

Cooperative Enterprise Empowers Women



**A Statement by the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP)
for the International Day of Cooperatives, July 3, 2010**

Today, on the UN International Day of Cooperatives celebrating the theme “Cooperative enterprise empowers women,” the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) encourages the adoption and strengthening of the cooperative business model as an instrument capable of improving the status and living conditions of women around the world. As women farmers play a key role in ensuring society’s food security, they are indispensable in building the world’s sustainable future. In this context, women farmers are very often barely visible in the agricultural sector, especially in decision-making processes. Agricultural cooperatives are an alternative form of business that can allow for the recognition of women farmers, improve their living conditions and increase access to leadership positions.

First and foremost, cooperatives support male and female farmers in their collective organization. As coops logistically support farmers in gathering and/or processing raw materials collectively, they contribute to adding value to the production and to affording a stronger market share for farmers in the food chain. In developing countries, cooperatives represent an even more advantageous opportunity for women farmers, as they often have less means than men to organize their production collectively.

Agricultural cooperatives can provide women farmers with decent work opportunities and secured incomes, which bring them closer to the formal economic system. This can help them acquire social status and make basic services such as credit, medical care, property and production tools accessible. Agricultural cooperatives are a means to improve employment and living conditions of farmers which contributes to alleviate poverty in rural communities.

The way agricultural cooperatives function can also give way to social dialogue and solidarity among members of both genders. Mixed cooperatives should be encouraged to further enhance equal rights between men and women farmers by specifying that both spouses can equally represent their farm with equal status. Apart from sharing the coops’ costs and benefits, members share their experiences and knowledge. They also organize and participate in common farming and non-farm activities. Agricultural cooperatives aid in the development of social links, which are very important to farmers in general and women farmers in particular, who often feel isolated from the rest of society, especially in industrialized countries.

Furthermore, the democratic structure of coops can allow women farmers to participate equally with male stakeholders in the decision-making process, which facilitates access to leadership positions. In certain regions of the world, women farmers’ participation in coops remains governed by traditional customs or ownership. However, agricultural cooperatives make the education and training that woman farmers need to strengthen their self-esteem and enhance their ability to become decision-makers accessible. The involvement of women in the decision-making process of cooperatives would enhance their corporate responsibility, social values and gender friendly policies.

IFAP encourages women farmers to participate actively in the board meetings of cooperatives and claim their right and capacity to take over positions of responsibility by presenting their candidacy for elected offices. IFAP encourages its members to celebrate this day, keeping in mind that women farmers’ active involvement in coops is an indispensable factor to support their empowerment and thus achieve sustainable development.

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THE VOICE OF THE WORLD’S FARMERS

IFAP IS THE WORLD FARMERS’ ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING OVER MILLIONS OF FAMILY FARMERS GROUPED IN 112 NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN 87 COUNTRIES. IT IS A GLOBAL NETWORK IN WHICH FARMERS FROM INDUSTRIALIZED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES EXCHANGE CONCERNS AND SET COMMON PRIORITIES. IFAP ADVOCATES FARMERS’ INTERESTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL SINCE 1946 AND HAS GENERAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS.

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