletter
for Latin America and the Caribbean, October-December 2012
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Family farmers produce more than 70% of Central America’s food. Between 80 and 90% of corn and bean farms are run by family farmers and they, in turn, produce 75 to 80% of these crops.

Most of the households in Central America that produce staple grains live in poverty and experience food insecurity; six out of ten rural households suffer from food insecurity. Paradoxically, family farms in Central America are also where the greatest potential exists for increasing productivity and revitalizing the agricultural sector, contributing toward a steadier supply of food and price stability.

Poverty levels in Central America (51%) are significantly higher than in Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole (33%). The situation is even worse in rural areas where an estimated two thirds of the population lives in poverty. With almost 15% of its population undernourished, Central America is well above the average for the entire Latin America and Caribbean region (8%). Infant malnutrition rates are also above those for the rest of the continent, the highest being registered in Guatemala where half of children under five suffer chronic malnutrition.

The central issue is the low productivity on family farms. The causes are varied and interconnected, the most noteworthy being: i) high concentration of land ownership both in terms of area and quality (flatlands vs. mountainsides, type of soil, access to water, etc.) to the detriment of family farming; ii) traditional systems of production with low levels of technology; iii) high levels of illiteracy, food insecurity and undernutrition, which result in low labor productivity; iv) degradation of the natural resource base that forms the basis of agricultural production, which in turn increases the level of vulnerability of rural households to climatic variability; v) poor infrastructure and limited access to markets; and vi) scarce attention paid to institutions, insufficient public investment, and limited rural funding.

Furthermore, the development of family farming is considered the principal means by which rural livelihoods can be improved. Several Central American countries have completed analyses on the role of family farming in promoting food security and rural development and have designed policies, programs and projects to support this development. Among these initiatives are the Family Farming Plan in El Salvador, Costa Rica’s Family Farming Sector Plan, Guatemala’s Family Farming Program to strengthen the peasant economy, and the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Family, Community and Cooperative Economy.

FAO, through the Panama Sub-Regional Office for Central America, is supporting the efforts of Central American governments and that of the Dominican Republic in the development of their family farming sector offering several services, which include capacity-building in extension and productive technology generation; supporting the sustainable intensification of agricultural production, improving access to and use of quality locally-produced seeds; technical capacity-building of livestock development units in the design, construction and management of livestock systems; supporting the formation and consolidation of groups, strengthening productive, administrative, management and marketing capacities; and finally, supporting the sustainable integration of small-scale producers in value chains.

Deep Ford
FAO Sub-Regional Representative for Central America
You represent two important organizations, one national (CONTAG) and the other regional (COPROFAM). What areas do they cover?

CONTAG is a labor organization that represents family farmers and farm workers in Brazil and is present in all 27 Brazilian states. CONTAG is affiliated with COPROFAM, which operates at a regional level, and together they represent a total of 4,200 unions. CONTAG’s affiliation with COPROFAM facilitates contact with other organizations in several MERCOSUR countries allowing us to effectively join forces on behalf of the family farming sector. There are 12 organizations affiliated with COPROFAM, which represent 30 million people.

Tell us a bit about the Food Sovereignty Alliance.

We are currently promoting this initiative in conjunction with other organizations given the obvious and enormous need to work together with civil society towards food sovereignty in Latin America. We are in the process of organizing this Alliance and expect to launch it in March 2013.

What strategy did CONTAG use to be able to represent such a high proportion of family farmers?

The main difference between CONTAG and other organizations worldwide is that CONTAG is an eclectic organization that represents two groups of people: those who work and manage their own land and those who are paid workers. Another major difference is that CONTAG is a labor organization, and this is what allows us to represent rural workers and fight for their rights.

What have been CONTAG’s major achievements in recent years?

We believe that the policies aimed at strengthening family farming that are currently in effect in Brazil are one of the greatest achievements. These policies have had a great impact in the country’s civil society and, without a doubt, CONTAG has been the forum where this dialogue has been made possible; the Marcha das Margaridas (March of the Daisies) is one of the events that has helped us reach our objectives. We are currently at a great advantage given our advocacy capacity in the government and extensive bargaining power to implement public policies aimed specifically at family farming. Examples of this are the school meals program and the National Family Farming Program (PRONAF), which have had a tremendous impact on Brazilian society.

What role has the government of Brazil played in supporting efforts to strengthen producer organizations?

The Brazilian government’s most positive feature is that it provides avenues for participative democracy, allowing us to submit our ideas on how best to formulate proposals, discuss them with the government and build consensus. We believe that if a forum exists where the government and civil society can discuss and debate these issues, mutually-beneficial policies can be developed.
What challenges do you perceive family farming organizations are facing at the national level?

The major challenge at the national level is to consolidate what we have achieved so far, for example, the institutionalization of family farming policies. Another major challenge is to ensure that the benefits of these policies reach the rest of the rural population since more than 50% of the poor in Brazil live in rural areas and it is precisely among this population that these benefits have yet to materialize.

What suggestions would you give to producers who want to consolidate their organizations in other countries in the region?

Civil society organizations must be strengthened. We have learned that progress cannot be made without strong organizations. Efforts must focus on capacity building and experience sharing. Organizations must have the capacity to represent their members politically and to lobby effectively given that this is how the needs of their constituents can be made known.

How do you and the organizations you represent together with FAO participate in the leadership training program?

COPROFAM in conjunction with FAO have been working towards strengthening their capacity to lobby more effectively in our countries. Following our example, members of civil society in 12 countries received training to strengthen their capacity to lobby. FAO’s efforts are not only focused on leadership capacity-building but also on the creation of forums for dialogue that currently do not exist in many countries.

Any final words for our readers?

Our message is to invite everyone to participate with us in the debate we will be undertaking until 2014 in preparation for the International Year of Family Farming. It is crucial to recognize the importance of family farming and that it is not an issue to be discussed solely with farmer organizations. It must also involve consumers and the rest of society since a significant proportion of food products that people consume come from family, peasant and indigenous farms.
Family farming plays an important role in food sovereignty and security in Argentina, especially because of the tremendous variety of foodstuff produced in the country, both for sustaining the livelihoods of families and for domestic consumption, and for export to markets outside the region. According to the 2002 Agriculture and Livestock Census, there are 251,116 farms in Argentina of which 218,868, or 87% of the total, can be considered family farms. However, family farms only occupy 13% of farmlands (Chart 1).
In Argentina, the National Family Farming Registry (ReNAF), which is administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, classifies family farms as nuclei of agriculture and livestock, forestry or fishery producers, or gatherers who produce handicrafts or carry out agribusiness or tourism activities, and who use resources of agricultural origin, regardless of whether these activities are intended for sale, for their own consumption or for barter or if it is the primary or secondary activity of the household, and fulfill the following criteria:

- Residence in rural areas or at a distance that allows for frequent contact with agricultural production or related activity;
- Relies primarily on the family workforce or only occasionally on casual labor;
- Income from external sources cannot surpass three monthly farmhand minimum wages;
- The family is responsible for/controls productive activity.

**Chart 1. Family farms vs. non-family farms in Argentina**

![Chart 1](chart1.png)

**Chart 2. Activities carried out by family farmers on their premises (% of producers)**

![Chart 2](chart2.png)

**Source:** National Agriculture and Livestock Census 2002

**Source:** ReNAF
According to data provided by the ReNAF dated March 2012, 70% of family farmers carry out crop-based activities, 81% livestock production activities, and 16% other agribusiness and food processing activities as well (Chart 2). Other data reveals that 82% of farms receive off-farm income (Chart 3).

Of the total number of family farms that receive off-farm income, 77% correspond to income from government transfer programs.

Other relevant information provided by the National Family Farming Registry:

- Family farming units (FFUs) consist of an average of 3.8 members; the largest ones are located in the northwestern (NWA) and northeastern (NEA) regions of Argentina, given the higher number of children and youth under 18, compared to the rest of the country.

- The gender perspective applied has made it possible to establish that almost half (48%) of registered farm owners are women.

- 52% of NAFs have joint ownership (male and female) whereas 27% are owned by men and 21% by women.

- The average age of registered owners is 45.6 years (46.9 for men and 44.1 for women).

- Four out of ten owners (40%) have not completed primary education or never attended school.

- The units have an average size of 6.3 ha. They are smaller in the regions of Cuyo (4 ha) and Pampeana (2 ha), and larger in the north: 7 ha in NWA and 10 ha in NEA.

- The average size, deducting extreme values, is 36.2 ha, with a total occupied area of 2,304,000 ha among all producers registered within the defined limits.

- Only one-third of FFUs are landowners (31%), and in NOA only 17% are.

- Overall, 70% are involved in crop production. This activity is carried out in 89% of units in NEA, 66% in NWA, and less than 60% in the rest of the country.

- 81% of FFUs are involved in livestock production. This activity is more extensive in the NEA, NWA and Patagonia regions.

- 16% of FFUs are involved in agribusiness. In the Cuyo region, 33% of FFUs carry out this activity.

- 9% of FFUs are gatherers. In the NWA region, this figure is more than double (20%) the national average.

- 9% of FFUs produce handicrafts. This activity varies greatly from region to region, from 17% in the Patagonia region and 14% in Cuyo to less than 10% in the rest of the country.
• 26% of FFUs carry out off-farm activities on a permanent basis and 70% are casual workers.

• 82% receive income from off-farm activities, most of which comes from government transfer programs (78%).

• Four out of ten units do not have electricity and 37% do not have sewage systems. Only 30% have running water in their homes.

At the institutional level, Argentina has established a Rural Development and Family Farming Secretariat under which the Office of the Undersecretary for Family Farming has been operating since 2008. This office is divided into 22 delegations that operate throughout the provinces. The objective of these delegations is to provide advisory, training and support services for family farmers. The delegations are grouped administratively into five regions: Central, Cuyo, Patagonia, Northwestern and Northeastern. The Office of the Undersecretary for Family Farming runs several programs and projects, such as the Rural Areas Development Program (PRODEAR), the Exchange and Training Network for Technicians (Red virtual TAF), and the Mujer Campesina (peasant woman) and Jóvenes Rurales (rural youth) projects.

Find out more:

National Family Farming Registry:
http://www.renaf.minagri.gob.ar/

Office of the Undersecretary for Family Farming:
http://www.minagri.gob.ar/site/index.php
The New Zealand Aid Programme together with the FAO Regional Office implemented the FORSANDINO (Strengthening of High-Andean Indigenous Organizations and Recovery of their Traditional Products) project from 2007 to 2011. The overall objective of the project was to help improve food security among families in indigenous communities by strengthening their development and management. To achieve this, the project focused on two key and complementary issues: a) institutional strengthening of indigenous organizations; b) recovery and leveraging of traditional products to improve the food security of indigenous communities.

A key element for fulfilling the main objective of the project was the recovery of the organizational structure of indigenous communities. The project from the onset, fostered the active and collaborative participation of all stakeholders, at all levels, thus becoming an inclusive and alternative platform for local development.

The project involved a series of activities, namely:

- Practical methodologies were developed and adapted for sharing experiences and capacity development of beneficiaries; the traditional knowledge of farmers was combined and enhanced with new technologies.

- The role played by the chakareros as wise elders was recovered and revitalized.

- Actions were carried out to improve the food and nutrition of the families focusing on the recovery of traditional products through...
contests and by processing and improving the quality of products from the high Andes.

- Initiatives were also implemented to improve and diversify production systems by creating seed banks, applying agricultural good practices, incorporating organic products and implementing technology innovations such as water sowing.

- Local business ventures were set up and initiatives implemented in several communities to generate income and add value to products sold locally.

The impact indicators revealed that the project contributed towards the fight against hunger in both countries by increasing agricultural production and income. The impact indicators of the project are listed in the following chart:

### Peru

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Households in control group</th>
<th>Beneficiary households</th>
<th>Impact of the project</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>(B/A) - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of households living below the poverty line</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>-19 pp*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual per capita household income (in Peruvian Nuevos Soles)</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family expense per fortnight on food consumption (in Peruvian Nuevos Soles)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of families that rate their household diet as “good” or “very good”</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6 pp*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentage points

### Ecuador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Households in control group</th>
<th>Participating households</th>
<th>Impact of the project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>(B/A)-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of households living below the poverty line</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>-7 pp*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual per capita household income (in US dollars)</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>1164</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family expense per fortnight on food consumption (in US dollars)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of families that rate their household diet as “good” or “very good”</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>25pp*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentage points
Lessons learned

Three experiences per country are presented below. These are experiences that the beneficiary communities considered successful in contributing towards the success of the project.

Ecuador

Successful experience 1. The chakareros and their impact on the revitalization of Andean farms. There are a high percentage of farmers in rural communities who are innate entrepreneurs and researchers. They are producers who always have stock for their own consumption and also available for sale. Since they are highly esteemed by the community in productive terms, it is they who must initiate the processes of transfer of technology and innovation. Technological innovations must be validated on their farms first so that they can later become outreach workers promoting these innovations within their communities.

Successful experience 2. Water sowing in Ecuador’s central mountain range. Water sowing (or planting, as it is also often referred to), which involves constructing small reservoirs with locally-obtained materials, prevents soil erosion, reduces the amount of sediment seeping into irrigation canals, avoids destroying thoroughfares, can be used as water troughs for animals, and preserves the humidity of the soil. Water sowing encouraged intercultural dialogue, knowledge exchange and the involvement of technical experts, and has enhanced the system of Andean farming and production.

Successful experience 3. Feeding the mind to combat hunger. Food security plans and programs must not only involve food access and availability but also its consumption, placing priority on locally-produced products.

Peru

Successful experience 1. The importance of family and community development plans. More than just the support that these projects can provide in the development of community development plans, it is essential to build capacity and train the members and leaders of the community so that they can monitor and evaluate the projects and prepare themselves more adequately in terms of time and knowledge to develop future plans for the community and not have to depend on other projects or external consultants.

Successful experience 2. Partnerships and networks. Networks make it possible to join forces, share knowledge and experiences, and validate tools and methodologies benefitting partner institutions and communities. They help create communities of learning and knowledge where the lessons learned can be shared.

Successful experience 3. Promotion, production and leveraging of traditional products. The efforts and actions of programs and projects can be better coordinated when the food security approach is adequately conceptualized on the basis of the reassessment and sustainable leveraging of traditional products. Joint actions can therefore be undertaken with social programs, educational institutions and women’s organizations, among others.

Useful tools

The tools used in this project were documented and can be downloaded from the following links (only available in Spanish):

Calendar of events

**OCTOBER**

4-5  Regional Consultation on Sustainable Crop Production Intensification (SCPI) in the Caribbean, UN House, Barbados

10-12 Third meeting of the Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services (RELASER)

12 – 20 Caribbean Week of Agriculture, St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda

17  Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems: ensuring food security and nutrition in a changing climate, Rome, Italy

18  Expert Seminar on Family Agriculture, St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda

24 – 26 Conference on Research in Agrarian Structure and Intervention in Rural Development, Salta, Argentina

29-30 Workshop-seminar on access to markets for limited resources aquaculture products in Latin America and the Caribbean, Campeche, Mexico

**NOVEMBER**

6-9  18th International Scientific Congress of the National Institute of Agricultural Sciences (INCA), La Habana, Cuba

12 – 16 18th Specialized Meeting on Family Farming (REAF) of Mercosur, Caixa Do Sul, Brazil

21 – 25 8th Edition of the National Family Agriculture and Agrarian Reform Fair (Brasil Rural Contemporâneo), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

23  National Meeting of Family Farmers of the Southern Region (FETRAF SUL), Brasil

27 – 28 International Workshop on Sustainable Intensification of Crop Production (ISPA SCPI) and Implementation prospects in Latin America, Santiago, Chile

**DECEMBER**

6-9  International Symposium on Peasant Family Farming, Agroecology and Climate Change, Yumbel, Chile.
Bolivia’s Legislative Assembly is discussing a bill on Sustainable Family Farming for Integration and Food Sovereignty within the framework of the Law on Farming and Indigenous Communities and Economic Organizations (in Spanish, OECAs). The initiative was put forward by the Integration Committee of Peasant, Indigenous and Native Peoples (CIOEC Bolivia).

The bill was introduced following an extensive process of discussion among grassroots organizations and proposes the creation of a Vice-Ministry of Family Farming, to recognize and value the contribution of women in the development of rural production, and establish a comprehensive financial system for OECAs as well as the formal creation of a platform for integration known as the “Productive Integration Summit”, among other initiatives.

The benefits foreseen in this new law include: strengthening of family farming organizations that are members of OECAs, the experience and knowledge of family farmers in these OECAs in the development of a productive chain that will guarantee their effective inclusion and participation, the integration at all levels and with all actors in the plural economy; and the inclusion of rural women and youth, stimulating rural employment and encouraging rural workers to remain in the countryside.

Source: Integration Committee of Peasant, Indigenous and Native Peoples (CIOEC Bolivia)
http://www.cioecbolivia.org/