

# Diversity of Family Farming Around the World

Pierre-Marie Bosc • Jean-Michel Sourisseau  
Philippe Bonnal • Pierre Gasselin  
Élodie Valette • Jean-François Bélières  
Editors

# Diversity of Family Farming Around the World

Existence, Transformations and Possible  
Futures of Family Farms

*Foreword by* Harriet Friedmann

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*To  
Philippe Bonnal  
Just a few months after the publication of  
this book's French edition, on 2 June 2016,  
Philippe Bonnal lost his battle to cancer.  
He played a decisive role in shaping the  
book's conceptual design and final form.  
Whenever we, the other coordinators of this  
collective project, lost focus or became  
distracted by other responsibilities, it was he  
who reinvigorated and re-inspired us. His  
strong intellectual commitment to the future  
of family farming guided the discussions that  
resulted in the book's Conclusion.  
We will miss his unrelenting rigour and his  
unbounded enthusiasm in our continuing  
efforts to fine-tune our understanding of the  
forms of agriculture described herein and  
our analysis of their transformations and  
their possible futures.*

# Foreword

The unique contribution of this excellent volume is to create a useful perspective for thinking about both parts of the phrase, *family* and *farm*. Families have changed as much as farms in all parts of the world since the 1970s when social scientists began to renew classical conceptions of family farming. Of course, the political economy of the international food system has dramatically changed the context of all farms, in North and South, East and West. Even the meanings of those geographical categories are changing as power shifts between private and state sectors, and within the state system. This changing political economy is a common focus. However, equally important, more difficult to track, and even more challenging to integrate into political economy are changing relations among men and women, parents and children, lineages and inheritance. Although not entirely new, movements of individuals across large distances have deeply and rapidly altered families everywhere. While statistics can appear to confirm a relentless movement from rural to urban areas, the sensitive case studies presented here show that these statistics capture only a moment in what may – with a lens capturing many scales of time and geography – be sustained networks among families which help family farms adapt to changing circumstances.

It is a significant accomplishment to reconnect the diversity of farming systems in the world with the diversity of family and kinship. The case studies in this volume mark a welcome reversal in observing and interpreting family farms. In the 1970s and 1980s, the central question was how farms based on a combination of ownership and labour in farm households could persist and even displace large capitalist farms. These questions had somewhat different answers for family farms in major grain and oilseed crops export regions, which came to resemble each other in monocultural fields, and in the diverse regions producing crops embedded in local landscapes and cuisines. Critiques of large-scale industrial agriculture were mostly confined to the margins of Western societies and to the plantations inherited from colonial history. Now there is widespread awareness of the social and ecological damage of industrial monocultures after three decades of international agrifood policies dismantling state protections for farmers in the Global South and unleashing the vast social, political, and economic changes glossed as ‘globalization’.

Nonetheless, the prevailing assumption is still common that the logic of markets in food, labour, and land tends towards an industrial future for agriculture, including displacement of family farms.

The case studies in this volume demonstrate how family farms have withstood the assault of financialization of agricultural commodity markets and increasingly of land. They challenge the narrow perspective on both family and farm that perceives it as doomed. That narrow perspective is rooted not in present realities but in various out-of-date ideas of what is a farm and what is a family, missing how family farms are part of wide and deep social changes taking place on every scale, from villages many kilometres distant from any large settlement to migrant neighbourhoods in global cities. Studies of global diasporas illuminate how cultural ties are maintained – and evolve – through marriages and filial ties crossing national borders and oceans. Many of those entering ‘global cities’ come directly from villages distant both geographically and culturally from their new neighbours. More important for this topic, many of those arriving in global cities are circular migrants who not only send back cash remittances but sometimes return to take the place held for them in the kinship structure of family farms. This is not an entirely new phenomenon; for instance, almost a century and a half ago, hired farm labourers in Argentina were called ‘swallows’ (*‘los golondrinas’*) because they moved every year between complementary seasonal harvests of southern Europe and South America. Today such circular migrants link family economies across great distances. These family economies must therefore be understood as based in multiple places, and as fluid: people, goods, and money circulate through specific networks across sometimes very large distances. Geographical distance can hide social proximity and economic networks. To grasp this requires a dynamic view that tracks movements and relationships over time, starting with individuals and the family and social networks they sustain; snapshots at a single moment mistakenly confirm the statistical impression of an inexorable rural outmigration.

We can now see that families and farms show exceptional resilience in the face of major changes in society and economy. This volume shows how diverse livelihood strategies have allowed family farms not only to persist, but to adapt and transform in response to changing conditions. The key to the family farm is to understand it as a system linking kinship and livelihood strategies with productive assets such as land and cattle, and with markets on all scales. Family farmers produce diverse plants, animals, fibres, fish, and forest crops with ingenuity. Far from being caught in imaginary timeless ‘traditions’, families often change their livelihood strategies. They find ways to combine embedded knowledge and practices rooted in kinship and landscape with modern transportation and communication technologies to create new possibilities for each generation.

The methodological contribution of these studies is to show the dynamism as well as the diversity of family farms. The literature on ‘petty commodity production’ of the 1970s and 1980s was excessively structuralist and even reductionist, focusing on kinship relations only as forms of labour comparable to wage labour in capitalist agriculture. In response, the concept of ‘sustainable rural livelihoods’ (SRL) was developed in the 1990s with the intention to study social actors from the

bottom up, as they devised strategies to make a living with the resources and conditions they found in each place. Yet it too fell to the economic determinism of inherited modernist thought and of newly revived celebrations of markets and capital. The revision of the concept of sustainable rural livelihoods in this volume begins with a critique of its reduction in practice from examination of the complex realities of diverse rural situations from the perspective of social actors to a list of categories of capital, such as social, human, and natural. The authors take up the challenge by Scoones, a leading practitioner of SRL, to integrate knowledge, politics, scale, and dynamics in order to combine the original innovation of the approach with features it had missed.

These case studies demonstrate that family agriculture, far from being locked into static, inherited practices, has an impressive capacity to adapt to changes of all kinds, from climate to markets to politics, precisely through its flexible use of land and other assets combining kinship with various forms of property.

Despite the repetitive mantra raising anxieties about ‘how will we feed 9 billion people by 2050’, family farmers grow most of the world’s food for themselves and others. The ‘we’ implied is not family farmers, who already do ‘feed the world’, including, of course, themselves, but global agrifood corporations with projects to deepen monocultures and displace the biological and cultural diversity of family farms. These corporations actually undermine food security by turning the world’s landscapes into monocultures of crops destined for animal feed, fuel, or any other use depending on relative commodity prices. They undermine nutrition security, too, by converting landscapes to fields of single crops such as maize and soy that enter into edible commodities – whose status as ‘food’ is dubious – now clearly implicated in widespread chronic diseases. These crops destined as industrial ingredients displace the diverse plants and animals raised by family farmers, which are suited to the landscapes they farm and the cuisines that underpin cultural diversity.

As several international studies show, the practical skills of family farmers allow them to continually adapt practices of raising crops and livestock and of managing forests, grasslands, wetlands, and waterways. Numerous techniques, often under the rubric of ‘agroecology’, show that productivity of family farms can be greatly increased by redirecting scientific research and government support towards an agenda defined in collaboration with existing farmers and their knowledge. The best way forward for both food security and ecological sustainability is for governments, international institutions, and scientific agendas to recognize the adaptive capacities of family farms.

Through exploring the existence, transformations, and possible futures of family farms, this volume opens vistas on possible sustainable futures for society at every scale. The adaptability of farmers to a world of new information and communication technologies should not hide the fact that working the land for food remains central to all social life. The resilience of those who dynamically sustain links among kinship, land use, and food production is a thread ensuring the survival of humanity. The resilience of family farmers, understood in the sophisticated conception presented in this work, now appears surprisingly clear in face of many pressures to organize land, labour, markets, and technologies on industrial models. Yet

as these studies suggest, and as everyone can see, life and livelihoods are precarious in rural areas. Policies supporting accumulation and power in reorganization of rural landscapes weigh heavily on family farmers. What will the future bring for farming, and with it, for food and land? Will finance reorganize the real relations of families and the treatment of ecosystems as merely economic ‘services’ and ‘resources’ for accumulation of wealth?

Policy shifts could strengthen the thread of those who manage land and food in holistic, integrated, place-specific ways. Most important is land. After several decades in which land in rural areas was not deeply integrated into global markets, soaring commodity prices, competing uses such as biofuels, speculative investment by finance capital, have led to projects to transform customary land tenure into individual titles. Customary tenure itself can allow for manipulations that also undermine rural livelihoods and can be at odds with changing gender and other rights. What is needed are new formal institutions to guarantee sustainable land use, as advocated by some farmer movements. One approach is to understand ‘commons’ as instituted and governed by communities, and nested at all scales from village to region to international institutions. Another is to bring to rural areas the cultural amenities of urban life and to better integrate rural and urban life. Cities are trying to become ‘green’ and rural areas are incorporating cell phones and creating sustained networks crossing urban-rural and national divides. These spontaneous efforts to move into a sustainable future suggest ways to reorient policies across scales, so that all the many cultural expressions of family farms might realize the possibilities for re-embedding human foodgetting in the specific places farmers inhabit, and to connect those places in sustainable relations across scales, right up to the biosphere.

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November 2014

Harriet Friedmann



# Preface to the English Edition

This English volume is the translation of the original French edition published by Quæ in 2014: *Diversité des agricultures familiales. Exister, se transformer, devenir.*

In our disciplines, the translation of ideas and concepts into another language requires real expertise. It is far from a straightforward task. To convey ideas faithfully, we need the resources of time and money.

The publication of this English version would not have been possible without the collective efforts of a number of the contributing authors of the various chapters in mobilizing funding for the translation. (The names, contact e-mails, and institutional affiliations of all contributing authors can be found in the List of Authors at the end of the book.)

Each contributing author obtained a part of the funding necessary from his or her parent institution. In one case, the author dipped into his personal resources. We would thus like to thank all of them and their institutions: IPAR (Initiative prospective agricole et rurale) in Senegal; Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil; IAC (Agronomic Institute of New Caledonia) in New Caledonia; Paul Valéry University; ISTOM (School of International Agro-Development); IRD (Research Institute for Development); CIRAD through the Art-Dev, Moisa and Innovation joint research units, its Platforms in Partnership for Research and Training (ASAP – Agro-silvo-pastoral systems in West Africa; SPAD – Highland Production Systems and Sustainability in Madagascar; PP-AL – Public Policy and Rural Development in Latin America), and its ES (Environment and Societies) department; and INRA through the Innovation joint research unit and its SAD (Science for Action and Development) department.

A first version of the translation was submitted to the authors for validation and modifications, followed by a re-reading of all the chapters by two of the coordinators to ensure overall coherence of the book. Final decisions were taken in consultation with the translator.

The coordinators would like to extend special thanks to the book's translator, Kim Agrawal, for his commitment, his uncompromising exactitude and attention to detail, and his constant desire to get to the true meaning of words and ideas.

Montpellier, France

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