The Future of Family Farming: Providing Resources for Women and Young Farmers

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Food Tank is excited to be collaborating with the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization for the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). Through this discussion we hope to promote greater dialogue around family farming issues. We are interested in opening up a broader debate on impactful policies for rural communities and the need for investing in technologies and innovations that help agriculture become economically profitable, intellectually stimulating, and environmentally sustainable for young and female farmers.

The future of agriculture is in the hands of young people and women. But around the globe the average age of farmers is swelling as young people leave rural areas in search of a better life. Meanwhile, most often deep-rooted inequalities prevent female farmers from gaining equal rights to access land, inputs, and economic resources that will allow them to reach economic autonomy and farm more productively.

To address the root causes of these asymmetries, governments and learning institutions need to design and implement targeted affirmative policies for women and youth, that may secure their access and use of natural resources, as well as provide practical training, and teach marketing and entrepreneurial skills. Not only, but at the same time they too need to learn from family farmers traditional knowledge and practices. Reform and decentralize knowledge and learning institutes, including research and extension programmes, aiming to create spaces for farmer led innovation, co-creation of knowledge between farmers and scientists also is essential.

The changes envisaged shall not only provide economic opportunities for youth, but improve self esteem among young people in rural areas. By creating not only farmers, but food entrepreneurs, scientists, agronomists, extension agents, and business leaders, schools, governments, and international organizations can improve the health of future food systems. And agriculture doesn’t just need youth: youth need agriculture too. Youth make up roughly one fifth of the population in developing and emerging economies and face global unemployment levels from ten to 28 percent.

However, maintaining an interest in agriculture is impossible if youth continue to view rural life as boring, backwards and deprived from opportunities, thus resorting to migrating to the urban centers. If international organizations and governments want to see young people staying on the farm, they need to focus on providing the means and environment for entrepreneurship to flourish in the rural areas. Improving infrastructure and roads, and providing Internet and mobile phone reception, can foster more supportive and social rural communities. Better access to energy, communications, services and financing will enable entrepreneurs to start up their own activities.
Female farmers face common constraints. To support female farmers, governments and international organizations need to focus on addressing women's rights to access and use natural and economic resources. Approximately 70 percent of all farmers in the developing world are women. If access to new technology, training and resources is made available to these farmers, yields could increase by 20 to 30 percent and could reduce the number of hungry people in world by 100 to 150 million people. There is a need for information and awareness campaigns about the key role played and the potential contribution of women to family farm management and rural development as a whole. The challenge is to analyze the causes underlying this inequality and establish positive discrimination policies for women farmers.

Moreover, promoting the equal status of women can open doors to formal education in agricultural careers.

In this discussion we would like to invite you to share your experience on what can be done to make agriculture stimulating and profitable for young people. At the same time we are also looking for information about women and agriculture initiatives around the globe, along with strategies to promote equality for females working in the food system. Some questions to consider include:

1. **What role can schools and universities play in promoting agricultural careers to youth?** Please share any relevant programs you are aware of.

2. **What approaches are most successful in promoting the equality of female farmers?**

3. **What measures can development organizations and governments take to make rural areas more appealing for future farmers?**

4. **Please share any relevant case studies about empowering women and youth in agriculture to achieve better food security.**

We look forward to a dynamic and stimulating discussion and thank you in advance for your contribution!

_Danielle Nierenberg_
_President_
_Food Tank_