



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE FAO FOR THE INAUGURATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF FAMILY FARMING**

*To Professor José Graziano da Silva  
Director General of the Food and Agricultural Organization  
of the United Nations (FAO)*

*Mr Director General,*

I am writing to you on this, the opening day of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028), an initiative aimed at reaching the Zero Hunger 2030 target and attaining the second of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda: “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”.

The family consists of a network of relationships in which we learn to live with others and in harmony with the world around us. It thus represents a fertile ground and a model for conducting a sustainable agriculture, with beneficial effects not only for the farming sector, but also for mankind as a whole and for the protection of the environment. In this sense, the family can help us appreciate the interconnection of humanity, creation and agriculture.

Family life also exemplifies the principle of subsidiarity, which, as a means of regulating human relationships, is capable of shaping the social order. Through an appropriate subsidiarity, public authorities – from the local level to the broadest international level – can work together with families to develop rural areas, without overlooking the goal of the common good and by giving priority to people in situations of greatest need.

In this “subsidiarity from below”, which helps us to be attentive and considerate to our neighbours,

we can see how family farming calls for the specific contribution of the feminine genius, so necessary in every expression of the life of society (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 295). Especially in developing countries, women make a significant contribution to agricultural activity. They play a role in all the stages of food production from sowing to harvesting, in the management and care of livestock, and even in more demanding forms of labour.

Lastly, the food crisis in underdeveloped countries and the grave economic and financial crisis in developed countries have prompted renewed efforts in various parts of the world to make farming not only a means of employment, but also of development for individuals and communities. The employment of young people in agriculture, in addition to combatting unemployment, can bring new energies to a sector that is proving to be of strategic importance to the national interests of many countries. The goals of the 2030 Agenda cannot ignore the contribution of young people and their capacity for innovation.

It is important to reassess educational systems, so that they can better respond to the needs of the agricultural sector and thus help integrate young people in the labour market. The interests and talents shown by young people in the field of agriculture should be encouraged by suitable educational opportunities and economic policies capable of providing them with the necessary tools to put their abilities to good use and thus to become agents of change and development for their communities, with a view to an integrated ecology. Educational systems need to pass from simply conveying knowledge to fostering that ecological culture which necessarily includes “a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm” (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 111). The transmission of these values, embedded in the family, can shape the life of local communities and international life itself.

Mr Director General: this opportunity to reflect on and to promote family farming as part of the effort to eliminate hunger also provides an incentive for an increased societal awareness of the needs of our brothers and sisters lacking the basic necessities of life. To this end, there is a need to provide peoples with a suitable structure that can help set them free from hunger. This will be possible only as a result of joint efforts, carried out in a spirit of willingness and determination, and guided by an approach that takes into consideration fundamental human rights and intergenerational solidarity as the basis of sustainability. These actions will be vital for attaining, also through family farming, the objective laid down by the second of the *Sustainable Development Goals*.

May the Lord bless the efforts and activities of the Representatives of the nations accredited to the FAO, of all those associated with this Organization and of all who contribute to the realization of this initiative at the service of our greater human family.

*From the Vatican, 29 May 2019*

## Francis

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