



# Family farming

A dialogue towards more sustainable and resilient farming in Europe and the world

*Conference – Brussels, Charlemagne building, 29 November 2013*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Public Consultation "The role of family farming, key challenges and priorities for the future"**



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# Executive summary on the Public Consultation

## "The role of family farming, key challenges and priorities for the future"

### Family Farming

*The concept of family farming covers various elements. From a sociological perspective, family farming is associated with family values, such as solidarity, continuity and commitment; in economic terms, family farming is identified with specific entrepreneurial skills, business ownership and management, choice and risk behaviour, resilience and individual achievement. Family farming is often more than a professional occupation because it reflects a lifestyle based on beliefs and traditions about living and work.*

*Being the most common operational farming model, family farming is at the heart of the European model of agriculture and thus of great importance in the EU. It constitutes the foundations upon which agriculture has thrived in Europe over centuries. Supported by a strong and ambitious policy framework family farming is ensuring food security while meeting rising societal expectations for food safety, quality, value, origin and diversity of food. At the same time, it maintains the rural lifestyle and contributes to the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of rural areas.*

*There is a high diversity of family farms in the EU, in terms of their size, activities they engage in, availability of resources, degree of market integration, competitiveness, share of labour used, etc. They operate in different economic, agro-ecological and social contexts, and thus contribute in a different way to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.*

### Disclaimer

*This paper is a summary of the replies to a public e-consultation launched by the EU Commission.*

*The information and views set out in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.*

### 1. Introduction

The European Commission launched on 5 August 2013 an on-line public consultation with the aim to understand citizens' experiences and perceptions on family farming. The survey also looked at some of the challenges and priorities faced by family farming (FF).

All citizens, organisations and public authorities in the European Union and beyond interested in the topic of family farming were invited to contribute to this consultation until 11 October 2013.

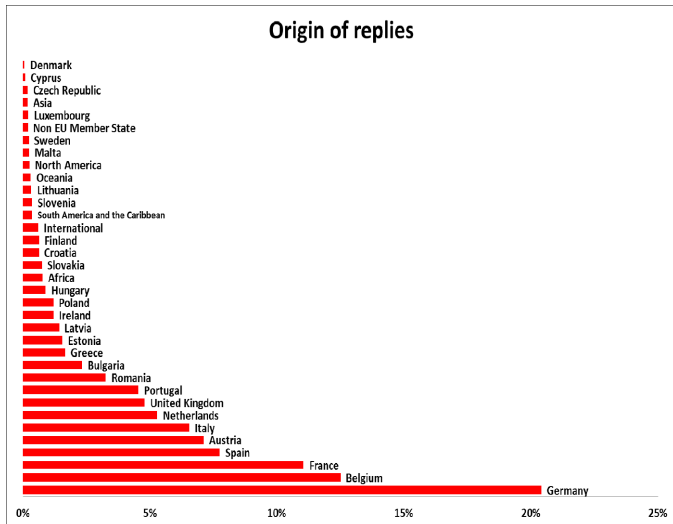
The consultation contributes towards the European conference "Family farming: A dialogue towards more sustainable and resilient farming in Europe and the world" on 29 November 2013.

This summary outlines the most important outcomes based on the 3414 contributions. In order to avoid bias, this document limits itself to describe results with no intention of expressing any conclusions, opinions or assumptions.

### Key facts and figures

- **3414 replies** from the five continents, but mainly from the EU (97%).
- 40% of respondents are **under 40 years** old, and almost **40% were women**.
- 72% of individuals declared **to own or to work on a farm**.
- Recipients were requested to identify the main **social, economic and policy challenges**. The majority of respondents selected: "**Ageing and succession**", "**Bargaining power**" and "**Administrative burden**" respectively as the main challenges.
- Individuals from **developing countries** identify "**Access to land and resources**" as the main policy challenge faced by FF.
- Neither **age** nor **gender** appear to be a differentiating element throughout the replies.
- 40% of farmers consider **research and innovation** as "very important" and 84% as "important" or "very important". **Sustainability** is identified as a priority research sector.

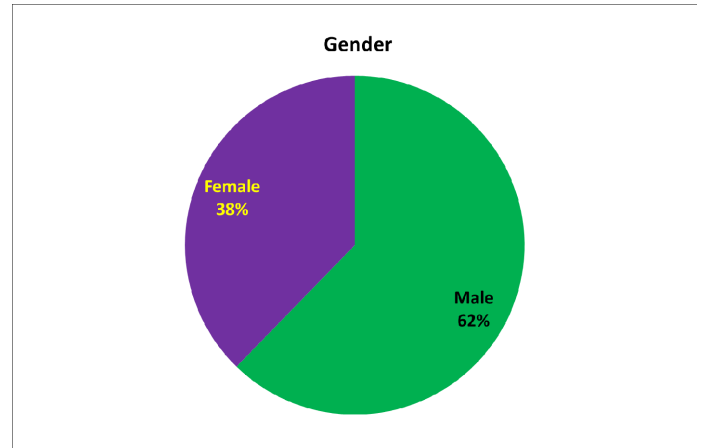
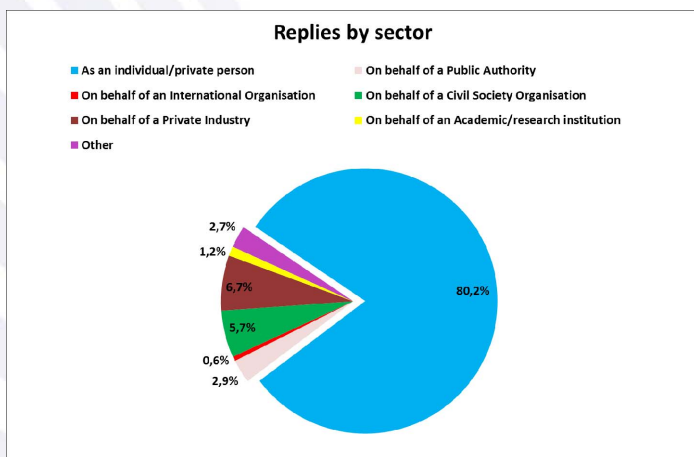
## Who replied?



The consultation received 3414 written replies, the majority (80,2%) coming from individuals, 6,7% on behalf of private industries, 5,7% from civil society organisations, 2,9% from public authorities, 1,2% from academic institutions, 0,6% from international organisations and 2,7% from other. Most of the replies (97%) represent European individuals/organisations, less than 2% represent developing countries and the rest of replies represent other categories (1%).

2659 of submissions came from respondents who identified with a gender category, from which 38% came from women and 62% from men.

40% of respondents are under 40 years old, and only 3,3% are over 65 years old. To be highlighted that statistics reveal that European farmers over 65 years old amount to 14% of the farming population<sup>1</sup>.



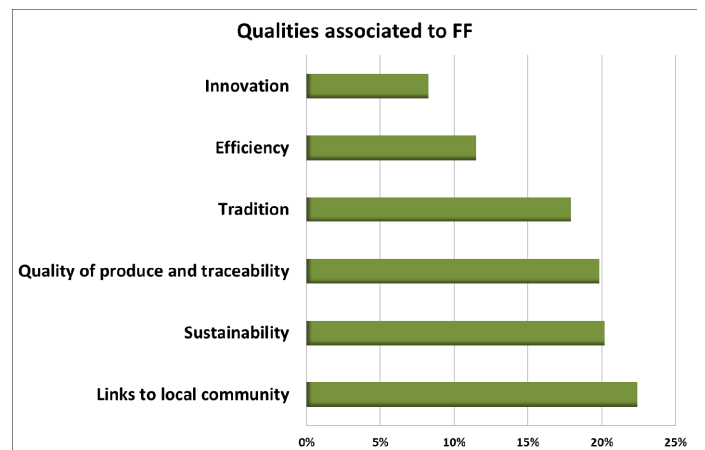
## 2. General findings

The whole sample cannot be considered as a statistically representative sample; therefore the results cannot be taken as representing the wider views of the general population; the sample is not geographically balanced since there is an overwhelming majority of European opinions (97%). To note that 3 European countries, namely Germany, France and Belgium, represent 44% of total replies.

### A general overview of Family Farms

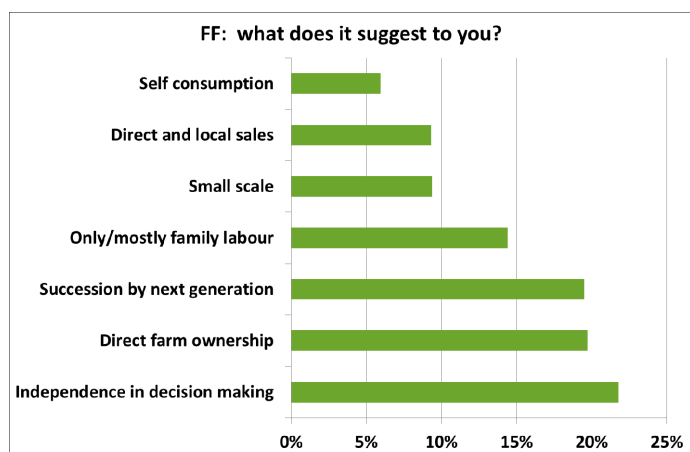
#### *Family Farming (FF) more than business but still a business*

The majority of respondents (61%) agree that the main contribution of FF is to "Food production" and "Security". However, when asked about the qualities associated to FF the respondents consider as value elements: "Links to local community", "Sustainability" and "Quality of products". According to the replies "Innovation" and "Efficiency" are the less valued qualities amongst the different options.



<sup>1</sup> Source: EU Agricultural Economic Briefs (October 2013). For more detailed information see, [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-area-economics/briefs/pdf/09\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-area-economics/briefs/pdf/09_en.pdf)

### FF what does it mean?

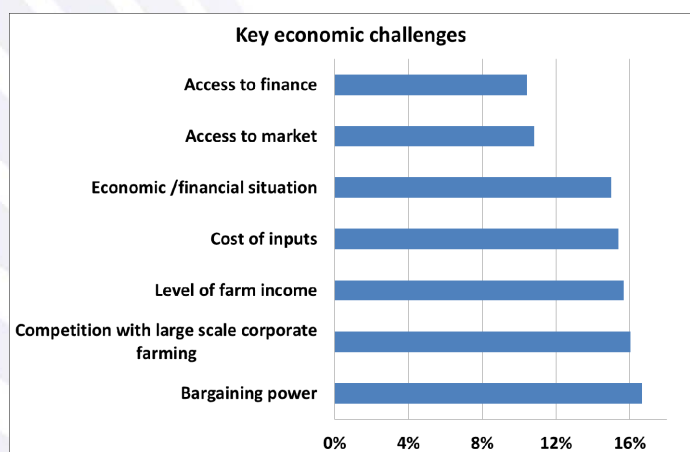


For a majority of respondents (82%) FF is associated with "Independence of decision making"(22%), "Direct farm ownership" (20%), and "Succession by next generation" (19%). Respondents were least concerned about "Direct and local scale" (9%) and "Self-consumption" (6%).

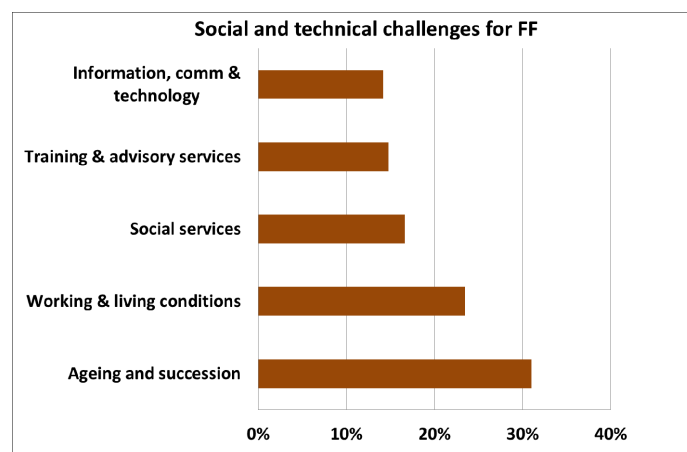
### 3. Workshop 1: Best practices in family farming

#### What are the challenges?

For a majority of respondents (78%) the main challenge to the economic survival of FF is associated with "Bargaining power" and "Competition with large scale corporate firms". Respondents viewed less important "Access to market and finance".

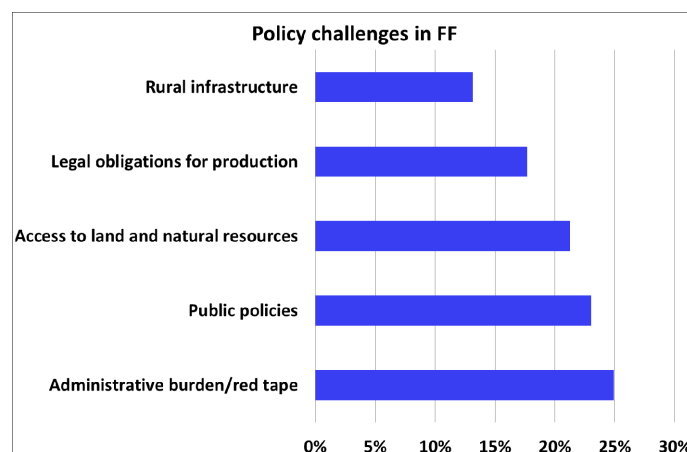


### At a social level, also several issues to be addressed

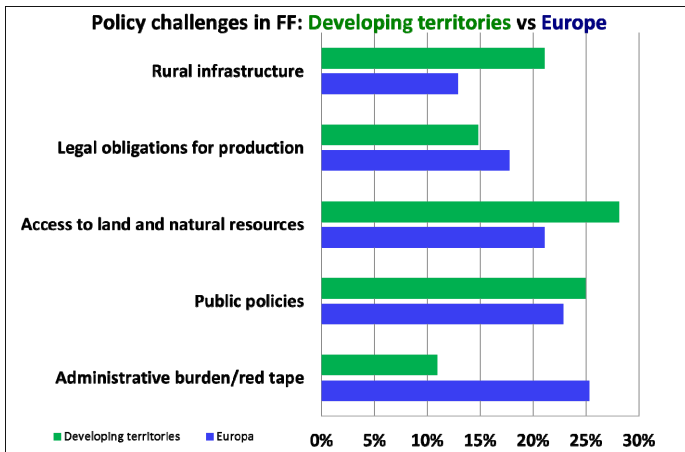


Eighty-five percent of respondents consider "Ageing and succession" (31%) and "Working and living conditions" (23%) to be the main societal challenges faced by FF. Respondents valued as less important "Access to information, communication and technology" (14%).

#### What about policy?

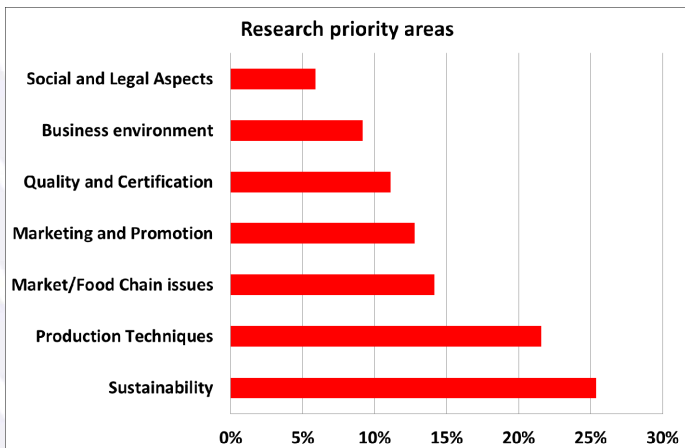


At a global and European level "Administrative burden" (25%) is perceived as a key policy challenge. However, it is interesting to note that, when comparing Europe with developing countries priorities change, "Access to land and natural resources" (28%) is valued as a main policy challenge for respondents from developing countries.

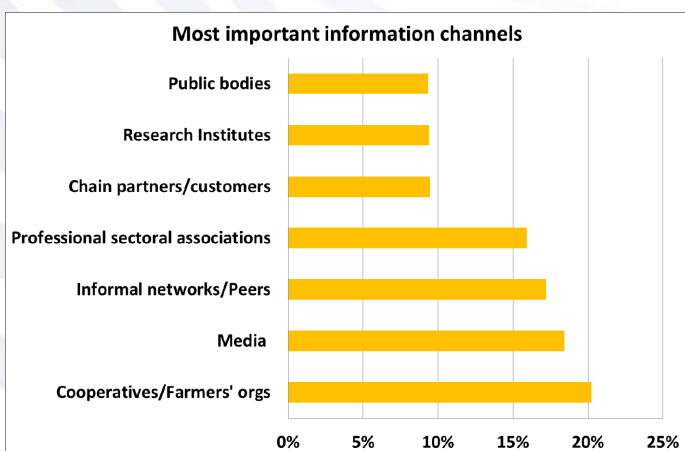


#### 4. Workshop 2: Access to new technology and research

The vast majority of respondents (81%) consider that technology and innovation are *important* or *very important* for FF.



Respondents favoured "Sustainability" (25%) as the main research priority area, followed by "Production techniques" (22%). Agreement with these statements is high in most countries and socio-demographic groups.



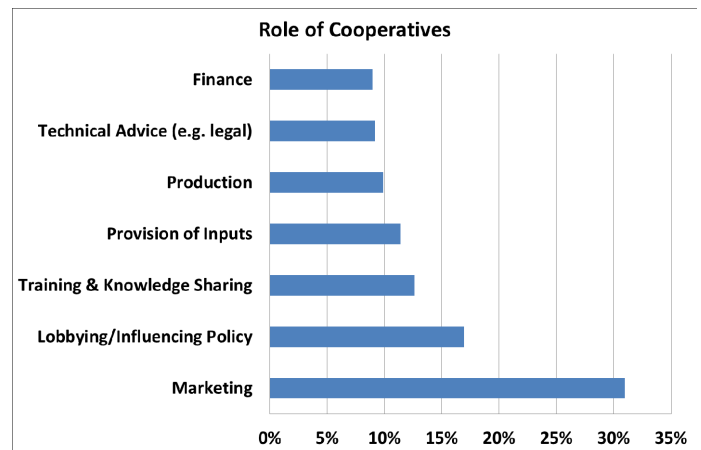
When it comes to accessing information on new technologies, a majority of respondents consider "Cooperatives/farmers organisations" (20%) as a key information channel. "Media" (18%)

and "Informal networks" (17%) were also associated as valuable channels that enable access to new information.

#### 5. Workshop 3: Organisation models to strengthen family farms

##### Working together to improve FF

The majority of respondents (78%) agree that cooperatives/farmers organisations are *very* or *somewhat important* for the survival and further development of FF.



Regarding the role of cooperatives, fewer than half (44%) of respondents consider that Cooperatives/farmers organisations can play a pivotal role in "Marketing" (31%). However, respondents from developing countries focus more on "Finance" than European farmers.

#### 6. Limitations

Respondents voiced a range of concerns in relation to the way questions were framed in the consultation. Specifically, respondents wanted to see:

- Open ended questions in order to provide comments/raise other issues based on their personal experience,
- more questions that address specifically gender and age and,
- more choices to answers.

#### 7. Position papers

Respondents were invited to contribute, in addition to the e-consultation, with position papers to expand on the challenges, opportunities and/or other specific issues of family farming.

The main challenges expressed by respondents to the sustainability of family farming are:

- Ageing and succession: Only 6% of farmers in Europe are under 35, and one third are over 65
- Administrative and market barriers
- Difficulty to access information
- Lack of common voice and representation at a national level
- Inadequate policies on trade and food sovereignty

- Volatility of market prices.

Among the opportunities that the family farming model can provide, the following are identified:

- Rural vitality by providing employment for young people in rural areas
- Food security and high-quality food
- Empowerment of family farmers
- Resilience to adapt quickly to environmental changes
- Preservation of cultural values
- Stewardship of biodiversity
- Competitiveness on the world market.

For more detailed information on all contributions see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/consultations/family-farming/2013\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/consultations/family-farming/2013_en.htm)