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## Can family farming save the world?

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2014 marked the UN International Year of Family Farming, which celebrated the contribution family-based agriculture brings to the global food system. Ilaria Bertini headed to Italy to attend two of the year's most significant family farming events

There are currently 500m small-scale family-run farms worldwide, which together account for more than half of all global agricultural production. Yet family farming is endangered by changing climate patterns, industrial agriculture and, in the case of developing countries, land grabbing and violation of indigenous rights.

However, the important role of family farming, especially in rural areas of developing countries, is being more and more acknowledged and 2014, the United Nations-declared Year of Family Farming, hosted a number of events aimed at raising awareness on the role it plays in eradicating hunger and poverty and promoting sustainable development.

Among them were the Salone del Gusto, a globally renowned, biennial celebration of local and artisanal food production, and Terra Madre, a parallel gathering of food activists and social justice campaigners. The events, organised by Slow Food, a worldwide movement that campaigns for sustainable, good and fair food for everybody, were held in Turin from 23 to 27 October and attended by more than 220,000 people.

The assembled gourmants sampled delicacies ranging from Korean temple food to raw milk goat cheeses made by local Italian artisans, and surveyed rare culinary treasures in the Ark of Taste, a hulking wooden structure that showcased global food products now at risk of extinction.

“**Making a garden is a political act, making it in Africa is twice a political act**”

The real stars of the show, though, were the family farmers who grew the food on display. During the five-day summit, delegates including chefs, environmentalists and social justice activists discussed the increasing challenges faced by family farmers, including how industrialised agribusinesses is continually expanding to feed a global population expected to reach 9.6 billion by mid-century.

With just a few hundred companies now controlling 70 percent of the global trade in key commodities such as beef, sugar and soy, corporate engagement on topics such as climate change, fair labour standards and gender equity is crucial, Oxfam America food security campaign manager Vicky Rateau told attendees in Turin.

But even as the industrial farming sector expands, family farms are enjoying a resurgence, said Italian

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but even as the industrial farming sector expands, family farms are enjoying a resurgence, said Italian climatologist Luca Mercalli. That's especially true in the West, Mercalli said, where family-run farms have moved beyond simple subsistence agriculture, and now constitute an alternative space where consumers and producers are establishing fairer and more sustainable ways to grow food using less resources, packaging and chemicals than large-scale farming.

That makes small farms a vital tool as food activists seek to ensure access to healthy, sustainable food for everyone, said British celebrity chef and campaigner Jamie Oliver, also in attendance at the summit.

"My belief is that it's every child's human right to be fed properly and to be educated about food, where it comes from and how it affects their body," Oliver said. "However, this can only happen if we rectify the mess that the global food system has found itself in today."

The hope now is that the conversations sparked at the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre will lead to a broader push to promote family farming both as a sustainable form of agriculture for the developed world, and as a step towards increased food security in poorer countries.

Slow Food is currently supporting a project to create 10,000 gardens in Africa by 2016, as a way to help address issues such as food access and to empower local communities.

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"Making a garden is a political act," Slow Food founder and president Carlo Petrini told delegates at the summit. "Making it in Africa is twice a political act, because this continent is facing a new form of colonialism through land grabbing from multinationals, with the complacency of many corrupted African governments."

The aim isn't to "help" African people, but rather to give African communities new tools with which to assert their self-reliance and economic independence, Petrini explained.

"The time for missionaries is over," he said. "This is not charity, this is to give Africa back what our civilisations have stolen."

The ultimate goal, Petrini said, is to ensure that every small community has its own source of healthy, locally grown food. Along the way, Slow Food hopes to foster a new young generation of agricultural leaders able to put food on tables while respecting Africa's culture, biodiversity and ecology.

"When every village [has] its garden, even the food and environment ministry will have to understand that African land is not for sale to foreigners," Petrini said. "This movement will not stop."

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