

Message of Monique Barbut
Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification
On the occasion of the World Food Day
16 October, 2014

Family farmers are vital to our modern way of life. It is frankly amazing that 500 million family farms produce at least 56% of the world's crops, and most of the world's rice. Yet, family farmers make up an alarmingly high proportion of the 'bottom billion' poorest people in the world. It is tragic that family farming is often seen as a career of last resort; combining back-breaking work with a cycle of aching poverty.

Current farming techniques can degrade the land; often a family farmer's only tangible asset. Falling productivity on degraded and degrading land destroys farming livelihoods.

This cycle of diminishing returns for family farmers has to stop.

Switching to sustainable land management and sustainable agriculture techniques could stop the loss of vital productive assets. We can, at the same time, rehabilitate nearly 500 million hectares of abandoned agricultural land. By rehabilitating these lost lands and sustainably managing the land we have, we can reach a state of land degradation neutrality. This would provide a solid foundation for future crop production and greater food security for a growing global population. With sustainable land management, individual family farmers should also see their vulnerability to shocks fall and productivity and incomes rise.

And family farmers can be startlingly productive. In many regions, they produce more crops on smaller pieces of land than non-family farmers. Imagine how much better the situation could be if all family farmers were informed about alternative, environmentally sustainable but profitable farming techniques. By making an informed choice about stewardship of their lands, family farmers and their communities will thrive and food production can be boosted.

Policy makers can play their part. By championing education for farmers and providing financial incentives to encourage the uptake of sustainable land management and sustainable agriculture, we can create a positive cycle of ever increasing returns.

It all starts with giving family farmers the right tools.