



# Farmer Field Schools

Farmer Field Schools (FFS) is an interactive and participatory *learning by doing* approach. Participants enhance their understanding of agro-ecosystems, which leads to production systems that are more resilient in local conditions and optimize the use of available resources. FFS aim to improve farmers' livelihoods and recognize their role as innovators and guardians of natural environments. FFS offer farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, foresters and their communities a place where they can meet, discuss and make practical experiments.

## What we do

FAO provides technical advice and support on developing FFS programmes to Ministries, national extension and advisory services, farmer organizations, NGOs, research institutions and the private sector worldwide. It helps governments to develop national FFS strategies and formulate legislation and policies that promote and enable sustainable agriculture and food systems and empower farmers.

For example, in June 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Viet Nam issued a directive to support a Programme on Strengthening the Application of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in Crop Production, using FFS as a platform. In Burundi, a strategy to harmonize and institutionalize FFS was approved in 2015. The approach will be mainstreamed to the Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen capacity and ensure the programme's sustainability. Burkina Faso conducts about 1500 FFS a year on government budget.

FAO also provides support for project development, technical backstopping, evaluations, workshops and training events. FFS field activities facilitate the exchange of information.

With the spread of the FFS approach, FAO is now taking on the role of lead facilitator in the dissemination of knowledge. The new Global FFS Platform provides



a gateway to existing documentation, a space for active exchange and learning, and a roster of FFS professionals worldwide. The "Farmer Field School Guidance Document – planning for quality programmes" (2016) is the reference guide for designing quality FFS. FAO is working in different regions and countries, and in collaboration with its country offices and partners – NGOs, farmers associations, facilitator networks, donors and the private sector –, to promote quality FFS programmes.

FAO has facilitated the creation of regional **networks of FFS practitioners** to share experiences, provide expertise through South-South Cooperation, and support policy formulation and dialogue.

**Farmer Field Schools enable change** as they have significant impact at community and policy levels. The experiences farmers gain through FFS allow them

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to increase yields and income sustainably. Farmers also improve their analytical, decision-making and communication skills. Typically, a FFS includes:

- regular observation of the current crop, animal, fishery or forestry throughout a cropping or reproductive cycle;
- evaluation and introduction of more sustainable production practices (including post-harvest and storage operations) building on local knowledge;
- testing and adapting new practices to the local context.

FFS activities are field based, include experimentation to solve problems, reflecting a specific local context. In a typical FFS, a group of producers meet regularly over the production cycle in a local field setting, under the guidance of a trained facilitator. The FFS process creates space for interacting among group members, sharing ideas, learning from each other and

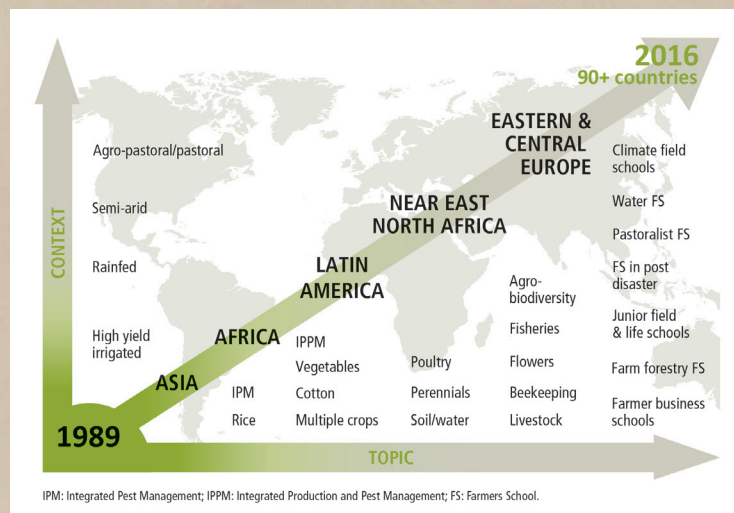
identifying other topics of interest. FFS alumni often feel more confident, empowered and better able to solve problems. It often brings about social change by strengthening the sense of community, reducing tensions, and improving women's self-confidence.

For example, women's groups in Balochistan, Pakistan participated in integrated kitchen-garden FFS. They appreciated the hands-on learning experience, the knowledge and new skills acquired. Now, their kitchen gardens improve the food and nutrition security of their families and help them to generate some cash income.

There is a strong demand for FFS in countries worldwide. FAO continues to use FFS for an increasing number of technical areas and as an important delivery mechanism for its Strategic Programmes on sustainable agriculture, rural poverty reduction and resilience, and its Regional Initiatives in Asia, Near East and Africa.

## Understanding the Context

In 1989, FAO pioneered the FFS approach on integrated pest management in rice production in Asia. Since then, FFS programmes have been established in over 90 countries. They offer farmers the possibility to strengthen their skills in a large number of areas, such as soil health, crop production, underutilized species, integrated pest management, bee keeping, pastoralism, seed systems, climate resilient agriculture, nutrition, conflict prevention and business management. The range of topics is constantly growing and adapting to needs, and a growing number of countries benefit from FAO's expertise when integrating FFS into their agricultural development programmes.



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### MORE INFORMATION

[www.fao.org/farmer-field-schools](http://www.fao.org/farmer-field-schools)