

Why a FAO definition¹ of family farming?

A working definition of family farming can help establish a common understanding and facilitate dialogue among diverse stakeholders in the context of the International Year.

Proposed FAO working definition of family farming for IYFF:

***Family Farming* (also *Family Agriculture*) 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 labor, including both women's and men's. The family and the farm are linked, coevolve and combine economic, environmental, reproductive, social and cultural functions.²**

A statistical definition of family farms is also needed to support efforts to assess the scale and extent of family farming in the world and to facilitate the collection of internationally comparable data to monitor this phenomenon over time.

Proposed FAO statistical definition of family farm for IYFF:

A family farm is an agricultural holding³ which is managed and operated by a household⁴ and where farm labor is largely supplied by that household.

¹ This definition was produced under the leadership of Eve Crowley, Martha Osorio, Anna Sakurai and Ana Paula De la O Campos with inputs from 11 technical divisions (AGP, ESA, ESS, EST, ESW, FIP, FOE, NRL, OEK, TCI, TCS), five decentralized offices (RAP, REU, RLC, RNE, SLM), CIRAD, the World Rural Forum, ASIA DHRRRA, Contag-Coprofam, Bioveristy International, and IFAD.

² Economic functions include production and employment. Environmental functions include soil enrichment, carbon sequestration, water purification, pest control, pollination and biodiversity enhancement.. Reproductive and social functions include childcare, nutrition, water and energy provisioning, education, health, social security, insurance and risk management. Cultural functions include transmission of identity, symbolic and religious values of resources and territories, knowledge and technologies.

³ "An agricultural holding is an economic unit of agricultural production under single management comprising all livestock kept and all land used wholly or partly for agricultural production purposes, without regard to title, legal form, or size." (*World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010, FAO Statistical Development Series 11*. FAO, Rome, 2005; paragraph 3.23).

⁴ "The concept of household is based on the arrangements made by persons, individually or in groups, for providing themselves with food or other essentials for living. A household may be either (a) a one-person household, that is to say, a person who makes provision for his or her own food or other essentials for living without combining with any other person to form part of a multi-person household, or (b) a multi-person household, that is to say, a group of two or more persons living together who make common provision for food or other essentials for living. The persons in the group may pool their incomes and may have

Additional criteria will be needed to permit measurable comparisons across contexts. The development of a more precise statistical definition of farm typologies is a matter for further work to ensure international comparability. However, these definitions do not aim to replace national definitions of family farming, which are usually country specific and adapted to particular social, historical and policy contexts.

Characteristics of Family Farming:

Overall picture

Family farming is one of the most predominant forms of agriculture worldwide, in both developing and developed countries. Diversity of national and regional contexts, in terms of agro-ecological conditions, territorial characteristics, infrastructure availability (access to markets, roads etc.), policy environment, and demographic, economic, social and cultural conditions, influences family farming structures, activities and functions, as well as livelihood strategies.

The sector comprises a wide spectrum of farm sizes and types. On one end of the spectrum are very large land holdings of several hundred hectares in high-income economies where farms can be easily cultivated by one or two family members with the use of labor-saving machinery and hired labor. On the other end of the spectrum in low-income economies, family farming usually consists of small holdings of a few hectares or less, often oriented towards subsistence with low marketable surplus.

a common budget; they may be related or unrelated persons or constitute a combination of persons both related and unrelated." (*Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses. Revision 2* . United Nations, New York, 2008; paragraph 1.448). Household is a well defined and internationally accepted statistical unit for data collection. In many but not all cases "household" coincides with "family".

Diversity of farms

Along this spectrum, individual family farms vary in terms of the activities they engage in, and the natural, physical, financial, social and human resources that they manage. They also differ according to the assets and resources available (land size and quality, water access, animal stock, infrastructure and mechanization, financial assets, etc.), who in the family manages these and how, whether they own or control the land or natural resources used, the type of contractual arrangements including renting and sharecropping, the scale of production, share of family labor utilized, extent and nature of wage labour employed, degree of market integration, distance of holdings from family residence, and standard of living. Different types of family farms usually face different constraints depending on the context/territory in which they operate and therefore have different policy needs.

Diversity of farm families

Family farming relies upon family members with different labour power, skills, capacities, opportunities and constraints, which vary in part depending upon gender and age. These characteristics influence intra-household relations, which in turn influence the distribution of resources, roles and responsibilities. As each family member and the family itself changes, intra-household relations and dynamics evolve.⁵ Because many decision-making processes pertaining to the type and nature of production, consumption, investment and accumulation are confined to the family, sensitivity to intra-household characteristics, relationships and dynamics including those of age and gender, are important in policy-making for family farming.

⁵ For example, morbidity, mortality, fertility and migration (but also marriage and divorce) may lead to shifts in age-sex structure and dependency patterns which can have profound effects on production, consumption, and resilience.

Strategies and Functions

In family farming, agriculture (in its broad sense) is an important source of family income, food supply and consumption, and a critical foundation for family farmers' livelihoods. However, to complement the family income or reduce risks, family farmers often diversify their portfolio of activities, participating in farm and non-farm activities or migrating. The livelihood strategies, as well as the decisions pertaining to investments on the family farm and degree and nature of market integration (local, national or international) are influenced by the family farms' characteristics and the context in which they operate.

In performing economic, social, cultural, environmental and reproductive functions, family farming is also often a means of maintaining family patrimony, cultural heritage, territories, landscapes, and communities. As a result, the motivations of family farmers often go far beyond profit maximization, to encompass other social, cultural and ecological motives.

Similarly, the sustainability of family farming, including its resilience and ability to respond to changing contexts, depends upon its economic viability, environmental stewardship, and the intergenerational enhancement of knowledge, traditions, practices, resources, institutions, and social identity. Policies and institutions also influence the "sustainability of family farming". They can determine whether family farming is a sector for the poor and those without other alternatives or one which supports upward mobility, economic prosperity and enhanced social and environmental well-being, both in and out of farming.

Advantages

The advantage of family farming is that family workers (in contrast to hired workers) have a strong incentive "to elicit conscientious work efforts for the sake of their own families' well-

being”.⁶ Because family farmers often have intergenerational bonds with the holdings they work, their production also frequently provides continued ecosystem services and care for the natural resource base. Because of this, family farming is particularly well suited to holdings or enterprises characterized by a highly diverse set of economic activities and mosaic type landscapes, in which the supervision and knowledge required for numerous small and on-the-spot production management decisions is most efficiently and cost effectively devolved to family workers.⁷

Limitations

In developing countries, these lower supervision costs make the family farming sector relatively efficient in terms of agricultural, fisheries, forestry and land productivity. However, the number of economically active family members limits the scale of production unless families have access to mechanization or are organized into producer organizations and cooperatives. Family farms are often poor because they have limited bargaining power and capacity to defend their interests in markets. Their response to market incentives is often also constrained by the limited market and technical opportunities available to them. Because family farms combine production and consumption objectives, the relatively high proportion of basic consumption within the budget of poor families can also constrain their responsiveness to markets incentives.

What FAO seeks to achieve in the International Year:

Due to its predominance and advantages, family farming can have a significant role to play in feeding the world, eradicating poverty, ensuring the sustainable management of natural

⁶ Hayami and Otsuka, 1993 in Hayami, Y (2010) ‘Plantation Agriculture,’ Chapter 64 in R.E. Evenson, P. Pingali (eds.) *Handbook of Agricultural Economics: Agricultural Development: Farm Policies and Regional Development*, volume 4, pp. 3307-3309

⁷ Hayami, Y. (2010) ‘Plantation Agriculture,’ Chapter 64 in R.E. Evenson, P. Pingali (eds.) *Handbook of Agricultural Economics: Agricultural Development: Farm Policies and Regional Development*, volume 4, pp. 3307-3309

resources and ecosystem services and preserving local cultural heritage. Family farming in low-income economies is often an occupation of last resort, but under the right conditions, could become a country's backbone of both rural development and national economic growth. The International Year supports family farmers by working with all stakeholders to obtain better rural and agricultural support policies and to identify new and better ways to enable them to enhance their prosperity, sustainability and freedom to achieve their own aspirations for a better future.