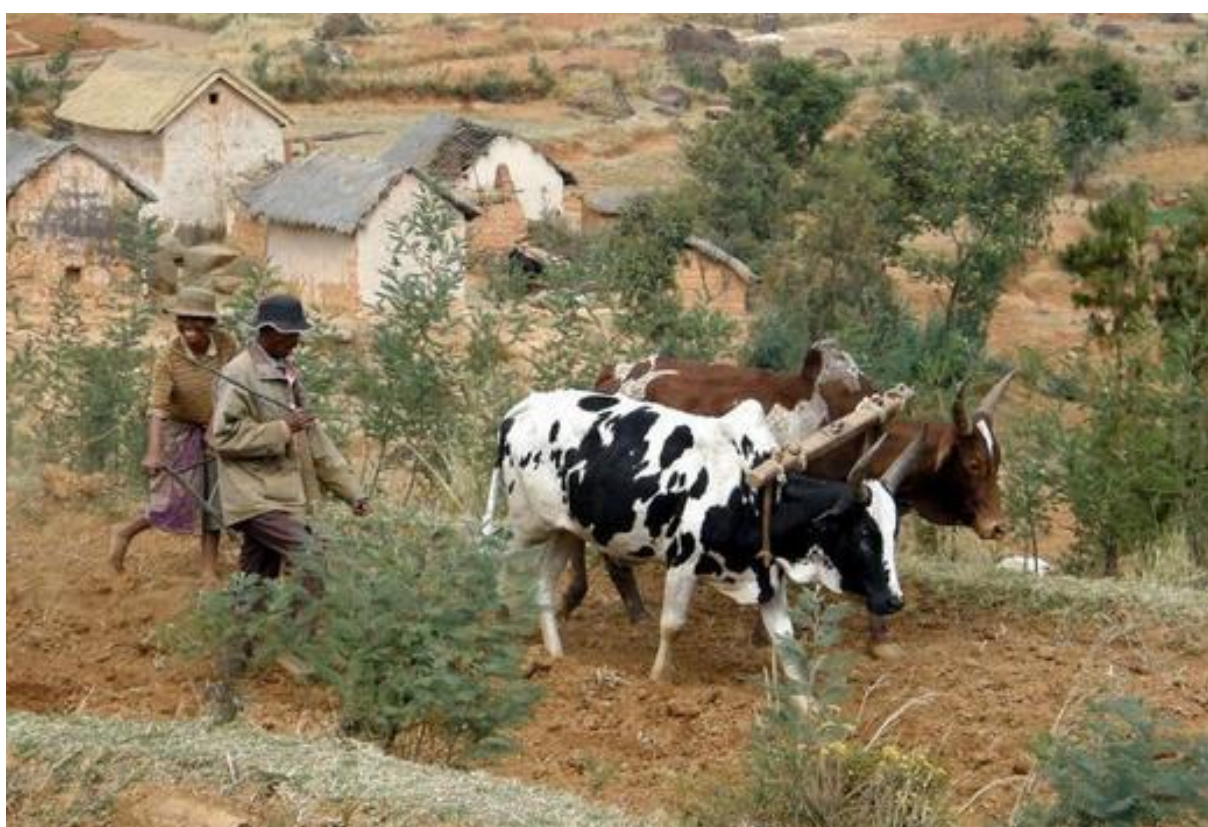


Family farming



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CIRAD, UMR ART-DEV



Content

- Context and issues..... 3
 - A majority presence in southern countries..... 3
 - How can we characterize family farming? 3
- What’s CIRAD doing?..... 4
 - Creating jobs and alleviating poverty..... 4
 - Guaranteeing food security..... 4
 - Reconciling production and the environment 4
 - Making optimum use of rural territories..... 4
 - Addressing health risks..... 5
 - Mitigating climate change 5
 - Fostering the energy shift 5
 - Favouring solidarity..... 5
- Resources 6
 - Books and documents 6
 - Scientific websites 6
 - Science for all 6

Report compiled for the 2014 Paris International Agricultural Fair.

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Context and issues

In today's world, some 2.6 billion people produce more than 70% of the world's food on more than 500 million farms. By 2050, agriculture will have to feed 9 billion people. What role will family farming play then? To answer that question, it is important to start by establishing a definition.

A majority presence in southern countries

Family farming provides jobs for 40% of workers worldwide, but:

- fewer than 5% of workers in North America and Europe,
- 59% in China,
- 53% in India,
- 53% in Africa.

How can we characterize family farming?

To characterize family farms, a first possibility would be to look at farm size. For the 81 countries for which data are available:

- 72% of farms use less than 1 hectare,
- 85% have less than 2 hectares,
- 94% less than 5 hectares.
- However, size is too dependent on local and national factors.
- For research purposes, it is better to take account of how farms operate. In this respect, a family farm is above all a farm on which:
 - only family members work full time: they are not linked by salary, but by domestic ties. Work forges strong links between the family and the farm.
 - part of what is produced is consumed by the family itself: family farms do supply markets, but domestic consumption is also a result of the work put in.
 - capital is family-held: it is inseparable from what the family owns.

Family farms occupy a wide range of environments, landscapes and territories: they thus have considerable capacity to adapt, thanks to the families' knowledge of their environment, notably by making use of fragile areas that are unsuitable for industrialized farming.

What's CIRAD doing?

For CIRAD, as an agricultural research organization working for and with southern countries, improving production conditions and living standards for family farms is a priority.

Improving production conditions and living standards for farmers in southern countries in all their many technical, organizational, social and economic facets is CIRAD's primary challenge and main priority. From laboratory to field, through its research platforms in partnership, it works to help producers, different stakeholders and public decision-makers adapt to change. Family farming lies at the heart of eight major challenges for research.

Creating jobs and alleviating poverty



By 2025, 330 million young people in Africa and 570 million in southern Asia will be arriving on the job market. However, family farming is finding it difficult to attract young people, who prefer urban jobs and lifestyles, and decision-makers, who would rather concentrate on urban policy and agribusiness.

Maintaining agricultural employment is crucial for these regions, which are currently the poorest and most rural on Earth.

Guaranteeing food security

Throughout history, family farms have managed to adapt what they produce to the demand for food from mankind. However, industrial farming and increasingly globalized distribution can sometimes destabilize family farms as a result of land grabbing and low prices.

Even now, the huge diversity of family farms means they can offer quality local food solutions in every type of environment.

Reconciling production and the environment

Family farms are currently having to cope with a growing shortage of land and water and a reduction in biodiversity and soil fertility. For the most part, they manage their resources sustainably, thanks to the farmers' know-how. However, because there are so many of them, family farms can also have an adverse effect on the environment if they do not have access to modern technology, if public policy is inappropriate or if population pressure on resources is too high.

With the support of appropriate public policy, family farms can also manage their environments and natural resources sustainably.

Making optimum use of rural territories

By clearing and planting land, modelling landscapes, moving their herds around or selling their products, family farmers contribute to territorial dynamics. With the development of towns and of industry, family farms are losing their influence on land use, which is tending to become more uniform and artificial.

From arid zones to city centres, research can help family farmers cope with an increasingly industrialized, urban world, so as to develop their land sustainably and pass on their farms to their children.

Addressing health risks



Thanks to their experience and comprehensive knowledge of their environment and their wide range of production techniques tailored to local conditions, family farmers have developed crop pest and animal disease control strategies. However, in some cases, they are more vulnerable than agro-industry, for want of information or capital.

Their know-how is a valuable asset. Improving their access to information and new technologies could help in setting up more effective observatories and surveillance and control networks.

Mitigating climate change

Family farming has less of an impact than industrial farming in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, soil erosion, water consumption and biodiversity shrinkage. However, they still have a role to play in mitigating climate change.

Research can help family farms switch to so-called "climate-smart" methods, by working with them to develop techniques that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, particularly agro-ecological techniques.

Fostering the energy shift

Family farms need to prepare for the expected exhaustion of fossil fuel supplies, and they are concentrated in zones where access to electricity, diesel and gas is already difficult. Demand for agrifuels is an opportunity for smallholders, but generates increased competition for land use.

The aim is to maintain or design production systems which, when balanced, generally work by limiting their use of external energy.

Favouring solidarity



In the absence of public solidarity, family solidarity is a major factor in ensuring the economic and food security of households. However, family structures are often patriarchal and dependents are poorly paid. While families provide security, they also trap individuals in a relationship based on dominance and hamper individual dreams of greater freedom and independence.

Public social aid programmes can trigger productive initiatives and generate wealth.

Resources

Books and documents



- *Évaluer et renforcer les capacités d'adaptation des agriculteurs familiaux : les populations forestières de l'Est malgache face aux mesures de conservation*, Toillier A., Quae, 2018.
- *Processus d'innovation et résilience des exploitations agricoles à Madagascar*, E. Penot (ed.), L'Harmattan, 2016.
- *A new emerging rural world: An overview of rural change in Africa* (Second, revised and supplemented edition), D. Pesche, B. Losch, J. Imbernon (eds), NEPAD-CIRAD, 2016. [Web]
- *Diversité des agricultures familiales*, P.M. Bosc, J.M. Sourisseau, P. Bonnal, P. Gasselin, E. Valette, J.F. Bélières (ed.), Quae, 2015.
- Conservation agriculture: an innovation faced with family farming constraints, Patrick Dugué, Patrice Djamen Nana, Guy Faure et Pierre-Yves Le Gal (ed.), *Cahiers Agricultures*, Special issue, 24, 2015. [Web]
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- Family farming facing forest, *Bois et forêts des tropiques*, Special issue, 319, 2014. [Web]
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- Appropriations foncières et modèles agricoles, Perinne Burnod, Jean-Philippe Tonneau (ed.), *Cahiers Agricultures*, Special issue, 22, 2013. [Web]
- Riz et rizicultures : innovations paysannes et dynamiques scientifiques, Nour Ahmadi, Jean-Yves Jamin, Patricio Mendez del Villar, *Cahiers Agricultures*, Special issue, 22, 2013. [Web]
- *Investing in smallholder agriculture for food security*, Committee on World Food Security, Rome, 2013. [PDF]
- *Structural transformation and rural change revisited : challenges for late developing countries in a globalizing world*, B. Losch, S. Fréguin-Gresh, E. T. White, World Bank, 2012. [PDF]
- *La sécurisation alimentaire en Afrique : enjeux, controverses et modalités*, Sandrine Dury, Pierre Janin (éd.), *Cahiers Agricultures*, Special issue, 21, 2012. [Web]

Scientific websites

- [Scientific websites on family farming](#)
- CIRAD is a partner of the [Family Farming Knowledge Platform](#)

Science for all

[Resources for the general public](#) (Reports, brochures, etc.)