

International Federation of Agricultural Producers

60, rue Saint-Lazare, 75009 Paris, France
Tel. : +33 1 45 26 05 53 Fax : +33 1 48 74 72 12
E-mail : ifap@ifap.org Web Site : www.ifap.org



The New Blue Deal: Farmers as Equal Partners in Integrated Water Management Policy

March 20, 2009, Istanbul, Turkey – Addressing a Press Conference on: *The New Blue Deal: Water security for agriculture and climate change*, the President of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), Ajay Vashee insisted that “To enable the farmers of the world - whether in a small village in Asia, Africa or Latin America or even in the Western world - to continue to feed you and maintain your environment, they must be equal partners at all decision making levels.” A farmer-centered approach needs to be the core of a “new blue deal” and is crucial for real impact and sustainable solutions.

The IFAP call was supported by panellists Avinash C. Tyagi from the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and Rudolph Cleveringa from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Alpaslan Basarik from the Union of Turkish Chambers of Agriculture specifically called for awareness raising on irrigation efficiency techniques, support programs for farmers, the establishment of Water Boards and strong water standards and regulation.

Farmers are ready to take on the challenge of feeding an additional 2.7 billion people by 2050 within the context of a depreciating resource base and a time when an estimated 1.8 billion people will be living with absolute water scarcity, but governments, donor agencies and scientists need to commit to engage with farmers in long term water policy plans. At the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, IFAP established partnerships working towards water security and putting farmers in the driving seat of establishing sustainable water management systems.

“Unless we’re able to put farmers at the centre of water and agriculture related policy,” said IFAP President, Ajay Vashee at the Ministerial Roundtable on Food and Water, “sustainable development will not be achieved. Empowering farmers, who are actually the custodians of the environment and have the closest interaction with land and water resources, through awareness raising programs and stewardship programs will encourage them to use more environmental friendly agriculture practices and hence, manage the water resources in a more sustainable manner.”

Chair of the Roundtable and Deputy Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation of Egypt, Hussein I El-Atfy, echoed this statement, emphasizing that “Farmers, and especially small-holder farmers, are the key players. When we strengthen the farmers, the water user associations; when we provide the incentives, commitment, and facilities, farmers will have the means to better manage the water resources. This will result in a positive impact on the income of the farmers and the income of the country itself.”

The need for a strengthened partnership between farmers and scientists was stressed as a critical factor for a sustainable management of water resources. “To be able to sustain millions of livelihoods and future food production, farmers need the support of the research community,” said Vashee. “Scientists should be able to learn from farmers and the rural population and benefit from their traditional and indigenous knowledge,” he continued. Moreover, “Rural women need to be involved in all levels of decision making. They are mainly responsible for the food production in many developing countries,” concluded the IFAP President.

IFAP met with senior officials of the United States Department of Agriculture, the African Development Bank and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to discuss various avenues for collaboration and pilot project possibilities that would include the farmers as key beneficiaries.

The IFAP delegation included Gabriel Lambert from the Palestinian Farmers’ Union, Enrique Dominguez Lucero from Confederacion de Porcicultores Mexicanos, who took part in several high level panels and side events as key speakers. The IFAP delegation also included IFAP Policy Officer Daniëlle de Man, IFAP Regional Policy Officer for the Mediterranean Hiba El Dahr and IFAP Communications Officer Jessica Goodfellow.

To view videos and photos of IFAP’s participation in the World Water Forum, please visit our You Tube page: <http://www.youtube.com/user/WorldFarmers> , Flickr <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ifap/sets/72157615616539078/> and Twitter <http://twitter.com/worldfarmers>.

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IFAP is the world farmers' organization and the farmers' voice at the world level, representing 600 million family farmers grouped in 120 national organizations in 82 countries. It is a global network in which farmers from industrialized and developing countries exchange concerns and set common priorities. IFAP has been advocating farmers' interests at the international level since 1946 and has General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.