Nutrition education as a strategy to strengthen family farming households and improve people’s diets

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The United Nations General Assembly declared 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming, given its role on global food security and nutrition. In Latin America and the Caribbean, family farming systems may represent up to 80% of the economic production units and more than half of total natural food production in some countries, thus becoming the largest source of agriculture and rural employment. However, some of the poorest farmers still face significant socio-economic challenges which can contribute to problems of malnutrition. This is why the current aim is to promote a fairer and more balanced development, identifying opportunities and effective ways to support family farmers.

For this International Year, FAO has defined family farming as “a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labor, including both women’s and men’s. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, social and cultural functions” (FAO, International Year of Family Farming 2014: Master Plan).

**Nutrition education** is the process through which individuals and societies are empowered to voluntarily adopt healthy eating practices and lifestyles which respect local food habits and the natural environment, and result in improved nutrition and better health for the population.

When supported by a conducive food environment that puts healthy food choices within people’s reach, nutrition education can improve family eating practices, including the selection, purchase, preparation, intra-household distribution and use of food. Nutrition education can also contribute to crop diversification, promote the use of indigenous foods, and protect biodiversity and traditional culinary practices. Hence it has been recognized as a catalyst for enhancing the nutrition impact of food security and agricultural programs.

This is why, in the context of family farming, nutrition education has an enormous potential to improve the diets and nutrition of farming families, as well as of the general public who consume their produce.
Moreover, given increased availability and marketing of highly processed foods that are frequently of low nutritional value, nutrition education plays an important role in empowering consumers to make healthy food choices, including nutrient-rich, fresh and local foods.

The aim of this forum discussion is to identify potential action points and initiatives whereby nutrition education can improve the diet of family farmers and create demand for nutritious local produce among the general public, thus both generating income for farming households and enhancing the nutrition of the public.

We hope participants will share their contributions in response to the following questions:

1. **What are the existing national and regional programs which aim to improve the dietary quality and dietary diversity of farming families?**
   
   a. What educational and communication strategies have been used in these programs?
   
   b. What main constraints and best practices have been identified?
   
   c. What other strategies have potential?

2. **How can nutrition education increase the demand for local family farming produce with high nutritional value, and thus contribute to improving dietary diversity and to protecting traditional foods and the local food culture?**
   
   a. What are the existing programs in the region in this respect?
   
   b. What main constraints and best practices can you identify?
   
   c. What other strategies have potential?

This discussion is in line with the objectives of Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), a high-level intergovernmental meeting on nutrition jointly organized by FAO and WHO, to be held at FAO Headquarters in Rome, 19-21 November 2014. The expected ICN2 outcome documents are a political declaration and a framework for action. For more information please visit [www.fao.org/ICN2](http://www.fao.org/ICN2).

We encourage you to share your experiences and views on the issues, and we hope this discussion will be of great interest to all participants.

Thank you in advance for your contributions.

The facilitators

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