

Family farmers are needed to enhance agricultural sustainability, says FAO

During the [High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) in New York, FAO director-general, José Graziano da Silva shared how enabling public policies and legal frameworks for family farmers will "allow them to adapt and flourish in today's changing environment" and maximise their contribution to sustainable development. He made the remark at the launch of the [UN Decade of Family Farming](#).



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

"We need to reform our food systems and link the activities of the Decade of Family Farming with the [Decade of Action on Nutrition](#). Family farmers are the ones who produce healthy foods. They can save us from the epidemic of obesity, and we need them for healthy diets."

The event saw the participation of the heads of FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which lead the implementation of the Decade, co-organisers Costa Rica and France, as well as La Via Campesina, the World Rural Forum and the World Farmers' Organisation among others.

Paving the way towards the implementation of the Decade

Family farms represent over 90 per cent of all farms globally, and produce 80% of the world's food in value terms.

Noting that although family farmers are a very diverse group and there is no "one size fits all" approach, the FAO chief highlighted two key common measures that will help pave the way towards the implementation of the Decade: "First, FAO and IFAD have established a multi-donor trust fund. FAO has already allocated some seed money to promote better dialogue and exchange between farmers on public policies," he said.

Secondly, he urged countries to make progress in developing their National Action Plans, based on the FAO-IFAD [Global Action Plan](#), launched in May. "This way FAO and IFAD will understand better the demands and processes of each country," he explained.

Family farmers as key drivers of better nutrition

Graziano da Silva also expressed his concerns about the growing levels of malnutrition. "We have to urgently address the alarming and growing levels of obesity and micronutrient deficiencies. This is happening particularly in populations that consume poor-quality diets based on commodities with little dietary diversity," he said.

He cited the high-consumption of ultra-processed food as another key driver of the prevalence of obesity. "Ultra-processed food, in particular, contains little to no nutritional value, with a high content of saturated fats, refined sugars, salt and chemical additives but, unfortunately, it is cheaper and easier to access and prepare than fresh food, particularly for poor people in urban areas."

In this context, Graziano da Silva noted that family farmers could also play a vital role in increasing the production and consumption of healthy and diversified fresh food and thus improving people's diets.

Nourishing people must go hand in hand with nurturing the planet

In his remarks, Graziano da Silva also stressed that the world can no longer rely on the agricultural innovation model that resulted from the Green Revolution of the 1960s.

"High-input and resource-intensive farming systems have increased food production at a high cost to the environment, generating deforestation, water scarcity, soil depletion, and high levels of greenhouse gas emissions," he said.

Graziano da Silva called for a transformative change towards food systems that produce healthy and nutritious food while safeguarding natural resources. "Nourishing people must go hand in hand with nurturing the planet," he concluded.

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