

18th Organic World Congress

Written inputs from panelists of the Main Track Session

7A: [Smallholders](#): The future of family farming amidst changing structures in the agricultural sector (Panel discussion)

Tuesday, 14 October 2014 (14:30-16:00)

Smallholders: The future of family farming amidst changing structures in the agricultural sector

Background

The vast majority of farms worldwide are smallholder family farms that produce 70% of the world's food. There is a growing consensus that smallholders play a crucial role in food production as well as in rural development. Organic farming is recognized as a particularly suitable concept for smallholders, as it builds on diversity, multi-functionality and farm-based resources. However, in most places, agriculture is experiencing a process of structural change. People are moving out of agriculture, and those who remain manage larger farms. Contract farming and agri-businesses are on the rise.

Session Objectives

In the UN Year of Family Farming it is particularly relevant to take a closer look at the role of smallholder-based organic farming today and in future. This session will analyze trends in changing agricultural structures and their relevance for family farming. It will identify and discuss options for Organic family farms to adapt to the structural change, or to cope with it. Participants will also discuss how to strengthen the position of organic smallholder farms.

Leading Questions

- What are current trends in changing agricultural structures in different parts of the world?
- What could agricultural structures look like in 10 years?
- What is the future role for family-managed smallholder farms?
- How can smallholders adapt to and cope with structural change?
- How to advocate for strengthening the position of family farms in organic agriculture?
- What can organic stakeholders (along the value chain and in the support sector) do to strengthen smallholding family farmers?

Methodology: Panel discussion with 4-5 panelists.

Moderator/Rapporteur: Eva Torremocha/Konrad Hauptfleisch

Speakers

- Elisabeth Atangana, CNOP-CAM & PROPAC, Cameroon
- Cristina Grandi, IFOAM Rome Office, Italy
- Paulo Petersen, AS-PTA, Brazil
- Anton Pinschhof, FNAB, France
- Edith van Walsum, ILEIA, The Netherlands

Anton Pinschof

Smallholders. The future of family farming amidst changing structures in the agricultural sector, *a neutral pseudo-scientific formula hiding the question of how shall farming folk resist being driven off their land.*

Background. The vast majority of farms worldwide are smallholder family farms that produce 70% of the world's food *and a similar % of the world's people. The big problem is that people are less profitable than Capital (for those that own both).* There is a growing consensus, *starting from zero,* that smallholders play a crucial role in food production as well as in rural development. *If smallholders had better unions and influenced public policy, they'd better prevent Rural Development from looking like Urban Development. The Organic farming method is recognized by those who do not make policy as a particularly suitable concept for smallholders, as it builds on diversity, multi-functionality & farm-based resources which, plus moral autonomy for farmers could allow them a strategic rediscovery of Food Sovereignty.* However, in most places, *including Europe,* agriculture is experiencing a process of structural change, *ever since the Renaissance when Lords & Masters suddenly got the bright idea they could improve upon Creation, usurping God's role, calling themselves Humanists, totally dominating Nature and the lower classes. The result was the Industrial Revolution run by monopoly capital and its world empire.*

Saying 'People are moving out of agriculture' *sounds like they go voluntarily, and ignores the misery of those too old to leave empty villages, even if grandsons are among those who remain to manage larger farms.* Contract farming and agri-businesses are *only on the rise because those wielding the dictatorial power of monopoly capital never consulted farmers about the other options. Contracts are dictated by the owners of supermarkets, who only aim to keep prices down & concentrate production in fewer & more highly indebted large farms, whilst agribusiness as a whole is run by the petrochemicals industry, which grew out of the armaments industry which, as we all know, has always been very busily engaged in the onward Progress of Humanity.*

The crowning glory of the forces of modernisation has been the fantastic hypocrisy of their missionary zeal in civilising all and sundry in the name of free (forced) trade, democracy & humanism. Yet refugee farmers can testify to the cold, civil brutality of those that drive them off their land. Their trauma lets them forget the softening up done in the name of foreign religions. Their faith, hope & charity let them tolerate some almighty God with several names, even when he, she or it seems conveniently impotent when a war is started by the Powers that be. The dogs in the street see that more die from hunger than ever before, whilst the military-industrial complex that provoked the failure has made the UN forget the fact that the billions never got fed. The International Brigades of humanitarians are weapons of mass distraction, deflecting themselves and everybody North & South from the essentially political tasks of relocating production, marketing & decision-making, repudiating foreign debt, re-

establishing local cultures & territorial autonomy, protecting indigenous peoples, rediscovering we are all indigenous people in exile. Now we are driven like sheep into the folds of ever expanding intercontinental forced markets renamed free markets, not unlike the triangular trade of 250 years ago, except this time round they embrace everything & everybody, not only slaves & cotton. Our Bio-Diversity will look more like traditional polytheism than like the vicious brands of monotheism that usually only serve as thin disguises for money-theism. The Gods of Localitude shall return as moral & technological Sovereignty. Monetary sovereignty is another story for another day, to be told in shanty towns & transit camps.

Session Objectives. In the UN Year of Family Farming it is particularly relevant to take a closer look at the role of smallholder-based organic farming today and in future. This session will analyse trends in changing agricultural structures and their relevance for family farming *and family vanishing*. It will identify and discuss options for Organic family farms to adapt to the structural change, or to cope with it *or say no thanks, piss off*. Participants will also discuss how to strengthen the position of organic smallholder farmers, *such as by increasing the number of farmers per hectare*.

Leading Questions - What are current trends in changing agricultural structures in different parts of the world? *Bad news all round. The trend is policy-driven. The next new scam is fair trade in uncertified organic products.*

- What could agricultural structures look like in 10 years? *Miniaturised, infra-structured, almost invisible.*
- What is the future role for family-managed smallholder farms? *Unionised, collectively visible & audible.*
- How can smallholders adapt to and cope with structural change? *By quietly demystifying it... and organising.*
- How to advocate for strengthening the position of family farms in organic agriculture? *By organised smallholders unions proving they do exist & can feed their nation... and not wasting time advocating.*
- What can **organic stakeholders** (along the **value chain** and in the **support sector**) do to strengthen smallholding family farmers? *Make value chain so short they must go home to till their own soil and stop uttering **euphemisms** for superfluous intercontinental trade & aid. The shorter the value chain, the less our values will be in chains.*

*Comments & elaborations in **italics** by Anton Pinschhof, FNAB, France (not here speaking for Fnab which has not mandated me as freelance spokesman. I'm only their unpaid delegate for a well defined foreign role in INOFO. I could only speak for Fnab if my text were validated by their board or their GA. FNAB's network involves about two thirds of France's 25000 individually certified organic or converting farmers.*

Cristina Grandi¹

The organic way to a family farming future

Cristina Grandi was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she earned a University degree in Agronomy. In the 1980s she migrated to Italy where worked with Italian ecologists in a campaign against pesticides. In 1996 she got a specialization on organic agriculture and started her collaboration with AIAB, the Italian Association for Organic Agriculture, where she had the responsibility of different campaigns and project promoting organic agriculture and was elected at the national board. In 2002 she started her collaboration with IFOAM on advocacy activities. She is representing IFOAM at the World Coordinating Committee for the International Year of Family Farming 2014.

Main idea: Smallholder farming is a key player of present and future food systems. Organic agriculture and other agro- ecological models provide solutions to the many challenges faced by family and smallholder agriculture. Efforts should be put for getting consensus on this option.

What are current trends in changing agricultural structures in different parts of the world?

Trends in agricultural structures vary considerably across regions and countries. Data shows that in the South the absolute number of smallholders has continued to grow over the last decades, decreasing at the same time the size of holdings. In Asia holdings fallen to nearly one hectare and in Africa, 80 % are below than 2 ha. Number of smallholders is, instead, decreasing in most developing countries, but they are still the majority in the EU and Japan. (FAO 2012, Eurostat 2012). At the present time, smallholders provide more than 70% of total food eaten by people, using around 20-30% of arable land (Etc Group, 2013). Land grabbing driven by increasing request of biofuel and animal feed is a new player that are modifying the agricultural structure in some parts of the world.

What could agricultural structures look like in 10 years?

An international debate is taken place on how transformations will take place on agriculture in coming years. The classical pathway traced by Europe during the industrial revolution, is now being questioned. Specific national conditions such as the demographic dynamics, the level an growth rate of GDP (gross domestic product) per capita, the relative importance and dynamic of agriculture in the economy, the structure of the sector, government policies, can lead to very different paths of transformation for agriculture in different countries (HLPE-FAO, 2013).

¹ Chief Food Security Campaigner, IFOAM. c.grandi@ifoam.org

What is the future role for family-managed smallholder farms?

According with current trends, it is clear that smallholders will maintain, in 10 years, its role of producing food not only in developing countries, but also in developed, emerging and transition countries. Driven by citizens' interest in healthy food an increasing number of family-managed smallholder farms will adopt organic agriculture and other agroecological practices.

How can smallholders adapt to and cope with structural change?

According with the High Level Panel of Expert of the UN Committee on World Food Security (2013) "Smallholders require models that build on their strengths as investors (labour) and avoid their constraints (lack of cash to purchase expensive external inputs). They need to develop their resilience through diversification of their products, but also by bringing greater biodiversity into their fields. Lastly, they require models of production that are coherent with promising new markets for high-value products that allow smallholders to capture more of the value-added. Moreover smallholders need models of production that provide diverse and nutritious diets". Organic agriculture is the most appropriate model to fit with these requirements.

How to advocate for strengthening the position of family farms in organic agriculture?

Organic agriculture is a tool for achieving the ecological intensification of smallholder farms and to provide healthy and nutritious food for rural communities and city dwellers.

Organic farming facilitate marketplace success by sharing experiences and developing new marketing methods. Together, organic smallholders can strengthen social structures, develop innovative networks and promote entrepreneurship. The impact of which includes more job opportunities, a stronger local value chain and improved rural development.

It is needed to advocate for improved local, national and international policies to promote sustainable organic family and smallholder systems and businesses, as well as for inversions in specific infrastructures and extension services for supporting organic family farming.

What can organic stakeholders (along the value chain and in the support sector) do to strengthen smallholding family farmers?

As demonstrated by experiences as EPOPA in Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia, Uciri in Mexico, the organic stakeholders could play an relevant role in linking smallholders to the markets, as well as training and assisting them for improving their productions. IFOAM has being developing tools adapted to smallholders as the Participatory Guarantee System.

Edith van Walsum

Pathways of small-scale family farmers towards food sovereignty and sustainability

Contribution by the AgriCultures Network

Context

Developing economies are grappling with raising populations, inequities, poverty, hunger and malnutrition. In fast growing economies questions are raised whether family farming is still desirable and economical. But it is still serving multiple needs – household food, income and nutritional security, social assets, sustaining natural resources, and in spite of lack of supportive mechanisms, it is still holding strong. The multifunctionality of family farming ensures resilience and steady income from multiple farm enterprises. Family farmers across Africa, Asia and Latin America have been sharing their own mechanisms of survival, success and failure. Many of them are innovative and illustrate that climate resilient agriculture is successful when it is firmly rooted in agroecological principles.

Family farmers require a democratic space, they need incentives in terms of knowledge support and farmer managed infrastructure, and they need to be systematically involved in decision-making throughout the value chain, where there is one. It is not a choice but a necessity to support the vast numbers of family farmers: around the world there are more than 500 million small-scale farm families. They can neither be ignored nor absorbed into urban-based vocations or global value chains. This is economic and political common sense: there is no way to transform the agricultural sector by putting aside those who produce more than 80% of agricultural outputs; they should be the drivers of this transformational change.

Small-scale family farmers: agro-ecological by design

We will share insights from practical experiences in agro-ecological family farming in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Farmers in collaboration have systematized these experiences with members of the AgriCultures Network, a global network focused on knowledge sharing. Their main strategy is to farm with nature, and to manage risks (whether climate or market related) through diversification. They may not be organic by international standards, but operate their farms with clear agro-ecological principles in mind (e.g. care for the soil; nurturing agro biodiversity at gene, farm and landscape level; recycling of nutrients, water, and energy). How and to what extent farmers put these principles into practice depends on a variety of factors, including their actual resource base, access to markets, and the policy environment. Small-scale family farmers can be seen as the bottom of the 'organic pyramid'. There are growing opportunities for family farmers to engage in global value chains;

however, for the foreseeable future it will be a tiny fraction of the rural population that will be able to take active part in these chains.

Family farmers are building their own futures

By practicing multifunctional agriculture and focusing on local and regional food systems, family farmers challenge the current dominant agricultural paradigm that preaches monocultures and economies of scale as the recipe to boost the global food system. Many small-scale family farmers opt for an alternative pathway and show that they can feed themselves, their communities and their regions while sustainably preserving the natural resources. Family farmers in Brazil, for instance, feed 60 % of the urban population on 20 % of the land. And African family farmers produce 80% of the food consumed regionally.

Factors that help and that hinder the upscaling of agro-ecological family farming

In spite of encouraging results, agro-ecological family farming is still far removed from reaching its potential. This is due to, amongst others, a limited and often biased understanding of family farming logic, resulting in a lack of recognition by policymakers and weak linkages with research and extension. By definition, agro-ecological family farming is knowledge intensive and it varies from place to place due to the huge variety in ecosystems. Sharing of knowledge and innovations is crucial and works best if it happens horizontally, from farmer to farmer, from community to community, from region to region. Agroecology has no blueprints; it is about internalizing principles. This is how the successful spread of for instance Farmer Managed Natural Resource Generation, the System of Rice Intensification (also in dryland regions: System of Crop Intensification) and Non Pesticidal Crop Management have happened. And this is why knowledge management and documentation, at farm and community level as well as in institutions concerned with sustainable family farming, are very important for the spread of agroecological practices. To sustain these gains, family farmers need strong and representative institutions which are representative, legitimate and skilled to convey the voices of farmers (e.g. ROPPA in West Africa has a strong negotiation power). These institutions are critical in influencing/changing government views.

Moving agro-ecological family farming forward

Building on the above analysis our panelist, Paulo Petersen from Brazil, will share his reflections on the formulation and implementation of the "**National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production**" *which was adopted in the Brazilian parliament on October 17th, 2013*. Paulo will examine the linkages between agro-ecology-based family farming systems, organic agriculture and the Organic Movement in Brazil. During the panel discussion we intend to draw lessons from the Brazil experience that may be relevant to other countries and regions.

Our panelist, Paulo Petersen is director of AS-PTA, a Brazilian NGO with a long track record in agro-ecology and family farming. AS-PTA publishes the

magazine *Agriculturas*, and is a member of the global AgriCultures Network. Paulo has been closely involved in this groundbreaking Brazilian policy process.

paulo@aspta.org.br

<http://www.agriculturesnetwork.org/magazines/brazil>