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**United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 (UNDFF) -
Enhanced data collection and analysis for evidence-informed public
policies for family farming**

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I. Background

1. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNOFF) aims at putting family farming, and all family-based production models, at the centre of interventions for a period of ten years, to achieve substantial transformations towards sustainable agrifood systems. The progress made in the implementation of the UNOFF has been reported to the 28th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG),¹ held from 18 to 22 July 2022, and to the United Nations General Assembly in July 2023.²

2. Among the priorities defined by the UNOFF Global Action Plan³ is the improvement of the global knowledge base on family farming. This is motivated by a lack of standardized, internationally comparable data about the sector. In particular, there is limited information about the mobilized family farming sector, namely family farmers that are organized within producer and other civil society organizations. The social capital and networks that tie together these producers can be instrumental to building resilient and inclusive farming communities and production systems.

3. Under the UNOFF, as recommended by the 28th Session of COAG,⁴ FAO aims at clarifying more specific questions related to family farming in the context of inclusive agrifood systems and rural transformations – constraints, needs, opportunities – for and with family farmers acknowledging the unique challenges faced by women and youth. This includes supporting actions for non-state stakeholders to collect and use their own data.

II. Technical contributions and achievements

4. Data on family farming are derived from multiple and diversified sources, that may have limitations in terms of clear information. Agricultural censuses provide a universal list of farms, that may cover all production systems, however, some subsectors (e.g. fisheries, aquaculture or forestry) might not be included. Agricultural censuses are usually conducted once every ten years because they measure structural aspects of agriculture that do not change significantly within this time frame. Typical structural data collected include the size and number of agricultural holdings, the holders' gender, the type of land tenure, the legal status of holders, as well as information on land use, crop area and farm labour. Thus, they tend to cover a more limited set of indicators compared with surveys, given the large undertaking of the data collection.

5. On the other hand, agricultural and household surveys provide a representative sample of farms and households respectively. They tend to be more frequently implemented and provide more detailed information on production and socioeconomic characteristics. However, they can often be limited in scope. Disaggregation to the territorial level is generally not possible for either type of survey, limiting the inclusion of certain farm types, as well as the conclusions that can be derived from the data.

6. Additional challenges may also arise when collecting new information on family farming. A key challenge is the lack of an updated sample frame due to infrequent censuses or poorly implemented farmer registries. In this context, family farming registries could be effective tools to obtain quality and useful data for the formulation and implementation of public policies targeting family farmers, their productive units and their organizations.

¹ COAG/2022/11. *The catalyser role of the UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 (UNOFF) and progress towards its implementation*. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/318b7ec6-2ab6-4b22-8b16-143757d966af/content>

² UN General Assembly. A. A/78/233. *Implementation of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019–2028)*. Note by the Secretary-General. <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=A/78/233&Lang=E>

³ FAO and IFAD. 2019. *United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028. Global Action Plan*. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5479e317-17b9-428b-9963-ba88e681ff16/content>

⁴ C 2023/22, para. 17 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/e9afa285-7dd8-44e7-a606-e16a6ad9181e/content>

A. Developing family farming classifications

7. In the context of the UNDF, several countries have developed national strategies in support of family farming. These require a clear definition of what constitutes a family farm, however, establishing a statistical (and thus, operational) definition of the sector is often in disagreement with the concept of family farming. Particularly, statistical definitions are limited to quantifiable indicators, preventing integration of normative aspects and context specificities, which go beyond economic dimensions, and uphold the significant cultural and social values associated with family farming.

8. Attempts to measure the size of the sector⁵ place family farmers as managing around 90 percent of the world's farms, around 80 percent of the global food supply, and more than half of the world's nutrient supply. However, if farm size is considered, smaller farms of 2 hectares or less, contribute to a lesser extent.

9. Such standardized measures may underestimate the sector in terms of scope and scale, due to inherent criteria regarding the production unit, which generally excludes non-crop agriculture. Regardless of the definition adopted, a consensus exists⁶ that family farmers are major actors in global agrifood systems and critical contributors to global food security.

10. FAO continues to support its Members in the development of farm typology classifications⁷ and operational definitions of family farming, while also assisting in the design of family farming registries. Operational definitions are crucial for transparently determining eligibility for public policies aimed at supporting family farming, enabling governments to tailor interventions effectively. Ensuring clarity in these definitions is crucial for the successful planning of public policies targeting family farming. Family farming registries are valuable tools for the effective and efficient design and implementation of differentiated public policies geared towards family farming.

B. Collecting data with and for producer organizations and farmers

11. Enhancing the availability of family farming-related data does not only occur through the enhancement of national statistical offices and Ministries of Agriculture. It also involves support to data that are collected by family farmers organizations themselves, as direct users and beneficiaries of more and better information.

12. FAO supported the development of quantitative survey instruments that can be easily administered by farmer and civil society organizations, while ensuring rigour, namely in the accuracy and compatibility of indicators and sampling strategies⁸. Through these UNDF surveys, FAO has also helped build capacities among umbrella organizations, as well as support in the analysis of information.

III. Next steps

Enhancing the monitoring and evaluation of policies to support family farming

13. FAO's family farming platform gathers quality information on family farming from all over the world. FAO will persist in supporting catalysing initiatives aimed at generating quality data and knowledge on the different challenges and potential solutions that family farming faces.

⁵ Lowder, Sánchez and Bertini. 2021. *Which farms feed the world and has farmland become more concentrated?* World Development, 142: 105455. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X2100067X?via%3Dihub>

⁶ FAO and IFAD. 2019. *United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028. Global Action Plan*. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5479e317-17b9-428b-9963-ba88e681ff16/content>

⁷ FAO. 2018. *Guidelines for development of a classification system related to Farm Typology*. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/84c6e0c5-4edf-4fc7-9d14-2c612557f57f/content>

⁸ FAO. 2023. *Brazilian semi-arid survey – Family farmers' resilience strategies during COVID-19*. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cc4136en>

14. The efforts to enhance data on family farming will be centred in four strategic axes: (i) identify precise data tabulations for family farming that can be obtained from the agricultural census, based on the tabulations recommended by the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020; (ii) strengthen the integration of relevant family farming data within administrative registries, refining this tool to acquire high-quality and useful data for effective family farming public policies and programmes; (iii) expand the application of FAO's UNDFE survey to support a more comprehensive, representative and regular monitoring strategy of family farming during the UNDFE; and (iv) support informative and reliable gender- and age-specific statistics relevant to family farming, by administering, collecting and analysing individual-level data within agricultural and household surveys.