



**WORLD FARMERS'
ORGANISATION**

ADOPTED BY WFO GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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WFO POLICY ON YOUNG FARMERS

Executive Summary

Guiding Principles

- **Providing adequate opportunities** and fair economic returns.
- **Respecting the diversity of the farming community**, regardless of the farm sizes, age, gender, sexual orientation, geographical location i.e., developed or developing countries, religion and cultural identity, indigenous or non-indigenous peoples.
- **Respecting the land and environment**, contributing to engage with other stakeholders and develop policies that strengthen farmers' role in fighting climate change.
- **Advocating for inclusive regulations** providing professional and learning opportunities that can allow young farmers an adequate career development and facilitate the generational renewal.
- **Promoting an enabling framework of rules** that facilitates access to land, capital, market, education and innovation.
- **Promote the dignity and social equality of farmers.**
- **Promoting innovation and technology** as a one of the ways to increase sustainability in agriculture.
- **Fostering cooperation with governments to create conducive policies for the young farmers as future leaders of agriculture.**

Policy recommendations to foster youth empowerment and engagement in farming

- Governments should create an **enabling environment for youth by adopting farmers driven policies, designing tailor-made educational programs for youth, as well as facilitating youth access to resources, infrastructures, education, finance, credit, start-up aid for young farmers, input and insurances** among others.
- Youth face several barriers in the farming sector, above all access to land. **Governments and all relevant stakeholders should strengthen youth organizations and participation in land policymaking processes, facilitating youth access to finance, foster generation renewal in agriculture and provide incentives for those retiring to let their farms to the younger generation.**
- Governments should adopt and **implement policies to facilitate youth access to markets, as well as to training and capacity building** to be able to fully express their potential as entrepreneurs in the value chain.
- Governments should create a **conductive policy, legal and financial environment to support youth, including young farmers, to create their own institutions.** Also, partnerships with and among youth-focused and youth-led organisations, should be fostered, also to increase youth institutional capacity and advocacy power.

Preamble

Youth is continually faced with various uncertainties regarding their general and professional development and career opportunities. **In many countries across the world, young people suffer significant disadvantages compared to their peers, by being detached from both the labor market and the education and training systems.** Central to this is the cohort of young people characterized as 'Not in Employment, Education and Training' (NEET youths). Although especially vulnerable, this societal faction contains unexploited potential in terms of their capacity to engage in the labor force and contribute to local economies.

The global population of young people aged 15-24 is around 1.2 billion, which **represents over 14 % of the global population with approximately 88% of them living in developing countries (60 % in Asia and 18 % in Africa).** By 2030, the target date for the sustainable development goals, the number of youths is projected to have grown by 7%, to nearly 1.3 billion. Young farmers represent a large share of the youth; however, their future is threatened by several challenges.¹

Young farmers are the future of the agricultural sector. Yet around the world, few young people see a future for themselves in agriculture or rural areas. Rural youth on the other hand face many hurdles in trying to earn a livelihood. Pressure on arable land is high in many parts of the world, making it difficult to start a farm. Youth often also lacks access to investments, networking, knowledge, markets, and many other productive resources necessary for agriculture. Although these issues are global, in developing countries, rural youth find themselves even more in such a predicament. While most of the world's food is produced by (ageing) small scale and family farmers in developing countries, it may be harder for older farmers to adopt the new technologies needed to sustainably increase agricultural productivity, and ultimately feed the growing world population while protecting the environment. Hence, the need to re-engage youth in agriculture, also to make sure that the knowledge that is not yet codified and can only be transferred orally, gets transmitted from the elderly to the young farmers to prevent it from being lost forever.

There is a lot of concern about engaging youth in agriculture, in many ways. Young people are not very much interested in continuing in agriculture because it is difficult for them to see a future for them in the farming sector, they do not see it as a profitable profession in the long run also because they struggle to get access to finance or loans to run their farming businesses. Furthermore, young farmers face high barriers to enter the sector, low and volatile

¹ World Population Prospects 2019 - Highlights | Population Division (un.org)

incomes for their hard work and limited access to the necessary resources, both financial and non-financial, thus justifying the current aging farming population. It is up to local and regional governments to take away the existing barriers, too low and volatile incomes, and overall uncertainty. **Young farmers need to be empowered and supported to be able to recognize farming as a business:** they need to see themselves as part of a bigger system, in some cases there is a need for them to change mindset and adopt an entrepreneurial approach. In this regard, young farmers deserve access to transparent information in terms of pricing and negotiations, as well as training to be able to shift their mindset, see themselves as entrepreneurs and see farming as an opportunity, as a profitable business which can truly improve their livelihoods.

Guiding Principles

We, Young farmers of the World, advocate for the right of all young farmers to be agropreneurs according to the following principles:

- **Providing adequate opportunities** and fair economic returns;
- **Respecting the diversity of the farming community**, regardless of the farm sizes, age, gender, sexual orientation, geographical location i.e., developed or developing countries, religion and cultural identity, indigenous or non-indigenous peoples;
- **Respecting the land and environment**, contributing to engage with other stakeholders and develop policies that strengthen farmers' role in fighting climate change. We young farmers, are willing to work with responsible industries, markets, public authorities, social community, which are available to share, discuss and partner with us to cope with the most relevant challenges the planet currently faces, including food insecurity, climate change, social instability, in light of a mutual respect and acknowledging the relevance of young farmers in all value chains;
- **Advocating for inclusive regulations** providing professional and learning opportunities that can allow young farmers an adequate career development, as well as, facilitate the generational renewal;
- **Promoting an enabling framework of rules** that facilitates access to land, capital, market, education and innovation;
- **Promote the dignity and social equality of farmers.**
- **Promoting innovation and technology** as a one of the ways to increase sustainability in agriculture;

- **Fostering cooperation with governments** to create conducive policies for the young farmers as future leaders of agriculture.

We, Young farmers of the world, are willing to work with other stakeholders to achieve global food security and provide viable solutions that can ensure economic, environmental and social stability in the world. **Support young farmers, secure the future!**

Main pillars for empowering and retaining youth in agriculture

Including young farmers in decision-making processes

Young farmers present a huge goldmine that can provide the solution to the main challenges of the 21st century as well as a strong potential to modernize an ageing agricultural sector that needs to be rejuvenated if a sustainable future and social stability for the planet are to be achieved. Therefore, it is key to address the obstacles of youth engaging in the agriculture sector through encouraging young people to join the sector. Particularly this includes **giving young farmers at policy level a chance to offer their opinion and experiences**. In this way, they can show other young people that farming can be a rewarding career as well as highlighting their importance in enhancing the role of agriculture on a global scale.

Facilitating youth access to education, training, technology

It should be noted that youth are influenced by a wide range of uncertainties regarding their personal and professional development. Rural youth, and in particular those who cannot access employment, education or training are especially vulnerable and face higher risks of labor market, social and economic exclusion. Change is necessary to support world youth. **Young farmers play a crucial role in societal development, and they are drivers of modern rural development** in era of rapid digitalization caused by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. **Young farmers tend to be more productive because of their openness to new ideas and are more open to informed risk taking**. Therefore, supporting the next generation of farmers not only enhances the future competitiveness of agriculture, but it also plays an important role in meeting the challenges of food security and global warming. **Youth and agriculture programming presents also a unique opportunity also for gender education**, as adolescence is a pivotal time of life in which young men and women form gender norms. Moreover, **a younger generation will help introduce new technologies whilst also learning from traditional methods**, holding the potential to offer the perfect fusion of new and traditional solutions to some of the world's biggest challenges.

Young people therefore need to be offered education in agriculture, a voice at policy level, and in the media, as well as fair return for their job as farmers. In addition, such change must come with a recognition that challenges being faced by rural youth are also related to underdeveloped infrastructures, high land prices, and difficulty in accessing credit and policy support as well as problems with farm succession.

Ensuring smooth and sustainable generational renewal

If older farmers do not pass farms to the younger generation, as part of a structured process of transition, there is a risk that rural youth may become disillusioned, further compounding the issue. In that sense, the issues of older farmers not having formal retirement plans or other reasons not to pass the farm to younger generations as well as financial, social and emotional difficulties in giving over the farm to young farmers should be at the center of concern and thus should be taken up in government policy. In this context, it will be crucial to **ensure continuity from one generation of farmers to the next, ensuring that newcomers are adequately trained to be able to adapt to evolving and increasingly specialized agricultural techniques**. Also, it might be appropriate to consider the possibility of forms of **coaching between elderly and young farmers** as the presence of young people, generating new added value, would allow coexistence and cooperation between the generations of farmers.

Creating an enabling environment for youth engagement and retainment in agriculture

Young men and women are engaged in the agri-food system in a variety of ways through formal and informal wage work, unpaid family labor, underpaid agricultural labor, self-employment, and cooperative membership and across all levels of the value chain. Overall, youth earn “mixed livelihoods” from various sources on-farm, off-farm, and non-farm and with self-employment and migration playing particularly important roles. Youth tends to favor modern agriculture practices, use of technology, and opportunities for a higher income in the short term, compared to staple crops. Youth decisions to engage in agriculture work are also shaped by the environment in which they live: the economic and political context, social norms and customs, the nature of the agri-food system, institutions, laws and regulations, parental and peer influence, media, previous experiences, and gender relations. In terms of solutions, skills development initiatives are likely to have an impact on youth employment and earnings outcomes; **skills transfer in the agriculture sector has effectively occurred in work-based learning venues such as farmer field schools, on-site employer-based training, internships, volunteer opportunities, and co-curricular youth organizations**.

In finance, effective interventions have promoted the bankability of youth enterprises, financial literacy and savings among youth, and the capacity of loan officers. Promising youth and land interventions will **ultimately strengthen youth organizations and participation in land policymaking processes, support education and awareness-raising activities for youth to understand their land rights and strengthen youth access to legal services to recognize and defend land rights**. Access to land in some cases is only possible through purchase and in these cases financial instruments with an adequate payment term and public guarantees are required. For young people the first years of start-up the business is challenging because in the presence of significant investments and for this reason it is important to provide for adequate pre-amortization periods.

The WFO youth policy therefore calls for action where the young generation have a chance to make a difference in agriculture space to feed the world but also make sustainable livelihoods from it, based on the three pillars of sustainability, including the economic one, recognizing farming as a business which needs to be profitable in order to be sustainable. This policy should be used as a guide for its members and partners in fulfilling the needs and expectations of the youngsters.

Policy recommendations to foster youth empowerment and engagement in farming

1. Creation of an enabling environment

Young farmers call on Governments to create an enabling environment for the development of rural areas, through the adoption and implementation of farmers driven policies and programs to increase investments in and access to infrastructures (i.e., internet broadband facilities, effective health systems, welfare, accessible roads, recreational facilities, banking institutions, schools) and the social support provided by the intranet of young farmers should be enhanced. With the right infrastructures, rural migration can be mitigated, and rural areas can retain and welcome skilled professionals of all kinds. Furthermore, Governments must commit to design tailor-made educational programs (such as the youth farmer field schools' approach) which will provide youth with the skills and insights needed to engage in farming and adopt environmentally friendly production methods. These commitments from governments world over must be able to translate into improved infrastructures for the young farmers to be able to connect to markets to sell their often-higher value food. This must be coupled with the commitments from governments to facilitate youth's access to credit and competitive

finance which will help them become entrepreneurs, improving their self-esteem and the feeling that they can make a living from the agriculture sector. Also, Governments should implement schemes and policies that support young farmers in finding enough and appropriate land to farm on, as this is the single most important production factor of farmers and especially young farmers struggle to find enough land to farm on.

2. Foster youth engagement in partnerships

Partnerships, particularly between organizations with comparative advantages on different issues affecting young people at the country level, **should be encouraged at all levels across the value chains.**

In addition, it is key to support the engagement of youth and youth-led organizations in policy processes and the development of partnerships among youth associations and networks.

3. Support generational renewal on farms

All over the world, young people face enormous challenges to find a profession, and those working in agriculture are not an exception. Despite the enormous effort youth make in agriculture, they still face a lot of difficulties in being involved in the sector. This is mostly due to a series of barriers that youth have to circumvent such as, access to land; education; finance and innovation, as well as lack of regulations facilitating youth access to agriculture; scarce availability of older generations to cede the drive of farms; succession plan and tax incentives. **Without young farmers it would be impossible to face many of the challenges this planet is called to address in the next 50 years**, i.e.: poverty eradication, food security, climate change, social stability, economic growth, and thus stronger generation renewal plans should be created. It is, therefore, necessary that all relevant stakeholders, including governments, private sector, farmers' organisations, academia, carry out sensitization of the current generation of farmers about generation renewal in agriculture and to provide incentives for those retiring to let their farms to the younger generation. In this regard, it could be helpful to create a network of experienced farming mentors to support youth with high-quality, business oriented, experience-based guidance, which would support young farmers in gaining confidence and get an entrepreneurial vision, while providing rewards to mentors for their service.

4. Increase youth institutional capacity

Governments should create a conducive policy, legal and financial environment to support youth, including young farmers, to form create their own institutions

including associations, cooperatives, organizations, movements, that should be recognized and supported by local and national authorities, in order to network and collaborate with other stakeholders and policy-makers. Those institutions should also be seen as a valuable partner by governments and other stakeholders. **This process would facilitate the advocacy activities of young farmers by enhancing their institutional capacity and provide a voice and sense of ownership for the youth.**

5. Increase access to finance, credit and Insurance

Governments should facilitate young farmers' access to finance, credit, start-up aid for young farmers, input and insurances. Moreover, young farmers should **have access to education, and specific training on economics and the creation and implementation of business plans.** Financial institutions should create dedicated schemes for young farmers and facilitate sharing of information, training and capacity building training. ***They should also apply a reduced interest rate for loans to young farmers to improve their access to farming and efficiency in the production process.*** The possibility of using non-conventional assets as collateral, such as: intellectual capital (IP, business plan, innovation output); livestock; innovative ways to get financed in agriculture (green bonds, plants & animals leasing, crowdfunding and crowdlending, carbon farming); products, should be considered.

6. Increase access to land

Governments should formulate policies that allow young farmers to access land. National authorities, religious entities and cultural institutions should give priorities to young farmers in their land allocation processes (if any). For instance, governments could transform abandoned lands into special young farmers zones to make land accessible to young agripreneurs. Legislation and national or institutional programs should facilitate the transfer of land to young farmers. Land registration for farmers should be established and the registration rights should be affordable for young farmers.

7. Ensure access to water

Access to both drinking and irrigation water is an inalienable right. The agricultural sector is highly dependent on water **and investing on making water management more sustainable and equitable, is key for increasing the sustainability of the farming sector.** This applies also to young farmers entering the sector, for whom easier access to technology and infrastructures would also contribute to shift to a more sustainable use of natural resources, including water, with benefits for the entire rural community.

Also, research should be encouraged in transforming sea water into irrigation/potable water to overcome irrigation water deficits in arid regions or in times of droughts.

8. Enhance access to education

Young farmers' skills development should be prioritized by Governments and proper programs have to be put in place by all Governments, universities and parallel educational programs. **The right of young farmers to be properly literate and educated should be recognized at global, national and local levels.** Even when educated, young farmers should have access to further education programs, graduate or post graduate studies, covering theory and/or practice. Traditional education systems, educational programs evaluation and re-assessment should involve young farmers' input, based on their experience as beneficiaries and young professionals. Also, **traditional education systems should be combined with on-farm training, including farmer-to-farmer exchange and at levels.** Young farmers' education in the farming sector should start right from a very young age from kindergarten to universities for children to get used to the values of farming in the young minds. Moreover, young people must be guaranteed **access to long life learning also through the exchange of experiences with young farmers from other countries of the world** (i.e. Erasmus Mundi for Agripreneurs). Provision of scholarships in this context could be a great motivator for aspiring agripreneurs, particularly those in the vulnerable groups.

9. Increase to Knowledge and Innovation

Farmers have always been at the base of the innovating chain in agriculture. **Young farmers can be an excellent ally in supporting research and development (R&D) if involved at all stages from concept to delivery and evaluation.** Scientists should be acquainted with young farmers' issues, and these must be involved in the research process. Traditional education systems, should be combined with on-farm training, including farmer-to-farmer exchange and at levels. Agri-companies using R&D, innovation and technology should ally with youth to expose young agripreneurs to novel aspects of doing agribusiness, thus increasing their self-esteem and capacity of taking opportunities.

10. Ensure to Market and Value chain

It is critical, for the sustainability of family farming as well as for the sustainability and resilience of the entire food systems, that all farmers, including young farmers, are included in fair value chains. Governments should adopt and implement policies to facilitate youth access to markets, as well as to training and capacity building on i.e., business planning, marketing, production, to be able to express their potential within the value chain.

11. Enhance to information

Agricultural information, knowledge, and the ability to learn are preconditions to coping successfully with change. Well-trained young farmers are better equipped to succeed in the daily management of their farms and adapt more easily to new economic circumstances or environmental considerations. **A central agricultural knowledge exchange tank could be set up, assembling all the knowledge, research, innovation and experience of all the agricultural stakeholders ranging from academia, scientists, private sectors, agricultural producers, third party organisations and consumers.**



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