

Women Farmers: The Key To Food Security

Presented by Denise O'Brien

Women, Food and Agriculture Network

Presented to the Graduate Program for Sustainable Agriculture

September 19, 2007

Definition of Food Security:

Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: 1) ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and 2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. (USDA)

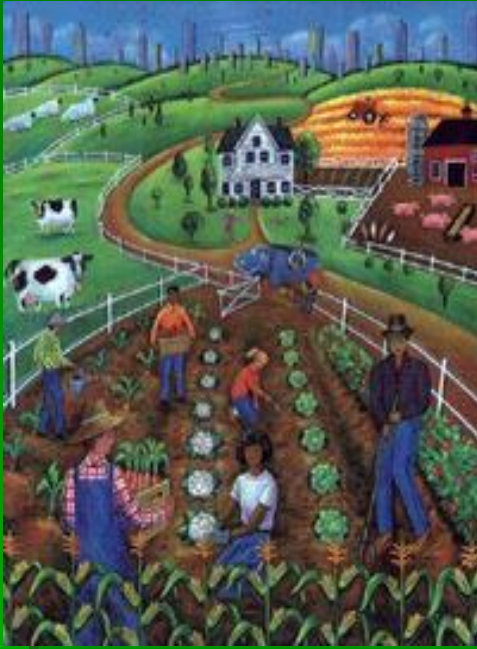


What is Community Food Security?

Community Food Security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound diet through an economically and environmentally sustainable food system that promotes community self-reliance and social justice.

Based on a definition
by Mike Hamm and
Anne Bellows








At a basic level, Community Food Security is about making healthy food accessible to all. It focuses on bringing fresh, local food into low-income communities, thereby reducing hunger, and improving individual health. But, as the definition above suggests, it's about much more than that.

Community Food Security is about:

-  **making nutritious and culturally appropriate food accessible, not just any food**
-  **supporting local, regional, family-scale, and sustainable food production**
-  **building and revitalizing local communities and economies**

-  **providing fair wages and decent working conditions for farmers and food system workers**

-  **promoting social justice and more equitable access to resources**
-  **empowering diverse people to work together to create positive changes in the food system and their communities.**

Why are women farmers and landowners in the United States important in the quest for food security?

Natural Capital—Clean air and water, healthy soils, biodiversity, scenery, climate

Human Capital—Health, skills and abilities, education, self-esteem

Cultural Capital—Cosmovision, spirituality, ways of knowing

Social Capital—Relationships, trust, reciprocity, groups, working together

Political Capital—Connections, voice, power, organization

Financial Capital—Income, investment, loans and credit, tax breaks, government payments

Built Capital—Infrastructure, machinery, buildings, transportation routes

Independence—Small production units, self-sufficiency, emphasis on personal knowledge/skills

Decentralization—Local agriculture, more farmers, dispersed control of farming resources

Community—Cooperation, preserving farm traditions, farming as way of life, quality/beauty

Harmony with Nature—Nature valued for own sake, imitated natural ecosystems, conservation

Diversity—Biodiversity, polyculture, integration of crops and livestock

Restraint—Simple lifestyles, back to basics, land practices to benefit future generations

Quality of Family Life— Time to spend with family, human health—no chemicals, less stress

Spirituality/Religiosity— Spiritual connection with nature, faith, sense of greater power

According to the most recent numbers from 2002 U.S. Agriculture Census:

- ❖ women own almost half the U.S. farmland, and**
- ❖ the number of women as primary operators has increased by 13 percent from the previous census in 1977.**

Nationwide, the number of women as primary operators increased from 209,784 in 1997 to 237,819 in 2002.



In Iowa, the number of women as principal operators rose from 5,101 in 1997 to 6,204 in 2002, a 21 percent increase.

- **Recent research on women in agriculture strongly suggests that women who choose to farm as a profession encounter various gender-specific barriers.**
- **One barrier has been exclusion of women from capital-intensive agriculture with large land-holdings.**
- **In response, women farmers have moved toward sustainable agricultural enterprises that encourage lower capital investment, greater investment of labor, and more land-intensive practices.**
- **A Minnesota study showed that women tend to farm the less productive land and disproportionately engage in the production of fruits, vegetables, trees, nuts and animal specialties.**



“Biodiversity for Food Security: Women Farmers are ready!”

Recommendations by women farmers for

World Rural Women's Day, 2004

Over the centuries, rural women have acquired knowledge about most of the species of animals and plants that share their everyday life.

Furthermore, women farmers protect the plants and animals produced locally, select the different species depending on how local conditions evolve, and handle agricultural ecosystems in order to renew resources in the long-term.



Women farmers are ready to work with agricultural research services to guide them on their roles and needs, lay down the working priorities jointly, and disseminate the results of research on the preservation of biodiversity. Women farmers are ready to work with the players involved in research to develop projects designed to preserve biodiversity.



Women farmers are ready to circulate their knowledge on biodiversity so that it can be taken into account in the policies of the agricultural sector and in the management of the environment. A policy framework that favours the recommendations of women farmers on the rational and sustainable management of biodiversity should be drawn up with the aim of preserving the knowledge accumulated over generations.

Women farmers are ready to undertake professional training so that they can use biodiversity more efficiently and rationally, and develop solid marketing plans for their production. They need to reinforce their technical and entrepreneurial capacities through the introduction of agricultural training services.



Women farmers are ready to participate in awareness-raising campaigns aimed at the general public to help all citizens understand the necessity of safeguarding biodiversity.

Women farmers are ready to better integrate ecosystem approaches into the management of their farms. Implementation of this project requires national and international funding.

Women farmers are the guardians of biological diversity and play a major role in world agricultural production. Applying these recommendations is vital to ensure food security for people while respecting the balance of ecosystems.





World Rural Women's Day
October 15, 2007

“The right to food: rural women produce and provide”

The purpose of the Day:

The day provides rural women and their organizations with a focal point to :

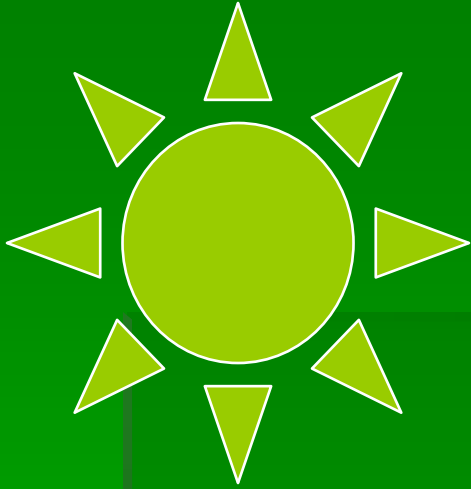
- ✓ Raise the profile of rural women,
- ✓ Sensitize both government and public to their crucial, yet largely unrecognized roles, and
- ✓ Promote action in support of rural women. This action undertaken by rural and farming women in all parts of the world on the very same day, in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation, would strengthen the impact of the day.



A recent World Bank study found that if women received the same education as men, farm yields could rise by as much as 22 percent. In Kenya, a national information campaign targeted at women increased yields of maize by 28 percent, beans by 80 percent, and potatoes by 84 percent. But, women farmers still receive only five percent of all agricultural extension services worldwide.



Women are essential to improving nutrition, increasing the production and distribution of food, and enhancing the living conditions of people in rural areas. Yet, women farmers are often among the poorest. Women make up 60 percent of the world's 1.2 billion poor. And women are getting poorer: the percentage of women below the poverty line has increased by half since the 1970s, while the comparable figure for men increased only 30 percent.



Areas for Action

In most developing countries, both men and women farmers do not have access to adequate resources, but women's access is even more constrained as a result of cultural, traditional and sociological factors. Accurate information about men's and women's relative access to, and control over, resources is crucial in the development of food security strategies.



Access to Land

Ownership of land encourages farmers to invest time and resources in long-term improvements and facilitates access to agricultural support services. Inheritance and land tenure laws limit women's ownership and use of land.



Access to Credit

Short- and long-term credit is needed to pay for inputs and hired labour. In the developing world, banks and credit associations are less inclined to lend to women because, without property and land rights, they lack collateral.



Access to Agricultural Inputs

Improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides are a vital means of enhancing production. Extension services and cooperatives distributing inputs rarely reach women who also lack the necessary cash to purchase even government-subsidized inputs.





Access to Extension and Training

Agricultural extension programs inform farmers about new technologies and plant varieties. Few extension services are targeted at rural women, few of the world's extension agents are women and most of the extension services focus on commercial rather than subsistence crops - the primary concern of women.



Access to Education

Investing in human capital reduces poverty and encourages sustainable economic growth. But prevailing attitudes about women's social, political and cultural rights severely limit girls' access to education throughout the developing world.



Access to Technology

Labour-saving technologies are important means of increasing production and improving people's quality of life. But the needs and priorities of women are rarely considered in the research and development of agricultural technology.



Access to Rural Organizations

Agricultural cooperatives and farmers' organizations help members obtain resources and represent members' interests before government. But a common prerequisite for membership of these rural organizations is, very often, 'head of household status' or land ownership, which applies solely to men.



Access to Services

Services such as transport and market facilities help farmers expand their income-generating activities. Although women have a role in the trading of goods and the food they produce, illiteracy and lack of legal rights prevent them from joining formal service institutions.

WOMEN PER 100 MEN IN AGRICULTURE



FEMINIZATION OF AGRICULTURE

In developing countries, women are increasingly taking charge of rural homesteads and farms as their menfolk leave for the cities in search of paid work. In Mozambique, for example, for every 100 men working in agriculture, there are now 153 women.

(Source: "The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics.", United Nations, 1995)

Resources:

<http://www.worldhungeryear.org/>

<http://www.fao.org/Gender/en/agrib1-e.htm>

<http://www.fao.org/Gender/en/agrib2-e.htm>

<http://www.fao.org/Gender/en/agrib3-e.htm>

<http://www.fao.org/Gender/en/agrib4-e.htm>

<http://www.rural-womens-day.org/>

<http://www.ifap.org/en/publications/docwomenbio04.html>

<http://agwomen.aers.psu.edu/bookchapters.html>

**Women, Land and Legacy Project Data Analysis
Preliminary Summary Using the Community Capitals
Framework - Bregendahl, Smith, Flora**