



International Year of Family Farming in the Caribbean



The United Nations has named 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). This theme provides an opportunity for Caribbean governments, institutions, organizations, and communities to highlight the important role that family farmers play in feeding their nations and contributing to the economic development of their countries.

Globally, two major farming structures are generally identified: (i) large-scale commercial agriculture, and (ii) small-scale production or “family farming”. For the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), family farming is understood to include crop, livestock, forestry, fishery and aquaculture producers who have the following characteristics: limited access to land and capital resources; use predominantly family labour with the head of the household participating directly in the production process; and the family farm activity is the main source of income for the family.

In developed and developing countries alike, family farms are the main producers of food consumed locally and are the most important contributors to food security.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, family farming accounts for more than 80% of agricultural production and generates more than 50% of agricultural employment. In addition to being a major supplier of food and employment opportunities, family farms serve as social safety nets, preserve and enhance the culture, skills and traditions of local communities, and contribute to the conservation of plant and animal species.

In the framework of the UN declaration of 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), the FAO, in collaboration with the World Rural Forum (WRF), the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) and the World Farmers’ Organisation (WFO), held the first *Regional Dialogue on Family Farming in Latin America and the Caribbean* in Santiago, Chile, on October 30-31, 2013. The objective was to improve the understanding of the role of

family farming in each country and sub-region, as well as to define the main regional issues that should be addressed during the IYFF.

Eight agriculturists from the Caribbean attended the Regional Dialogue in Chile and reported that the challenges faced by family farms across the region are very similar. They cited four critical areas that need to be addressed: (i) lack of an institutional framework designed to guide the development of family farming, (ii) lack of appreciation and undervaluing of the contribution of family farming by society and governments, (iii) weak and uncoordinated economic, technology, social and environmental policies supporting family farm development, and (iv) lack of public policies to encourage youth and women to remain and work in rural areas.

On the basis of the results and experience of the Family Farming Dialogue in Chile, FAO in collaboration with Caribbean Farmers Network (CAFAN), agreed that a Caribbean Family Farming working group should be formed to serve as a catalyst to develop and implement an agenda to promote increased recognition and development of family farms in the Caribbean region. The institutional membership of the working group is: FAO, CAFAN, Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), The University of the West Indies (UWI), Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). After two recent meetings of the working group it has been agreed to initiate work in the following five thematic areas: a) Public Policy to support family farming technology development, extension, and investment; b) Information and Communication systems to facilitate the collection of data and preparation of analysis and publications on family farming; c) Succession planning to promote an increase of youth and women in family farming; d) business and economic planning and analysis for enterprise development; and e) sustainable development of family farms emphasising building resilience and reducing risk.

The small farmer in the Caribbean is most often a male ranging from 41-54 years of age, producing crops using low productivity systems, and farming less than two hectares of land. Produce is marketed through many outlets but mainly in open markets. Small farmers are considered high risk and thus they have limited access to credit. This is reinforced by the fact that many Caribbean farmers do not keep records and as a result they are generally unable to evaluate the financial viability of their enterprises.

The Caribbean Family Farming working group is committed to the promotion of family farm development. This means implementing actions that enable family farms to increase their adoption of improved systems of production and to have increased access to markets.