

Sustaining family farmers in the Dry Areas

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The estimated 500 million family farmers worldwide are often the main food producers in many regions, making vital contributions to the variety and quality of local diets.

Paradoxically, many also struggle on marginal lands and suffer from limited inputs, confining themselves, their families, and their communities to food and nutritional insecurity.

The plight of family farmers was taken up this year when the United Nations declared 2014 to be the **International Year of family Farming (IYFF)**. This commitment to transforming the lives of this vulnerable demographic is also a strategic aim of the **CGIAR**, including Dryland Systems – a research program that targets rural communities forced to endure some of the harshest and most marginal agricultural lands on the planet.

With IYFF as a strategic focus, the CGIAR and its partners held a meeting this week to share information and analysis on the status and trends of family farming, and promote this information to decision makers, policy makers, and the general public.

The meeting – **International Encounters: Family farming and research** – was held in Montpellier, France, and brought together more than 250 stakeholders from the fields of agriculture, including farmers, leaders of rural peoples' organizations and NGOs, policy makers, development workers, researchers, and civil society groups.

It provided an opportunity to build dialogue, exchange information, and stimulate ideas on joint work, enhancing innovation and research in development agendas that deal with local, regional, and global changes in areas as diverse as society, economics, food security, urbanization, migration, food and health, and climate.

Discussions focused on:

- How global change impacts on family agriculture and its various evolutions

- How family agriculture contributes to the global challenges facing society, the economy, the environment, and food security
- How scientific research and development action can support family agriculture in facing these challenges

Dryland Systems contributed to these discussions, providing knowledge and information gained through the Program's research and the activities of partner organizations. In order to enhance the initiative's research and impacts going forward, individuals from partner organizations were invited to attend the meeting so their work and interventions could benefit from the latest thinking and developments, and they in turn, could apply their own experiences and contribute to debates.

The individuals chosen represented the breadth of Dryland Systems' thematic and geographic spread. They included Yahya Shakhathreh, Director of Field Crops at the **National Center for Agricultural Research and Extension (NCARE)**, Jordan, who used the event to identify proven extension methods that encouraged the adoption of new technologies. Moha Ferrahi of the 'Resources Center' of the **Moroccan Green Plan**, spoke about the Moroccan government's efforts to improve the productivity of family farmers while sustaining the environment and strengthening food and nutritional security.

In addition, Rustam Ibragimov of the **Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources in Uzbekistan**, exchanged ideas to further develop family-operated farms and identify research needs to improve the livelihoods of family farmers and their households. This knowledge will feed into Ibragimov's work with Uzbekistan's Council of Farmers.

Finally, Shukhrat Mukhamedjanov of the Scientific Information Center, within the **Interstate Coordination Water Commission of Central Asia**, gained considerable insights from recent efforts to develop and adapt alternative water use methods, including: the leveling of fields, irrigation techniques, and the timing of irrigation.