

# FAMILY FARMING TO BOLSTER HUMAN KNOWHOW AND RESOURCES

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With good reason, 2014 was declared the International Year of Family Farming by FAO. Involving nearly 2.6 billion people, or 40% of the world's population, this form of agriculture is the primary source of employment at global level. Accounting for 500 million of the world's farms, family farms produce about 60% of global agricultural output and represent 80% of the total value of food production (FAO, 2014a). These figures alone testify to its importance.

Family farming is a means of organizing agricultural production, characterized on the one hand by strong operational links between families and production units, and on the other, by predominant reliance on family labour. This type of farming is distinct from industrial agriculture, which is marked by its strong financialization and complete separation of labour and capital. While agribusiness is currently booming, its weight in global terms can in no way be compared with that of family farming, which remains the dominant form of agriculture. Also noteworthy is the development of an intermediary form, landowner farming, which differs from the model of family farming in that it mainly uses non-family salaried labour.

A common principle of uniqueness shared by ordinary farming and family farming conceals a wide diversity of forms of family farming that are closely linked to the regional or local context in which they are located. In this respect, family farming is a reflection of the social organization and values that prevail in the places where it is practised. For example, family-run structures that vary widely from one region of the world to another leave their mark on the technical and economic operation of those production units. The rationales that underlie such operations are very often far removed from the economic motivation of a business attempting to maximize its profit in the short and medium term. They are hard to grasp for anyone not familiar with the family system of production and decision-making. Paradoxically,

the result is widespread misunderstanding of this type of agriculture, including in countries where it exists. Standard statistical classification, by size of farm and the nature and volume of production, does not adequately convey their impact. This fact is too often ignored, even though it should be the primary factor to consider when developing policies that target this type of agriculture (CIHEAM-FAO-CIRAD, 2016).

Family farming is predominant in the Mediterranean region, where it still strongly conditions socio-demographic and territorial equilibrium. In a study exploring the issue of waste in the Mediterranean, attention must be given to family farming as a source of employment, an opportunity for inclusive development and an incubator for rural and agricultural knowhow. Yet although it represents an important resource for addressing the region's economic, social and environmental challenges, this type of farming is particularly vulnerable to threats, especially in the east and south of the Mediterranean. With varying degrees of proximity to the swathe of political crises stretching from Syria to the Maghreb, the countries of the region are seeing their economic development hampered, with high unemployment and the dual afflictions of land and water insecurity that are partly linked to climate change – very prevalent in this part of the world. Such factors of social, economic and environmental vulnerability have an impact on economic activities and communities, first and foremost on family farming, whose knowhow and knowledge, either real or potential, is wasted.

In this chapter, we first attempt to analyse the characteristic features of Mediterranean family farms, revealing their importance compared with other forms of agriculture. We go on to describe the challenges that they are or will be facing, and their strengths in helping to address these (in terms of food security, protection of the environment, fighting poverty, underemployment and social and territorial inequalities). In conclusion, we question the agricultural policies set in place by different countries in the Mediterranean region and discuss some that should be implemented. In this regard, special attention should be paid to women and young people, whose potential is still largely untapped, but who could become key players in agricultural and rural development. Such an approach involves reformulating and reinvigorating state intervention in rural areas, but also strengthening producer organizations that encourage the spread of good practices and knowledge, acting as a communication conduit between the public authorities and the most vulnerable family farms, so as to maximize their potential and productivity.

## The importance of family farming in the Mediterranean

Although there are undeniable similarities between agriculture in the north and south of the Mediterranean region, for the purposes of analysis, Mediterranean countries that are members of the European Union (EU) must be considered separately, since the effects of the common agricultural policy (CAP) are determining factors for this group of nations. Family farming is by far the dominant form here, especially in comparison with countries of northern Europe. According to the agricultural

census of 2010, family farms in southern Europe prevail both in terms of numbers (12.2 million, accounting for 97% of total farms) and in terms of their contribution to agricultural employment (86.2% of the regular agricultural labour force). These ratios are respectively 94% and 83% taking an average for the EU with 15 member states – before the entry of the new member countries from Central and Eastern Europe – clearly illustrating the distinct nature of the Mediterranean countries (FAO, 2013). Family farming is also predominant in terms of agricultural surface area, but to a lesser extent: while it accounts for 80% of agricultural surface area in Italy, the proportion is 70% in Greece and Portugal, 60% in Spain and 40% in France (FAO, 2013). These figures clearly show the coexistence, alongside family farming, of vast production units, comprising agribusiness or landowner agriculture.

From the outset, the CAP identified family farming as the model for development of European agriculture. Price support (border protection, aid for exports, supply management) enabled considerable development and modernization of farms, leading to a concentration of land ownership and a rural exodus, without compromising their family-run character. Then, gradually a modernized model of family farming began to emerge, which adopted business rationales while retaining the fundamental link between the household and production unit. Starting in 1992, CAP reforms moved towards dismantling price support and supply management in favour of direct income support based on agricultural surface area and linked to environmental criteria (greening). This development within the CAP, based on the liberal principle of making productive decisions subject to market signals (prices) – dictated by the demands of the rules of international trade (World Trade Organization) – has led to increased concentration of production units and the accelerated development of non-family forms of agriculture, which now account for 60% of agricultural surface area in a country like France.

The Mediterranean part of the EU has been less affected by this process. Examples include Italy, where the model of modernized family farming is still widely predominant, or Greece, where the existence of family farms has helped to cushion the impact of the economic crisis by offering a living and jobs to large numbers of unemployed young people and city dwellers who have returned to the land. The strength of Mediterranean family farming in the EU lies in the fact that it has been able to retain a social purpose and assign this an economic value: short supply circuits, recognized quality products that are rooted in territories and often linked to the Mediterranean diet, organic agriculture, etc. It has also taken advantage of opportunities offered by certain provisions of the CAP and their implementation at national level, in favour of less favoured areas and producer or rural development organizations. New demand by a growing number of consumers seeking local, quality products is strengthening this momentum, to the point of offering an alternative to a shift towards the chemical intensification and financialization of agriculture. Family farms that have not embarked on this latter path are currently the most vulnerable within the EU, and are the most seriously threatened with disappearance due to competition from landowner agriculture and agribusiness.

In southern and eastern countries of the Mediterranean, family farming has not benefited from price support, as it has done within the EU. As large-scale agricultural importers, these countries are generally more concerned about access to cheap food for urban populations than about the revenues of local producers, and for this reason they strongly restrict the extent of protection of agricultural products at their borders. Depending on the the countries under consideration, small-scale family farms receive varying degrees of attention. Here, it is worth mentioning the Green Morocco Plan, one of whose pillars focuses on support for vulnerable agricultural areas and small-scale units of family-run production, as part of projects with a strong territorial dimension. Likewise, the Algerian policy of rural renewal favours territorial approaches in the form of local development projects, whose impacts can be beneficial to small-scale family farming. The land tenure situation of these countries is also very different from that of EU member states. Their land tenure systems are still strongly influenced by the dual legacy of the Ottoman Empire and measures taken after decolonization. They are characterized by the strong grip of state control and by the complexity and variety of land tenure status bequeathed by history, which is the cause of substantial inequality in land distribution.

Family farming in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region represents a reservoir of jobs and labour, often employing more than 10% of the total population: 30% of the active workforce is employed in agriculture in Egypt, 40% in Morocco and 20% in Algeria and Tunisia (FAO, 2014b). Mostly practised on small suace areas, it easily dominates in terms of numbers of farms (compared with large landowner estates or industrial farms), but much less so in terms of agricultural surface area. In Egypt, small-scale family farms of fewer than 5 hectares account for 98.2% of total farms, but only occupy 70.7% of agricultural surface area. In Algeria, the figures are respectively 55.4% and 11.3%, in Tunisia, 53.5% and 10.9%, and in Morocco, 69.8% and 23.9% (FAO, 2014b). This observation, however, should be tempered by the fact that figures on agricultural land use fail to convey the use of free range grazing areas by small ruminants, which represent an important activity for family farming in the Mediterranean. And they say nothing about non-agricultural surface areas that supply food products which can be sold in addition to specifically agricultural production (gathering wild food plants, aromatic or medicinal plants, hunting, collecting non-timber forest products).

So there is a real agricultural dichotomy here, with, on the one hand, large landowner estates or agro-business farms that are firmly linked to national and international markets, and, on the other, small-scale family farms that are poorly connected to markets, and which are becoming increasingly fragmented due to the system of intergenerational inheritance, with a high level of poverty. In Egypt, for example, 83% of the very poor and 63% of the poor are concentrated in agricultural areas of Upper Egypt (Ghanem, 2014). Naturally, these different forms of agriculture are not isolated from one another. They interact, along with the flow of labour or products. Such exchanges are sometimes actively encouraged, particularly by the Green Morocco Plan, which promotes the aggregation of small-scale producers around a large-scale farm. The case of Turkey should be singled out. An important agricultural country, it has the budget to implement an agricultural policy that adopts certain

features of the European CAP: progressive dismantling of border protection to make way for direct aid to producers' revenues, support measures for certain sectors, crop insurance programmes, etc. Although marked by substantial disparity in land distribution – 79% of farms have fewer than 10 hectares of land and only cover 34% of agricultural surface area (OECD, 2012) – family farming has strong development potential, not least because the country is the only one in the region where climate change could have a beneficial effect, allowing the cultivation of new land at higher altitudes.

## Challenges and strengths of family farming in the Mediterranean

### Multiple and varied challenges

As previously mentioned, the first challenge facing family farming in the Mediterranean lies in the political crises and conflicts experienced by a number of countries, which directly affect the daily lives of people, including farmers. More generally, the poor economic growth of many Mediterranean countries does not allow them to offer an effective framework for developing family farming. These considerations also apply, albeit to a lesser degree, to Mediterranean countries in the EU, which are similarly suffering the effects of a major economic crisis.

*Access to resources and lack of recognition.* To these challenges, which are strictly speaking external to the agriculture sector, should be added others that are more directly linked to its internal operations, starting with access to resources. Aside from the disadvantage that it suffers in terms of land, family farming must contend with the unequal distribution of water resources, which goes hand in hand with inequality of land distribution, especially in irrigated areas. Access to capital, and especially formal credit, poses a major challenge. The share of credit allocated to the agriculture sector in percentage of agricultural GDP is 27.5% in Tunisia, 14.2% in Algeria, 7.9% in Egypt and 7.4% in Morocco, while that of credit allocated to the private sector in percentage of total GDP in the same countries ranges between 30% and 65% (FAO, 2014b): loans to agriculture are clearly not on a par with the sector's contribution to national economies. If one adds that the loans granted are mainly given to large-scale farms, the extent of the problems encountered by family farming in financing its activities becomes even clearer. It should be noted that the history of land management in the EU, coupled with the effects of the CAP, have combined to significantly attenuate constraints to accessing resources for family farming in Mediterranean countries of the EU. Poor access to resources and lack of financial means are also related to scant recognition of family farming in countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, where this activity is often regarded as informal and archaic. This lack of social recognition is compounded by lack of judicial recognition, with heads of farming families and agricultural workers on family farms frequently having no legal status. Very often, land titles do not exist and land use rights are confused. The strong state of precariousness that results acts as a brake on capacities for innovation and risk-taking in family farming – factors which are essential if farmers are to adapt to climate change. The Mediterranean basin is one

of the areas on the planet that will be worst affected by global warming. Market access is also difficult for family farms which, taken individually, are of low economic weight. With weak resources that do not enable them to invest in exploring remunerative markets, small-scale farmers are often prisoners of trade circuits that give them limited negotiating power with buyers of their products. They receive little benefit from training and extension services, which struggle to reach them, and they remain cut off from sources of scientific, technical and economic information. They must constantly juggle between the food requirements of their families, steering them towards self-sufficiency, and core cash flow needs, which force them to sell their output for low prices. Ultimately, very often neither of these needs is adequately covered, with all the consequences in terms of poverty and malnutrition that this entails.

*The issue of succession for family farms.* One challenge with worrying implications for the future is that of ageing heads of family farms, and their renewal. In countries of southern Europe, 64% of farms of fewer than 5 hectares are held by farmers of more than 55 years-of-age. This ratio becomes 50% for farms of more than 5 hectares. By comparison, in countries of northern Europe, the figures are respectively 51% and 38% (European Parliament, 2014). Access for younger generations to the status of head of farm can often only come about through successions and inheritance, since entering agriculture as a business requires high start-up capital. In addition, many small-scale farmers continue to work well after the retirement age, in order to provide supplementary income. In countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, young people are not readily attracted by family farming, which is generally associated with poverty, and they seek to secure a better future in the cities or abroad. Control of land by older people, coupled with their risk aversion, discourages the younger generation, who would like to develop innovative activities within family farms.

*The issue of gender equality and the role of women farmers in family farms.* The social organization and values reflected by family farming generate strong gender inequality in the southern and eastern Mediterranean, since women's position is inferior to that of men in the public sphere, outside the family. Of the many indicators of gender inequality, we limit ourselves to mentioning that women account for barely 5% of total agricultural land owners (4.1% in Algeria, 5.2% in Egypt, 7.7% in Lebanon), while they represent 23% of agricultural workers on family farms in Algeria and 34% in Egypt (FAO, 2014b). The issue of gender in family farming is central and complex, for women often play a leading role in households. Women's strong potential has yet to be developed in family farming. One of the most glaring inequalities needing to be addressed is unquestionably that linked to the level of women's education, especially rural women. Despite efforts made in this sector, literacy levels of Moroccan women older than 15 were below 50% in 2015, with an average national literacy rate of 67% (Index Mundi, 2014), and this figure is even lower in rural areas. Nonetheless, it would be unfair to paint an entirely negative picture of family farming in the Mediterranean. Fortunately, the long list of challenges that it faces is compensated by a great many significant strengths

## Strengths of family farming

*Between resilience and adaptability.* Among these, special mention should be made of family farming's strong resilience. Indeed, this type of agriculture can absorb shocks and withstand poor conditions, by accepting under-compensation for work done – something an agro-business or landowner farm can never countenance. Moreover, a family farm has no obligation to ensure a return on capital that is at least equal to the opportunity cost, since it mobilizes funds belonging to the family, which can here too accept under-compensation in order to overcome a difficult period. This is in marked contrast to the shareholders of a firm, who are ready to resell their shares if a more lucrative opportunity presents itself. Such resilience naturally has its limits: that of the subsistence threshold for poorly capitalized family farms, and that of covering fixed costs, especially borrowing costs, for more capital intensive ones. A major cause for abandoning agriculture in Europe remains the inability to pay back loans. This resilience is undoubtedly a strength, for although it involves a sacrifice on the part of the family, it enables the household to weather periods of adversity and bounce back when conditions improve. Agri-businesses or landowner farms meanwhile are far more vulnerable to economic downturns. For this reason, family farming plays a role in mitigating crises and providing refuge, when a country's national economy is affected by recession and unemployment (Goussios, 2016).

Another key strength of family farming, which goes hand in hand with that of resilience, is its considerable flexibility and adaptability. Conducive to rapid and robust decision-making mechanisms, it is particularly reactive to signals from its surroundings. Whether in response to producer prices or incentives from agricultural policies, family farming can instantly adjust decisions on production or use of labour, and modify its technical-economic strategy, while agri-business or landowner farming must cope with the strictures of governance or labour laws (Marzin *et al.*, 2014). That is good news for political decision-makers, who can be certain of seeing their measures on family farming put into effect. It also reveals the considerable responsibility that they bear on the matter. The resilience and flexibility of family farming is equally linked to the fact that family members engaged in agriculture, including heads of farm, very often have sources of revenue other than that generated by the farm. On-farm diversification, which is one of the features of this type of agriculture, also makes a contribution, reducing risks and enabling opportunities to be seized. The development of agro-tourism is one striking example, of particular interest in the Mediterranean region, as is linkage to short supply circuits for high added value products.

*Family farming: a sustainable model.* Unlike industrial or landowner farming, the specific way in which family farms operate makes them a sustainable model, in every sense of the word. Heads of farm manage their patrimony in such a way that the current use of resources does not jeopardize the assets of future generations. In favourable conditions, family farming therefore represents a major tool for the sustainable management of the resources it mobilizes (land, water, biodiversity). Clearly, in the Mediterranean, as elsewhere, there are plenty of examples showing that family farming

can destroy natural resources (soil erosion, deforestation, disappearance of high-value species). But this negative impact is only the result of the unfavourable conditions in which the activity is practised, leaving farmers no alternative in order simply to survive, unlike other forms of agriculture, for which the exploitation of natural resources is sometimes an integral part of the economic model (Clavel *et al.*, 2014).

*Potential for development and social ripple effect.* Family farming's major strength lies in its potential for development and the ripple effect that this can have on entire societies where it is operating. We have seen the importance of this sector in providing jobs and occupations to members of the workforce. Any improvement in the incomes of members of the workforce engaged in family farming, however modest, has an immediate impact on effective demand for consumer products and represents a source of economic growth for the productive fabric as a whole, at local or national level. Family farming is a dominant activity in rural areas of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, and when it prospers, it becomes a powerful engine for local development. It strengthens food security, creates value that benefits the majority of inhabitants and kickstarts a virtuous circle of job creation and higher standards of living. Rural areas become attractive, including and especially for young people, as sources of opportunities for entrepreneurs.

In these troubled times, such scenarios are worth pursuing, for they more than anything else can make a valuable contribution to bolstering local livelihoods and preventing involuntary migration, whose origins, it is well known, often lie in the deep malaise found in rural areas of the Mediterranean and beyond. For this reason, family farming is a way of conserving agricultural knowledge and knowhow and avoiding their loss and waste. As observed in Chapter 15 on traditional knowhow, family farming in the Mediterranean is a repository of extremely valuable knowhow, built up over the years and enriched by exchanges with other parts of the world. This type of agriculture offers a framework for its transmission from one generation to the next. Loss of knowhow is today unacceptable, at a time when the challenges facing Mediterranean agriculture, starting with climate change, demand that all forms of knowledge be mobilized. A repository of knowhow that has been accumulated, family farming is also an incubator of new knowledge, developed through practice and whose emergence is activated by the appearance of new conditions. Through its flexibility and capacity for adaptation, it becomes an extraordinary laboratory, a melting pot for local knowledge and exogenous knowledge, traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge, a legacy for the future of Mediterranean agriculture. The challenge is to ensure that these flows of knowledge and information can reach family farming.

## Policy recommendations

The extraordinary potential offered by family farming for the development of countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, and for the setting in place of more sustainable agriculture on both shores of the Mediterranean, calls for the design and implementation of policies which can help it to become a reality. To this end, rural and agricultural policies should mitigate the challenges facing family farming and build on its strengths.



The development of the CAP will determine the future of family farming in the EU Mediterranean countries. The dismantling of the milk quota system at the end of 2015 brought an end to one of the last European mechanisms for supply control. It is not realistic to think of returning to the days of price support. Family farming in the Mediterranean has shown that it held up rather better than agriculture in northern Europe to the emergence of other more capitalist models. As a result, it should be able to retain its dynamism, if the CAP pursues and increases its efforts to develop good environmental practices, typical products and the link between production in a particular territory and areas with a natural handicap. The evolution of the share of the CAP's second pillar (rural development) in the total aid given to agriculture will be an indicator of commitment to pursuing this approach. In France, the priority given to agroecology and territory-based food projects also goes in this direction.

The International Year of Family Farming offered an opportunity for CIHEAM to explore these new approaches. During its 10<sup>th</sup> meeting held in Algiers on February 6 2014, the Ministers of Agriculture from CIHEAM's thirteen member countries made a clear recommendation to support family farming, "particularly on the southern shore of the Mediterranean – which makes a strong contribution to ensuring the food security of rural households as well as to the sustainable management of natural resources and the promotion of human development, especially for women and young people" (CIHEAM, 2014a). This is a powerful theme for strengthening relations between Europe and countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, at a time when it is important to defend the conviction that the future of regional and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation must necessarily involve more projects, networks and initiatives that have an agricultural, food-based and rural scope.

In countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, the future of family farming is also very closely linked to the content of agricultural and rural policies and their degree of priority in government agendas. As we have seen, some countries have embarked on a move towards family farming, such as Morocco (Green Morocco Plan) or Algeria (rural renewal). Given the demands of economic diversification, concerns over food security and public and social disorder provoked by the discontent of a rural youth without prospects, a return of agricultural and rural issues to the forefront of national agendas may lead to an upsurge in leadership and trigger awareness of the value of family farming. The International Year of Family Farming has played an important role in this awareness-raising. Now the challenge lies in putting sufficient and adequate measures into practice.

The most important political step to be taken involves ensuring that family farming obtains a social and legal status and that family farmers can defend their interests within professional organizations that are representative and democratic. Beyond their recognized union functions, these organizations must play an economic role in marketing family farming products by concentrating their supply, so as to collectively strengthen family farmers' bargaining power on prices. The same applies to supplying farms with inputs and equipment. When strengthened and recognized, such professional organizations can also serve as an interface between family farmers

and other sources of agricultural knowledge (research, extension, enterprises, etc.). It should be stressed that here we are talking about interface, and not a vertical, top-down knowledge chain, with family farmers as the receptacle. What is important is to foster cross-fertilization of knowledge, capitalizing on the knowhow of farmers and jointly developing new useful and functional knowledge, based on sharing everyone's contributions. This kind of effort is critical to developing relevant solutions to challenges posed by climate change. On this issue, family farmers in countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean possess knowhow and experience that can be valuable, including for agriculture in European countries. As observed in Chapters 14 and 15, there is a need for multi-stakeholder partnerships and projects to develop, so as to set in place new knowledge and innovation systems, with professional organizations positioning themselves at the centre. Likewise, these can play a leading role in empowering rural Mediterranean women, helping them to realize their potential, which can never be fully expressed in current conditions.

## Promoting access to productive resources for family farming

Another major facet of policies favourable to family farming involves access to productive resources, first and foremost land. The issue is a thorny one and attempts at agrarian reform in countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean have produced results that fell well short of expectations (for example in Egypt and Algeria). A number of problems have been raised by the allocation to private individuals of land which is part of private state property (Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt). The urgency of an agricultural revival, so as to diversify the national economy in countries like Algeria calls for massive investment in family farming and the country's rural areas, which would undoubtedly have positive repercussions for the economy as a whole. Access to credit for family farms also poses a problem that is hard to resolve, given the way the banking system works in a number of countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. In this respect, the many well tested experiences of micro-finance in the region (Tunisia), and to an even greater extent further afield (sub-Saharan Africa, Asia), merit investigation, assessment and mobilization, setting in place an ambitious financing mechanism for family farms and other emerging micro-enterprises in rural areas. In order to achieve their full effect, these measures must be accompanied by massive investment in the rural sector, to serve as a framework for the practising of family farming. It is unrealistic to expect to interest young people in agriculture if there is no road linking rural areas to markets and the outside world, and if there are no schools, hospitals or even health care centres and Internet connections.

These recommendations have already been announced and are mentioned here by way of reminder. One sector that is rapidly expanding, and for which the intervention of the public authorities as regulator will be of paramount importance to the future, is that of digital agriculture. Essentially neutral, the digitalization of agriculture, which is in the process of revolutionizing production techniques, does not offer an agricultural model. It consists of producing and enhancing a massive volume of digital data that enables agriculture to be piloted (precision agriculture, decision

support tools), or information to be instantly exchanged between different actors. It can equally well be applied to agribusiness, landowner agriculture or family farming, promoting the emergence of an agroecological agriculture, just as much as it can foster the development of agriculture that focuses on short-term profit. It all depends on the mode of data management and its use. The role of public authorities in this is decisive. They must ensure both that the new agricultural era does not bypass the great majority of farmers – who are family farmers – and that digital agriculture is put at the service of protecting the planet and tackling waste. They should also ensure that this digital data, like the infrastructure that will be set up to manage it, is accessible to all, and that the skills needed to implement the digital revolution in family farming emerge, by directing fresh and greater efforts towards the training of young people. Let us set ourselves the objective of achieving this vision, in which family farms and intelligent rural development offer opportunities, jobs and an attractive quality of life to future generations.

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