

# Foreword

## Family farming: *development issues* and research opportunities

**T**he diverse range of farming models and practices that shape world agriculture will inevitably require renewal. The overall picture is now, despite the occasional pessimistic media coverage, quite clear—agriculture will have to produce more to feed growing populations living to an increasing extent in urban areas. It is also essential to produce better as current farming systems often have unsustainable environmental impacts, with human health and ecosystem balances also sometimes paying a heavy toll. These quantitative and qualitative revolutions have to be accompanied by efforts to mitigate the growing inequalities and disparities between the world's farmers, while generating (rather than eliminating) jobs in the farming sector.

Visible trajectories of change being promoted in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries tend to be geared towards land concentration, greater production, financialization and intensification through the artificialization and standardization of production systems

and, more broadly speaking, food systems. However, by advancing even further along the path of agricultural industrialization and professionalization, could we overcome the limitations of conventional modernization based on fossil fuels and labour productivity gains, derived from agricultural revolutions in developed countries and the green revolution? There is reason for doubt.

Family farming—which relies almost exclusively on family labour and strong interrelationships between farming families and their farms—seems to offer convincing alternatives.

This form of production has proven its resilience despite regular claims that it is on the brink of disappearing: 2.6 billion people live off family farming, which provides jobs for 40% of the global workforce; men and women continue to cultivate and develop areas that are of no interest for other forms of production due to the assumed low productivity potential, and family farming continues to generate food for a significant portion of humanity based on the effective use of natural ecosystems and long-standing and constantly evolving know-how.



▲ Growing potatoes  
in Ecuador.  
O. Dangles © IRD

Everywhere family farming is practiced it is clearly resistant. Moreover, family farms are not necessarily small, poor and backward, especially in the light of their performance in response to current challenges and their multidimensional nature. They are potentially capable of creating wealth, ensuring food security, sustainably managing natural resources, providing jobs, reducing certain inequalities, contributing to energy transition and controlling emerging health risks worldwide.

The intrinsic qualities of family farms do not, however, fully guarantee their sustainability.

Their responses to various adverse events may also be detrimental to the ecological and social balance. These smallholdings are also clearly in a vulnerable position due to unregulated competition with agribusiness. Family farming requires technical and organizational innovations, supported by tailored public policies, to be in a suitable position to cope with global challenges and meet the need for renewed agricultural models.

Agricultural research must document the current state of family farming in support of discussions on possible farming systems of the future. This means characterizing the strengths and weaknesses of the farms, measuring and comparing their demographic significance, their economic, agricultural, environmental and social performances, as well as their replicability.

Public policies that could enhance family farming performance or even facilitate the emergence of new support approaches and methods should also be assessed.

Many research units of the Agropolis scientific community have been directly or indirectly involved in studying this vast and complex situation through multiple partnerships with higher educational institutions in Languedoc-Roussillon Region. Their production and current orientations highlight the renewed long-term interest in multifaceted research on family farming. This *Dossier* provides a full comprehensive overview of the diversity, originality and promise of this research, which is mostly conducted in partnership with developing countries. Some of these research initiatives are focused specifically on family farming, while others develop innovations in collaboration with and for family farmers, promoting joint knowledge building through participatory activities. This research community is hence devoted to working with farmers and their representative organizations on and for family farming and its efforts will be highlighted and synergized in 2014—the year the United Nations has dedicated to family farming.

**Jean-Michel Sourisseau (UMR ART-Dev),  
Pierre-Marie Bosc (UMR MOISA)  
& Michel Dulcire (UMR INNOVATION)**

