



# Family Farmers

*Feeding the world, caring for the earth*



**F**amily farming is inextricably linked to national and global food security. Both in developing and developed countries, family farming is the predominant form of agriculture in the food production sector. Family farmers carefully manage their lands to sustain remarkably high levels of productivity despite having less access to productive resources such as agricultural inputs and support (most research shows an inverse relationship between land size and productivity).

**F**amily farming preserves traditional food products, while contributing to a balanced diet and safeguarding the world's agro-biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources.

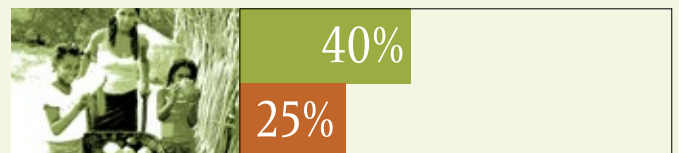
Family farmers are the custodians of a finely adapted understanding of local ecologies and land capabilities. Through local knowledge, they sustain productivity on often marginal lands, through complex and innovative land management techniques. As a result of the intimate knowledge they have of their land and their ability to sustainably manage diverse landscapes, family farmers are able to improve many ecosystem services.

**F**amily farming represents an opportunity to boost local economies, especially when combined with specific policies aimed at the social protection and well-being of communities.

Family farmers have strong economic links to the rural sector; they contribute strongly to employment, especially in developing countries where agriculture still employs the majority of the labour force. In addition, the incremental income generated by family farming is spent on housing, education, clothing etc. in the local non-farm economy.



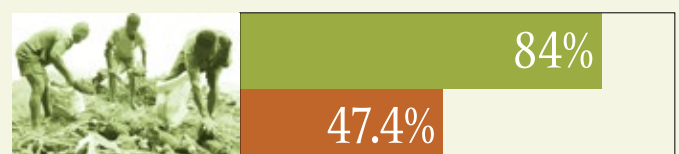
## Family Farming: agricultural production on share of land farmed



In Brazil, family farmers provide on average approximately 40 percent of the production of a selection of major crops working on less than 25 percent of the land.



In the United States, family farmers produce 84 percent of all produce – totalling US\$ 230 billion in sales, working on 78 percent of all farmland.



Family farmers in Fiji provide 84 percent of yam, rice, manioc, maize and bean production working on only 47.4 percent of the land.



## FAMILY FARMERS AROUND THE WORLD KEY FACTS AND FIGURES\*

- There are over 500 million family farms
- They make up over 98% of farming holdings
- They are responsible for at least 56% of agricultural production on 56% of the land

\*based on Census data from 91 countries

*Beyond absolute number of holdings, family farmers also work on a significant portion of the world's farming land.*

*Regional averages are: 85 percent in Asia; 62 percent in Africa; 83 percent in North and Central America, 68 percent in Europe and 18 percent in South America.*



## How to strengthen Family Farming?

**T**o realize the full potential of family farmers in eradicating hunger and ensuring food security, an enabling policy environment is necessary. This includes greater recognition of their multiple contributions, as well as an acknowledgment and reflection of these in national dialogues and policies. Fundamental first steps are for countries to articulate their national definitions of family farming, and collect data on the agricultural sector that recognizes and organizes farmers' contributions systematically.

At national level, there are a number of factors that are key for a successful development of family farming, such as: agro-ecological conditions and territorial characteristics; access to markets; access to land and natural resources; access to technology and extension services; access to finance; demographic, economic and socio-cultural conditions and availability of specialized education among others. Targeted agricultural, environmental and social policy interventions in support of family farmers are necessary in order to make tangible changes and sustainable improvements.

## SUSTAINABLE RICE PRODUCTION SYSTEMS AND FAMILY FARMERS

**More than a billion people depend on rice production for their livelihoods** and more than 3.5 billion people depend on rice for at least 20 percent of their daily calories. Family farms are the main source of rice production – especially in Asia. In rice production systems, food security and prosperity have long been associated with the availability and diversity of both rice and fish. Traditional rice-fish systems and modern adaptations of these systems produce higher yields of rice along with fish production. In addition, since use of agricultural chemicals is minimized, wild biodiversity can flourish. Rice fields therefore harbour a rich level of biodiversity- from birds to crabs to insects- and are considered to be one of the most successful tropical rainfed systems.



**F**amily farmers are a large and extremely diverse group; the definition of family farming varies throughout the world and must be flexible, according to cultural traditions and national criteria. Within this diversity, FAO views family farming as:

*“all family-based agricultural activities which are 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.”*

#### THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FAMILY FARMING

The United Nations declared 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in collaboration with Governments, International Development Agencies, farmers’ organizations and other relevant organizations of the United Nations system, as well as relevant non-governmental organizations, is facilitating its implementation with the following objectives:

1. Support the development of agricultural, environmental and social policies conducive to sustainable family farming.
2. Increase knowledge, communication and public awareness.
3. Attain better understanding of family farming needs, potential and constraints and ensure technical support.
4. Create synergies for sustainability.



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**

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of the United Nations

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**2014  
International Year of  
Family Farming**

[www.fao.org/family-farming-2014](http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014)

[www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/core-themes/theme/spi/en/](http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/core-themes/theme/spi/en/)

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