



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



The International Treaty  
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES  
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**Views, Experiences and Best Practices as an example of possible options for the national implementation of Article 9 of the International Treaty**

*Note by the Secretary*

*At its second meeting of the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights (AHTEG), the Expert Group agreed on a revised version of the template for collecting information on examples of national measures, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights*

*This document presents the updated information on best practices and measures of implementing Article 9 of the International Treaty submitted by Brazil on 1 August 2019.*

*The submission is presented in the form and language in which it was received.*

## **Template for submission of**

### **Measures, Best Practices and Lessons Learned from the Realization of Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty**

#### **Basic information**

- **Title of measure/practice:** The strategy to constructing the identity of custodian farmers as a way to increasing food security
- **Date of submission:** 21 July 2019
- **Name(s) of country/countries in which the measure/practice is taking place:** Brazil
- **Responsible institution/organization (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s) and contact person):**

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- **Type of institution/organization (categories):** Research, Development and Innovation (Government Institution)
- **Collaborating/supporting institutions/organizations/actors, if applicable (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s)):**

Associação Riograndense de Empreendimentos de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural - EMATER/RS, UNAIC (União das Associações Comunitárias do Interior de Canguçu), COOPERAL (Cooperativa Regional dos Assentados.), COOPAR (Cooperativa dos Pequenos Agricultores da Região Sul), COOAFAN (Cooperativa dos Agricultores Familiares Nortense), MPA (Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores), COONATEERRA (Cooperativa Agroecológica Nacional Terra e Vida) - Bionatur, Prefeitura de Rio Grande, AGABIO (Associação dos Guardiões da Biodiversidade de Tenente Portela), Emater/RS, MAPA (Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento), MDA - Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário, IRGA (Instituto Riograndense do Arroz), UFPEL (Universidade Federal de Pelotas) e UFSM (Universidade Federal de Santa Maria).

#### **Description of the examples**

#### **Mandatory information:<sup>1</sup>**

- Short summary to be put in the inventory (max. 200 words) including:
  - **Implementing entity and partners:** Embrapa Clima Temperado
  - **Start year:** 2010
  - **Objective(s):** Recognize the identity of custodian farmers and their importance for the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources to promote food and nutritional security.
  - **Summary of core components:** In Brazil numerous initiatives in different parts of the country for the conservation of agrobiodiversity by organized communities have emerged and are been strengthened in the last two decades. In Southern Brazil, Embrapa Clima Temperado has

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<sup>1</sup>This mandatory information is required in order for the measure/practice to be included in the Inventory.

- developed strategies to constructing the identity of custodian farmers in Rio Grande do Sul state. Embrapa has worked to join the custodian farmers into associations.
- **Key outcomes:** Through the implementation of this practice, since 2010, there have already been: (1) seven seminars, one of which was international; (2) about 200 custodian farmers identified; (3) more than 70 landraces seed exchange fairs; (4) creation of five centres for education of junior custodian farms; (5) mapping of twelve nuclei of custodian farmers in several regions of Rio Grande do Sul state; and (6) participation of custodian farmers from different regions at the seed exchange fairs, reflecting the desired approximation between them.
  - **Lessons learned (if applicable):** Becoming more conscious of the importance of the role they can play and supported by the recognition of their importance by society, especially the urban people, custodian farmers can claim and reach the due protection of the Brazilian Government being instrumental for a more just and sustainable society.
- **Brief history (including starting year), as appropriate**

In 2010 a pioneering meeting was held bringing together organizations of farmers that worried about in situ/on farm conservation. After discussions, the terms "seed custodian farmer", "agrobiodiversity custodian farmer" and "custodian farmer" were adopted. To know more about the custodian farmers (ages, ethnicities, distribution in the territory, motivations, relationships with other custodian farmers, economic condition, genetic diversity of landraces conserved, their networks, their exchange relations, their needs), Embrapa team started a search for custodian farmers in the communities of Rio Grande do Sul state, with the help of Emater/RS. Next, the approach was bringing these people together, having as element of aggregation the Agrobiodiversity and Food Safety Seminar. The custodian farmers came to play a leading role in this process and the construction of their identity began. The knowledge acquired during the Seminars, moreover debates and dialogues, contributed to strengthen the empowerment of the custodian farmers. Finally, efforts focused on the stimulation of organization of groups of custodian farmers and on the holding of Seed Fairs, where knowledge and seeds were shared. During this phase, there was an involvement of rural schools that began the process of internalization of principles that govern a condition of custodian farmers, materializing their condition as "junior custodian farmers".
  - **Core components of the measure/practice (max 200 words)**

Participatory research related to characterization of corn, beans and vegetables landraces developed by Embrapa Clima Temperado in some projects, before thinking this practice, led to dialogue between researchers and farmers' associations. From this dialogue, came the figure of a farmer who conserves landraces seeds over the time, having great knowledge about these landraces in its environment (often inherited from their parents or grandparents), as well as the way of cultivating and their use as food. This farmer holds the responsibility for seeds, which constitute not only genetic but also cultural heritage. The farmer has conventionally been mentioned as "custodian farmer", a person who has taken upon himself a task of selection and conservation of plants that meet the needs of the community. The practice started in 2010, when the representative organizations of farmers discussed the concepts for custodian farmers and it became evident the need of identify and bring together these people. This was achieved with the first Agrobiodiversity and Food Security Seminar, in 2011. The seminar provided an incentive for the realization of many other meetings aiming the agglutination of custodian farmers at the regional level. The process of construction of custodian farmer's identity, as well as their representation, is continually being improved.

- Description of the context and the history of the measure/practice is taking place (political, legal and economic framework conditions for the measure/practice) (max 200 words)

Historically, the subsistence of humanity in terms of food security has been the use of agrobiodiversity. With the advent of modern agriculture, a change occurred: farmers adopted the varieties developed by breeding programs and by the growing seed industry and abandoned their traditional varieties, resulting in genetic erosion. Understanding the richness of these traditional varieties, together with the perception of this significant loss, Embrapa Clima Temperado developed a project to study some of their aspects. The species that the project set out to study are important in the diet of the Brazilian people: beans, corn, pumpkins, cucumbers, beans, onions, sweet potatoes, peanuts, cassava and peppers. In this context, came the figure of the custodian farmer, who preserves the traditional varieties. It was evident that it was essential to understand the custodian farmer in the search for his identity, while contributing, as a consequence, to a greater food security. The analysis showed that the custodian farmer was often old, isolated, usually without heirs, and that this reality is affecting the future of these landraces and, consequently, impacting the issue of food security. It is clear that there is a need to develop support instruments and public policies for custodian farms to help for consolidate food security processes.

- To which provision(s) of Article 9 of the International Treaty does this measure relate

Art. 9.1      x

Art. 9.2a    x

Art. 9.2b   

Art. 9.2c   

Art. 9.3      x

#### **Other information, if applicable**

- Please indicate which category of the Inventory is most relevant for the proposed measure, and which other categories are also relevant (if any):

No.	Category	Most relevant <sup>2</sup>	Also relevant <sup>3</sup>
1	Recognition of local and indigenous communities', farmers' contributions to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, such as awards and recognition of custodian/guardian farmers	x	
2	Financial contributions to support farmers conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA such as contributions to benefit-sharing funds		

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<sup>2</sup>Please select only one category that is most relevant, under which the measure will be listed.

<sup>3</sup>Please select one or several categories that may also be relevant (if applicable).

3	Approaches to encourage income-generating activities to support farmers' conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA		x
4	Catalogues, registries and other forms of documentation of PGRFA and protection of traditional knowledge		
5	In-situ/on-farm conservation and management of PGRFA, such as social and cultural measures, community biodiversity management and conservation sites		x
6	Facilitation of farmers' access to a diversity of PGRFA through community seed banks <sup>4</sup> , seed networks and other measures improving farmers' choices of a wider diversity of PGRFA.		x
7	Participatory approaches to research on PGRFA, including characterization and evaluation, participatory plant breeding and variety selection		
8	Farmers' participation in decision-making at local, national and sub-regional, regional and international levels		
9	Training, capacity development and public awareness creation		
10	Legal measures for the implementation of Farmers' Rights, such as legislative measures related to PGRFA.		
11	Other measures / practices		

- In case you selected 'other measures', would you like to suggest a description of this measure, e.g. as a possible new category?
- Objective(s)
- Target group(s) and numbers of involved and affected farmers<sup>5</sup>
- Location(s) and geographical outreach

- Resources used for implementation of the measure/practice

Financial resources: from Embrapa and other government agencies - Ministry of Social Development (MDS), former (extinct) Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAPA). Human resources: farmers communities, NGOs, research and educational institutions (Embrapa, Emater, Universities, rural schools).

- How has the measure/practice affected the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture?

The practice has resulted in the strengthening of in situ/on farm conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture, increasing genetic diversity of plants cultivated by family farmers. This was the consequence of the empowerment of custodian farmers, knowledge sharing and seed exchanges that happen at the various events held. All of this contributes to greater food security, but also to an increase in

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<sup>4</sup> Including seed houses.

<sup>5</sup> Any classification, e.g. of the types of farmer addressed, may be country-specific.

household income and, consequently, an improvement in the quality of life for the families of custodian farmers. In addition, the practice also contributes to the integration between *ex situ* conservation and *in situ/on farm* conservation of genetic resources, as custodian farmers provided new accessions of landraces for conservation in genebanks, and had access to materials they had lost and were previously collected and conserved in genebanks with cold chambers.

- Please describe the achievements of the measure/ practice so far (including quantification) (max 200 words)

Target groups: family farmers, farmers settled by Agrarian Reform programs, indigenous people, quilombola communities, urban citizens, researchers, farmers' associations, cooperatives, farmer representative bodies, students from rural schools, universities and research institutions.

Number of involved and affected farmers: more than 200 custodian farmers were identified and characterized, 1,800 people participated in the Agrobiodiversity and Food Safety Seminars, and at least 15 thousand farmers were reached in a process of irradiation generated by this practice.

- Other national level instruments that are linked to the measure/practice

The practice is linked to the National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production (PNAPO) and its National Plan for Agroecology and Organic Production (Plano Nacional de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica - PLANAPO).

- Are you aware of any other international agreements or programs that are relevant for this measure/practice?

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Nagoya Protocol, Aichi Targets, SDGs, Food Forever

- Other issues you wish to address, that have not yet been covered, to describe the measure/practice

- **Lessons learned**

Describe lessons learned which may be relevant for others who wish to do the same or similar measures/practices (max 250 words).

Embrapa's great learning was the understanding that the interactive process with the custodian farmers is fundamental in the right direction of efforts to maintain agrobiodiversity. The characterization of custodian farmers has revealed the complexity of their landscape. A key point is that being a custodian farmer requires recognition by the community of which one is a member. Some of custodian farmers keep traditional varieties because of family tradition, by inheritance, while there are those who preserve them for their economic importance, as they are an important source of income. The most important aspect is self-awareness of the importance of the role he or she, as custodian, plays which consequently elevates his/her self-esteem. This point is fundamental because it has implications for the continuity of *on farm* conservation processes, as it directly influences the children of farmers, leading them to contemplate the possibility of living in the same environment as their parents from the cultivation of the same seeds, with income generation. The process of building the custodian farmer's identity is permanent. Significant progress has already been achieved, because today they have greater freedom and autonomy that allows them to claim demands that lead to a better quality of life when they see their seeds valued by society. This concretely leads to the maintenance and even expansion of agrobiodiversity and cultural heritage, resulting in greater food security.

- What challenges encountered along the way (if applicable) (max 200 words)

One challenge, evidenced in the pioneering meeting of 2010, was the aging of the custodian farmers and the almost no direct heirs of their heritage. Such scenario qualifies the assumptions adopted in this practice, as they foresee the need to, while valuing landraces, also value and protect the custodian farmer, which has kept them through the centuries. Other challenge was to get together the custodian farmers due their dispersion in a wide geographical area in Rio Grande do Sul state (281.748 Km<sup>2</sup>). Recently, the economic and politic crisis facing Brazil is a major obstacle to the continuity and extension of this practice. The lack of financial resources in government agencies and research and development funding agencies has effect on the NGOs, Universities and research institutions that support activities related to custodian farmers.

- What would you consider conditions for success, if others should seek to carry out such a measure or organize such an activity? (max 100 words)

The identification of custodian farmers in different communities and their organization in groups and associations, the sharing of landraces seeds and knowledge, the socialization of the experiences by different groups, the growing number of custodian farmers involved in the various meetings and seeds exchange fairs, and the existence of a forum to collective discussion about the problems surrounding the custodian farmer's activities, ensures the success of the established practice.

#### **Further information**

- Link(s) to further information about the measure/practice

<http://boaspraticas.org.br/index.php/pt/areas-tematicas/alimentacao/620-guardioes1>

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/6/2/741>

<https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/economia/campo-e-lavoura/noticia/2016/06/jovens-atuam-na-preservacao-de-sementes-crioulas-6219549.html>

<https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2018/07/23/guardioes-de-sementes-crioulas-uma-luta-por-autossuficiencia-sabor-e-saber/>

<https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/geral/noticia/2013/04/guardioes-ajudam-a-garantir-a-biodiversidade-4118625.html>

<https://www.alice.cnptia.embrapa.br/alice/bitstream/doc/994218/1/Art.007.2013AGRICULTORESGUARDIOESDESEMENTES ....pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHVOzXxzKo0> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-Mq2RB0exc> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FthrV0Vi50Q>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAKMaEU5OJQ>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7WQx\\_0RJBQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7WQx_0RJBQ) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV1BsxbPI9I>