

IFOAM Highlights the Plight of Smallholder Farmers on Earth Day

Smallholder farmers grow over 70% of all our food. Reports predict climatic extremes that will imperil their production and livelihoods. Unless small-scale farmers are given the agro-ecological technologies they need to meet these challenges, impacts on food production will be devastating, pushing millions into poverty.

Compared to pre-industrial levels, average global surface temperature is set to increase from 3.7 to 4.8°C by 2100, if urgent additional climate change mitigation efforts are not initiated. What is more, just 1°C of global warming can be devastating to food production and crop yields and that higher levels of warming will push millions into poverty, reducing any development gains of the recent past. To this day, global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have not stopped rising. These are the disconcerting conclusions of two recently released cornerstone reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that will form part of their Fifth Assessment Report.

Although smallholder farmers produce the lion's share of all global agricultural production, half of them are still among the world's hungry. The IPCC's reports stress that their future is uncertain considering the *"risk of loss of rural livelihoods and income due to insufficient access to drinking and irrigation water and reduced agricultural productivity, particularly for farmers and pastoralists with minimal capital in semi-arid regions"*. In other words, those with the least are set to lose the most, should action not be taken to counteract weather extremes like droughts and floods induced by climate change.

Organic systems offer a solution by contributing to climate change mitigation through their higher carbon sequestration potential than conventional farming systems. According to a report by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, organic agriculture practiced by smallholders leads to an increase in food production and to greater benefits for the ecosystem overall: improved soil organic matter, reduced erosion and increased biodiversity. At the same time, organic farming also allows farmers to get a higher price for their produce and tap into niche export markets.

As Andre Leu, President of IFOAM, underlines: *“The International Year of Family Farming should mean more than just costly events and nice speeches! It must trigger the release of funds from developed countries to ensure that the right incentives are provided to those who are most vulnerable: The shift to agro-ecological techniques can elevate them out of poverty!”*

“On Earth Day we should all express our gratitude to all struggling smallholder farmers the world over who produce so much of the food we consume. It is now up to us to ensure they have access to the means and eco-technologies that will enable them to secure their own sustainable livelihoods,” he adds.