

Ileia's 25th anniversary conference

The Future of Family Farming

A strategy of mixed farming that builds on ecological resilience is the right answer to major global challenges, such as climate change and hunger. Family farming offers a way forward in agriculture that is a viable alternative to specialised agri-business. Swift, concerted action and political will are needed to improve the situation of one billion family farmers. They need secure access to land, fairer (international) trade conditions and know-how on adaptation to climate change. Critical consumers, dynamic farmers' movements and smart use of ICTs can play a catalytic role in strengthening family farming.

These were the main conclusions of the conference on the Future of Family Farming that was organised by ileia in December 2009. More than 150 professionals from science, government, business, as well as NGOs, students and partners from the South participated. Among the keynote speakers were Camilla Toulmin of the International Institute on Environment and Development (IIED), K.S. Gopal of the Centre for Environmental Concerns (CEC), Olufunke Cofie, regional coordinator of the Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF) in Ghana and ileia's director, Edith van Walsum. Their presentations were followed by discussions and three regional workshops, wherein African, Latin American and Asian partners of the global AgriCultures Network shared their perspectives and practical experiences. The market place for ideas is wide open

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There is enough for everyone's need In recent years, large scale land acquisition, triggered by an increasing global demand for biofuels, has become a major threat to small-scale farmers. Family farmers



From left to right: K.S. Gopal, Camilla Toulmin, Olufunke Cofie.

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There is enough for everyone's need In recent years, large scale land acquisition, triggered by an increasing global demand for biofuels, has become a major threat to small-scale farmers. Family farmers have proven to be amazingly flexible and adaptable but they cannot survive in a vacuum, on a crumbling resource base. Governments' support has focused on specific commodities, not on production systems, let alone on the strategic needs of family farmers. A political choice has to be made, or even a philosophical one as K.S. Gopal said, quoting Gandhi: "There is enough for everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed".

Green cities Within the next twenty years, the majority of the world's population will live in cities. Agriculture in and around cities (especially the production of perishable foods) is therefore an increasingly important option. It is efficient and low-carbon agriculture, recycling nutrients and urban wastewater and reducing food miles. The challenge will be to protect land from encroachment and estate development and to ensure that necessary services such as credit and information exchange are made accessible to urban farmers. Knowledge brokering in a global context The AgriCultures Network has gone a long way in capturing, validating and disseminating experience of family farmers. The challenge ahead is to show the relevance of sustainable practices in today's context of climate change and

food crisis. Collaboration with research in validating such practices, and an active engagement with policy are crucial. The renewed magazine *Farming Matters*, linking local practices more explicitly to global debates, is a step in this direction.

Localised agriculture

Members of the AgriCultures Network highlighted regional particularities and solutions to agricultural problems. In Latin America the agro-ecology movement is emerging as a key asset for small-scale farming, uniting farmers, researchers and policymakers. The Asian workshop focused on organic agriculture and the power of consumers to change agriculture. In Africa the use of mobile phones and other social media provides an enormous potential for learning, exchanging information and also for improving and up-scaling sustainable agricultural practices. For Bara Gueye,

director of the West African IED Afrique, this is an already occurring reality: 'We need to recognise that information techniques and communication are crucial in strengthening people's capacities to negotiate and take their future into their own hands. The AgriCultures Network should focus more on this'.

All workshops concluded that a greater policy commitment to family farming and to fairer international trade is needed. As a knowledge broker, the AgriCultures network has to play an active role in bridging the gap between high level ideas and policies and realities on the ground.

See the conference video here

http://www.youtube.com/user/ILEIAfoundation#p/u/3/SOuDR_dGaqE

Read the conference report here

<http://images.leisa.info/pdfs/jubilee-conference2009.pdf>

