



The Future of Family Farming: Empowerment and equal rights for Women and Youth

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To cultivate the next generation of family farmers, we must invest in women and youth.

The stereotype of the young male farmer has given way to the reality of an aging, female-fronted farming force. In the developing world, women make up 43 percent of the agricultural labor—and, in some countries, they make up 80 percent of agricultural labor. However, in some South American and European countries, rural young women are leaving the countryside in search of employment in urban centers leading to the masculinization of farming in these regions.

Women face many obstacles to productive farming. Compared to men, they have limited access to credit and lack control of family funds. In fact, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that only 10 percent of credit in sub-Saharan Africa is available to women. Female farmers also face scant educational opportunities and gender discrimination at markets. Without available funds and proper training, women are unable to make improvements to their farming methods and continue to suffer from low food yields. Melanne Verveer, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, FAO, emphasizes, "In many developing countries, women are the backbone of the economy. Yet women farmers do not have equal access to resources and this significantly limits their potential in enhancing productivity." But encouraging experiences can be found, such in Brazil, where women have joint title to land, as part of innovative land reform policies, giving them equal ownership of land with their male partners, whether they are married or not. According to FAO, providing female farmers access to the same resources as men could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 100-150 million people. And when women earn more and have better rights, they tend to invest more in the health and nutrition of their families.

Today's youth are tomorrow's family farmers, and maintaining interest in farming as a profession is vital to future food security. Youth make up roughly one fifth of the population of developing and emerging economies and face global unemployment levels from 10 to 28 percent. The number of young people of working age is increasing while this same group typically rejects careers in the agriculture and food system. But we can change that and cultivate the next generation of agricultural leaders—not just farmers, but food entrepreneurs, scientists, agronomists, extension agents, union and government leaders. Governments, particularly in developing countries, but also elsewhere need to invest in policies and practices that provide access to land, credit and banking services, education and knowledge, and technical skills for young farmers. And these governments need to ensure that young people have access to markets,

goods and service, employment opportunities, and leisure so that they want to stay on the farm.

Food Tank is excited to be collaborating with the FAO to promote 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). We look forward to participants highlighting current initiatives that work to empower female and youth farmers, and are interested to hear suggestions for improving livelihoods of female farmers and encouraging youth to pursue farming. Some questions to consider include:

1. What are some of the key challenges women and youth in agriculture are facing? For example, many rural areas in the developing world aren't stimulating places for youth to live and develop? How can we make rural areas more attractive to youth?
2. Please share any programs and initiatives you are leading/participating that are helping to strengthen the role of woman and youth in agriculture.
3. What measures can family farmers' organizations, governments, development organizations, the private sector take to ensure empowerment and equal rights of women and youth in agriculture?

We look forward to a lively and thought-provoking discussion. Thank you in advance for your contribution!

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