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Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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Продовольственная и
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Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
الغذية والزراعة
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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Twenty-fourth Session

Rome, 29 September - 3 October 2014

Family Farmers: Feeding the World, Caring for the Earth

Executive Summary

In recognition of the contribution made by the world's 500 million family farmers to agriculture, 2014 was declared the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). Family farmers are inextricably linked to:

- a) food and nutrition security as they produce between 56 and 80 percent of the world's food and produce diversified crops;
- b) sustainable agricultural production related to natural resource management and ecosystem health, as they manage around 70 percent of all agricultural land globally;
- c) local and in particular rural economies.

However, family farming encounters immense challenges and family farmers are diverse, ranging from large family enterprises to subsistence smallholders. Nonetheless, there are many commonalities and concerns.

National definitions enabling specific policies, programmes, strategies and partnerships are instrumental in empowering family farmers to overcome these challenges and would also allow for better data on family farming, thus helping to establish better informed policies, programmes and strategies targeting the three pillars of sustainability simultaneously.

The IYFF, through its awareness raising activities, advocacy strategy and consultative policy dialogue process initiated by Regional Dialogues has proven instrumental in improving the knowledge and information as well as the public perception of family farming. In line with this, the Committee is invited to recognize the importance of family farming and the work carried out to-date, during the IYFF.



Suggested action by the Committee:

The Committee is invited to:

- a) Recognize the importance of family farming for food and nutrition security, natural resource management and local economy as well as the need to develop and implement specific policies, programs and effective strategies and partnerships by Members Nations;
- b) Recognize the importance of developing common criteria for achieving definitions and typologies of family farming as well as the further development of the key analyses and indicators to better assess the status and trends of different types of family farming.

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

Caterina Batello

Senior Agriculture Officer, Plant Production and Protection Division

Tel: +39-06 570 53643

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly of the United Nations declared 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) and FAO is facilitating related activities led through a multi-stakeholder International Steering Committee (ISC). The IYFF has already helped raise awareness for family farming including its crucial role in food and nutrition security in the world. The process of Regional Dialogues has identified region specific characteristics as well as obstacles impeding improved livelihoods for family farmers. This document provides information on the importance of family farming in the world and further elaborates the work carried out during the IYFF, most notably the process of Regional dialogues.

II. What is Family Farming?

2. The master plan of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), approved by the multi-stakeholder International Steering Committee of IYFF provides the following definition: “Family farming includes all family-based agricultural activities, and it is linked to several areas of rural development. Family farming is a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labour, including both women’s and men’s.”¹ The remainder of this document is based on this understanding of family farming.

III. The Importance of Family Farming

3. The IYFF is an acknowledgment of the importance of family farming and following the launch of the year, there has been increased visibility and research on family farming. It should be noted that the lack of data specifically on family farming is a recurring concern. The following are issues for which family farming is of high importance:

A. Global Food and Nutrition Security

4. Based on above-mentioned definition, recent numbers by Lowder, Skoet & Singh² and FAO^{3,4,5}, show that the large majority of the world’s farms, over 90 percent of holdings are family farms. At least 500 million family farmers exist and contribute very strongly to the production of the world’s agricultural production, at least 56 percent⁶, if not over 80 percent⁷. Family farmers work between 60 and 85 percent of the land in all of the world’s regions, except for South America, where they work on 18 percent of agricultural land⁸. They also exhibit higher production efficiency per hectare than non-family farms⁹. Family farms are very diverse, ranging from very small holdings of less than one hectare that may contribute to the family’s subsistence livelihood strategy to very large

¹ FAO. 2013a. International Year of Family Farming 2014. Master Plan (final version). Accessed 17 June 2014 (http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/iyff/docs/Final_Master_Plan_IYFF_2014_30-05.pdf)

² Lowder, S., Skoet, J., & Singh, S. 2014. What is the total number of farms in the world, and what do we really know about farm size and farm land distributions? A Comprehensive look at national agricultural censuses. Rome: FAO. Accessed 17 June 2014 (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/019/i3729e/i3729e.pdf>)

³ FAO. 2014a. The State of Food and Agriculture 2014: Innovation in family farming. Rome: FAO.

⁴ FAO. 2014b. International Year of Family Farming Infographics. Accessed 27 May 2014 (<http://www.fao.org/resources/infographics/infographics-details/en/c/230925/>)

⁵ FAO 2014a and FAO 2014b use different methodologies to determine the % of family farms as well as the % of land farmed by them. FAO (2014a)’s numbers are based on the criteria of family ownership and predominance of family labor and based on a sample of 52 and 30 countries respectively. FAO (2014b) has a different approach, including national definitions, sole-holder criteria and using numbers on smallholder farmers as proxies for family farms. These numbers are based on a sample of 98 countries and territories for the % of family farmers and 99 countries and territories for the % of acreage held by family farmers.

⁶ FAO. 2014. International Year of Family Farming Infographics. Accessed 5 June 2014 (<http://www.fao.org/resources/infographics/infographics-details/en/c/230925/>).

⁷ FAO. 2014. The State of Food and Agriculture 2014: Innovation in family farming. Rome: FAO.

⁸ FAO. 2014. International Year of Family Farming Infographics. Accessed 27 May 2014 (<http://www.fao.org/resources/infographics/infographics-details/en/c/230925/>)

⁹ FAO. 2014. The State of Food and Agriculture 2014: Innovation in family farming. Rome: FAO.

holdings managed as sophisticated commercial enterprises; however 84 percent of all farms are smaller than two hectares¹⁰. These numbers clearly show that family and small-scale farming are inextricably linked to world food security.

5. According to the International Cooperation Centre of Agricultural Research for Development (CIRAD)¹¹, family farmers are globally responsible for over 90 percent of the world's cocoa, cotton and coffee production. In Brazil, according to the national definition, family farmers produce a variety of goods, including 70 percent of the country's cassava and beans¹². Due to the variety of food they produce, family farmers also strongly contribute to nutrition security. In addition to their contribution to nutrition, family farmers, including smallholders, could also help to improve food security if they were equipped with the means to lower post-harvest losses. Moreover, inadequate handling and storage can cause the loss of valuable micronutrients. In Africa alone, the quantity of grain lost each year, would have been enough to feed 48 million people¹³.

B. Sustainable Agricultural Production

6. Due to the amount of land farmed by family farmers (women and men), their practices also significantly affect the world's ecosystems and natural resources. Therefore, sustainable agricultural production can only be achieved globally, if family farmers are placed at the forefront.

7. As family farmers are managing large amounts of the world's terrain, they are confronted with soil and water degradation. On certain African soils, degradation is responsible for yield reductions of up to 40 percent while it is estimated to have lowered the productivity of Africa's soils by 8.2 percent on average¹⁴.

8. Agriculture is responsible for 70 percent of global freshwater withdrawals worldwide, and agricultural water use is expected to further increase by around 19 percent until 2050. Furthermore, climate change is projected to change both temperature and rainfall patterns, increasing the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events such as storms and droughts¹⁵.

9. Integrated farming systems, where various kinds of crops, fruit, vegetables and animal products are cultivated can be between four and ten times more productive than large-scale, monoculture operations. Farms using polyculture operations, in which multiple crops are grown in the same space, have yield increases of between 20 and 60 percent¹⁶. This is particularly interesting as small family farmers and traditional agricultural systems in developing countries are well known for their use of very diverse cultivars¹⁷.

C. Local Economies

10. On the economic side, family farming represents an opportunity to boost local economies, especially when combined with specific policies aimed at social protection and the well-being of communities. As a report by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) uncovered, smallholder farmer development

¹⁰ FAO. 2014. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2014: Innovation in family farming*. Rome: FAO.

¹¹ CIRAD. 2013. *Les agricultures familiales du monde*. Montpellier: CIRAD.

¹² Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development. nd. *Mais Alimentos. More Food A Family Farming Plan for Brazil*. Ministry of Agrarian Development.

¹³ The World Bank, National Resources Institute and FAO. *Missing Food: The Case of Postharvest Grain Losses in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2011

¹⁴ Nellemann, C., MacDevette, M., Manders, T., Eickhout, B., Svihus, B., Prins, A. G. & Kaltenborn, B. P. (Eds). February 2009. *The environmental food crisis – The environment's role in averting future food crises*. A UNEP rapid response assessment. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal

¹⁵ IPCC. 2007. *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

¹⁶ Rosset, P. M. 1999. *The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture in the Context of Global Trade Negotiations*. Policy Brief 4. Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy. Accessed June 17 2014 (<http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/246>)

¹⁷ Jarvis, D., et al. 2008. A global perspective of the richness and evenness of traditional crop-variety diversity maintained by farming communities. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 105:5326-5331.

stimulates local, rural business and job creation.¹⁸ Regarding investment in agriculture, the Committee on World Food Security's High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition also found that the majority of investments in smallholder agriculture are carried out by smallholder families.¹⁹

IV. The International Year of Family Farming

11. The International Year of Family Farming has its roots in an initiative launched by the World Rural Forum (WRF) in 2008. Inspired by the work of over 350 organizations from 60 countries in five continents, the 37th Session of the FAO Conference proposed that the United Nations declare 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming and at the 66th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 2014 was formally declared as the International Year of Family Farming.

12. FAO, in collaboration with governments, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IFAD, the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centres (CGIAR) and other relevant organizations, was invited to facilitate the implementation of the IYFF.

A. Key Objectives

13. The master plan at the core of the IYFF outlines the following four key objectives:

- 1) Support the development of policies conducive to sustainable development of family farming and encourage governments to establish the enabling environment (conducive policies; adequate legislation; participatory planning for policy dialogue; investments) for implementation;
- 2) Increase knowledge, communication and public awareness;
- 3) Reach a better understanding of family farming needs, potential and constraints in order to ensure technical support;
- 4) Create synergies for sustainability.

14. The International Steering Committee and the Secretariat of the Year conducted their activities based on above-mentioned objectives.

B. Key Activities to-date

Regional Dialogues

15. Regional dialogues were held in Asia, Europe, Latin America, Near East and North Africa, North America, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

16. What follows is a synthesis of key findings common to all the dialogues, highlighting policies, challenges and efforts to empower family farmers.

17. The definition launched in the master plan was acknowledged as being flexible enough to stimulate the discussion. The diversity in family farming was acknowledged and the discussion and adoption of criteria at country and regional levels was called for. FAO was asked to provide technical assistance and know-how at country level in the search for definitions and criteria. As a common theme, family farming is not defined only by its agricultural characteristics but is also a way of life centred on the sustainable use of natural resources, the respect of biodiversity and a strong linkage with local food habits and markets.

18. Family farmers are vital to eradicating hunger and poverty, achieving social cohesion, employment and the sustainable use of natural resources. Family farming has the potential to meet the rising global demand for food. There is consensus that family farming has the potential to increase food supply and improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable populations in rural areas.

¹⁸ IFAD & UNEP. 2013. Smallholders, food security, and the environment. Page: 11. IFAD: Rome. Accessed May 27 2014 (http://www.unep.org/pdf/SmallholderReport_WEB.pdf)

¹⁹ HLPE. 2013. Investing in smallholder agriculture for food security. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome. Accessed June 17 2014 (www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_225682.pdf)

However, rapid globalization of the food sector and threats from large-scale commercial farming, extractive industrial production, emerging environmental changes brought about by climate change, lack of access to markets, assets, inputs, technologies and extension services, and unfavourable policies limit family farmers to unleash their potential.

19. Establishing legal frameworks as well as pro-family farming policies, prioritizing family farming in broader macroeconomic policy, international trade, multilateral processes, creating multi-stakeholder national level platforms for family farming, creating sector specific policies and programmes which take into account the characteristics of the country are essential to empower family farmers.

20. Access to financing and investment resources through better engagement of existing financial institutions, credit instruments and bank procedures, the creation of new institutions or reinforcing existing ones with simplified lending procedures adapted to the realities of family farmers, developing insurance and guarantee facilities to reduce the risk of lending to agricultural operations, encouraging the development and expansion of rural micro-credit facilities as well as family farmers-centred financial institutions are of paramount importance.

21. Access to land and natural resources through guaranteeing access to land, facilitating land titling and securing land tenure, addition and/or amendment of laws in order to protect the rights of small tenants, putting an emphasis on the need for regulation on the use of communal land and pastures to prevent the ‘grabbing’ of land and water, implementing the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Land Tenure, Fisheries and Forests are vital to sustain the activities of family farmers.

22. Family farmers are often exposed to unfavourable market conditions, which include high costs for their inputs and low prices for their products. Countries must establish a marketing strategy for the sector that incorporates among others, the following strategies: (i) promotion of local markets; (ii) promotion of collective marketing to overcome restrictions of volume, reduction in costs and negotiation of better conditions; (iii) raising the value of family farming products (e.g. establish rules of origin, or create labels that differentiate their produce); and, (iv) improving logistical aspects, especially communication, storage and transport. This is to provide market access and integration into value chains.

23. There is a need to consider innovative types of research and extension institutions, which place family farmers at the centre and do not consider them as mere end-receivers of technological packages. Improved research and extension services are particularly needed to assist family farmers to adapt to the impact of climate change as they are a high risk population. It was noted that problems caused by the large number of dispersed family farms can be tackled through the development of strong producer organizations that group farmers together such as associations and cooperatives.

24. The important role played by women in family farming is not recognized in terms of income earned and asset ownership, despite their large work contribution on family farms. There is a need for information and awareness campaigns about women’s potential in family farm management, to provide better access to land, credit and technology services to women as men still have a greater advantage in accessing these services.

25. Youth are increasingly losing interest and abandoning family farming in search of jobs in urban areas or opportunities in other sectors. Access to adequate goods, services and job opportunities would convince more youth to stay closer to the family farm. Governments need to invest more in rural areas and in agriculture. There is a need to develop programs and projects that specifically target young farmers and provide them with privileged access to land, credit and technical knowledge.

26. Apart from the Regional Dialogues, the following IYFF key activities are currently planned:

- Global Dialogue is scheduled to take place on 30-31 October 2014 and will serve as the culminating event of the IYFF as it concludes a year-long policy dialogue process, initiated by the six Regional Dialogues.

- The development of Common Criteria for achieving definitions and typologies on family farming at national and regional level and the web-based knowledge platform on family farming are two important activities of the IYFF. The working group will include technical experts who are given the task of developing criteria and guidelines to support countries in establishing and characterizing clear family farming definitions and typologies at a national and regional level. The working group will deliver a compilation of definitions and methodologies to be used at country, regional and international level to characterize family farming; define common criteria and respective methodologies to adapt at national and regional level and provide recommendations for improved data collection at holding and household level.
- Two consultations through the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition on Family Farming are being conducted both of which will focus on the intersection of family farming, gender and youth.

27. In order to further mainstream family farming within FAO, work is ongoing to integrate this initiative to FAO's Strategic Framework as well as in the preparation for the International Year of Soils in 2015 and the post-2015 framework.

V. Suggested Action by the Committee

28. Based on the research carried out on the importance of family farming as well as on the outcome of the Regional dialogues, the following high importance key issues emerged:

- a) The lack of national definitions of family farming in most parts of the world impedes specific policies, programmes and effective strategies to address the challenges encountered by family farming. The lack of common criteria to be utilized for creating definitions and typologies on family farming at a national and regional level resulted in a limited availability of statistical data at a holding level.
- b) The importance of further developing key analysis and indicators to better assess the status and trends of different types of family and smallholders farmers.
- c) The diversity of family and small scale farms around the world and the fact that they are inextricably linked to world food and nutrition security and contribute strongly to food production both in the developed and the developing world. Highlighted their potential to be highly efficient in the use of a natural resource base to provide food and further ecosystem services.

29. The Committee is invited to:

- a) Recognize the importance of family farming for food and nutrition security, natural resource management and local economy as well as the need to develop and implement specific policies, programmes and effective strategies and partnerships by Member Nations;
- b) Recognize the importance of developing common criteria for achieving definitions and typologies of family farming and further developing key analyses and indicators to better assess the status and trends of different types of family farming.