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WORLD FOOD DAY 2014 TOASTS FAMILY FARMERS
*New survey highlights tension between love for the land and trying to
make ends meet among North American family farmers*

Des Moines, Iowa (Oct. 16, 2014) – Today, the world puts 500 million family farmers in the spotlight in observance of World Food Day 2014. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has recognized family farmers as central to solving global hunger and malnutrition.

According to FAO, family farming includes all family-based agricultural activities. Family farming is a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production, which is managed and operated by a family and is predominantly reliant on family labor. In addition, FAO reports that based on data from 93 countries, family farmers account for an average of 80 percent of all holdings, and are the main producers of food that is consumed locally.

“The world cannot do without the family farmer,” says Amy McMillen, Partnerships and Outreach Coordinator for FAO. “It’s because of the family farmer that we eat a variety of healthy foods every day. And yet, family farmers still make up the majority of poor and hungry people in the world. We must do more to incentivize, celebrate and exponentially improve the lives of family farmers to ensure all people have access to fresh, healthy food.”

The face of family farming in North America is dynamic. Results from a new survey of 75 North American family farmers, led by Humanitas Global in collaboration with FAO and Food Tank, were unveiled at the Borlaug Dialogue in Des Moines, Iowa today. The results demonstrate what is at play for those who have stayed on the farm, chosen to leave the farm or taken up farming for the first time. A consistent takeaway from the results demonstrates that North American-based family farmers remain committed to family farming, despite the challenges that exist.

“The survey results and our conversations with farmers reinforce a deep affinity for family farming, but they also show that farmers are torn between a love for the land and trying to make ends meet,” said Nabeeha M. Kazi, President & CEO of Humanitas Global and Chair of the Community for Zero Hunger. “For those who no longer work the family farm, the importance of feeding their communities and the world remains very much part of their identity.”

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Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents who have left the family farm said they remain involved in agriculture in their current careers. In addition, a majority of those who have left the family farm said they intend on returning in the future.

“We do not want the universe of family farmers to shrink, and we must have policies, programs and resources to enable family farmers to stay on the farm if they desire to do so and perform at their potential,” says Kazi. “However, we also cannot overlook the power of those who have left the farm. These individuals have tremendous and highly credible voices as we promote and protect the family farm. We should deploy them to inform policy, shape programs and amplify the story of the family farmer in diverse spaces.”

The greatest challenges for family farmers today include the cost of land, labor costs, government regulations and policies, climate change and the inherent risk of farming, as well as the disproportionate amount of work required given the financial returns.

“The survey results show that family farmers do not rely on farming alone to pay the bills,” says Kazi. “Approximately 67 percent of respondents to the survey said that a family member’s income or additional part-time work supplements income from farming.”

On the positive side, a connection with the land and food systems, independence and working outdoors were all cited as the principle advantages of being a farmer. Those who grew up and remained on farms, those who left farms to pursue other careers and new family farmers all spoke of tending to the land and watching food grow as the most fulfilling aspects of being a farmer.

“Family farmers are facing economic challenges and beyond,” says Danielle Neirenberg, President of Food Tank. “In addition to tools and resources, family farmers are concerned about issues that all Americans worry about – including providing health care for their families and higher education for their children. And yet, so many people stay on the family farm or are committed to returning, because farming is fulfilling, intellectually stimulating and challenging – and it has shaped their values.”

Neirenberg points out that the commitment to family farming is unwavering. She notes that many respondents who have left the family farm said they still pitch in on the farm when they can. Many went on to say that if no one was available to tend the family farm, they would return home to take over rather than lose it.

The challenges that family farmers face in the United States and throughout North America mirror the challenges seen globally. Climate change, low profitability and better off-farm opportunities all emerge as the greatest global threats to family farming.

“Recognizing the external pressures on family farming, many which the global community can help alleviate, is crucial if we are to make family farming viable and desirable for the next generation,” says McMillan. “FAO celebrates family farmers. We have to be very deliberate and responsive to the needs of the family farmer so they can successfully and profitably do what they love, and that love is feeding and nourishing the world.”

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About Humanitas Global

Humanitas Global is an international development organization based in Washington, D.C. and has a multi-disciplinary team that brings innovative and strategic approaches to tackle the world's greatest challenges. Humanitas has directed global and domestic stakeholder engagement programs, behavior change and advocacy initiatives and feasibility assessments in the agriculture, food and nutrition-security arenas. Humanitas chairs the Community for Zero Hunger, which is a multi-sectoral response to the UN Zero Hunger Challenge. Humanitas also founded and manages the internationally-renowned blog: The Hunger and Undernutrition Blog.

www.humanitasglobal.com

www.zerohungercommunity.org

www.hunger-undernutrition.org

About the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Achieving food security for all is at the heart of FAO's efforts – to make sure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. FAO's three main goals are: the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; the elimination of poverty and the driving forward of economic and social progress for all; and, the sustainable management and utilization of natural resources, including land, water, air, climate and genetic resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

<http://www.fao.org/home/en/>

<http://www.worldfooddayusa.org/>

About Food Tank

Food Tank is a think tank focused on feeding the world better. Food Tank researches and highlights environmentally, socially and economically sustainable ways of alleviating hunger, obesity and poverty and creates networks of people, organizations and content to push for food system change.

www.foodtank.com