

Focus Issue: Family Farming in Mountains—Institutional and Organizational Arrangements in the Context of Globalization

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Focus Issue: Family Farming in Mountains— Institutional and Organizational Arrangements in the Context of Globalization

Dear Readers,

Mountain farming is family farming, as claimed in a publication prepared for the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) 2014 (Wymann von Dach et al 2013). Indeed, global estimates show that 500 million of 570 million farms can be conceived as family farms (Lowder et al 2014) according to the Food and Agriculture Organization's definition (FAO 2013). The share of family farms is likely to be the same or even higher in mountains, where external investment in land by corporate agricultural enterprises is presumably less attractive than in the more accessible lowlands. Mountain farms in developing countries are geared mainly towards family consumption, while farming in industrialized countries is market-oriented; and in Europe, mountain farming is increasingly being determined by policies that also emphasize the role of landscape preservation. The contribution of family farming to sustainable development in mountains thus differs a great deal from region to region. But all mountain farms face similar challenges and opportunities: environmental constraints as well as unique niches and diversity, lack of infrastructure and poor accessibility as well as attractive settings. In addition, mountain farms deal with increasing climate variability and global socioeconomic dynamics such as out- and in-migration, commodification of crops and natural resources, tourism, conservation, and radical changes in cultural and political values. Based on centuries of experience in tackling mountain environments, farming families and communities have developed distinctive forms of institutions and organizational arrangements. This issue of MRD addresses the question to what extent these institutions and organizational arrangements have been able to cope with the current multiple challenges. It also explores whether family farming practices have succeeded in generating solutions in combination with new institutional arrangements and policies, and whether this enables family farmers in mountains to benefit from new opportunities.

In the MountainDevelopment section, Mauro Varotto and Luca Lodatti show how a traditional terraced landscape in the Italian Alps has been revitalized through innovation in social management creating new forms of community and solidarity, combined with farming practices oriented towards multifunctionality and relations characterized by multiscalearity. The authors emphasize the need for innovative forms of governance and partnership between city and mountain residents in order to improve and scale out this small-scale initiative.

In the MountainResearch section, the first 3 papers address institutional issues and arrangements related to mountain pastoralism. Coming from an ethnographic perspective, Giulia Fassio and her colleagues analyze the structural and cultural continuities of mountain pastoral families in the western Italian Alps, where the current of change has been strong in the past decades; they conclude that family structures have changed considerably and that access to communal resources may prove crucial in future for their survival. The case study in the Ukrainian Carpathians by Agata Warchalska-Troll and Mateusz Troll investigates 5 types of summer livestock farming practices and corresponding organizational forms of animal husbandry to assess which are best suited to deal with modern challenges in an unique environment. In the next paper, Elena Katia Villarreal and co-authors show that despite increasing individual decision-making at the family level in Andean wetlands in Bolivia, the *allyu*—a key indigenous and traditional collective institution—is still significant for managing camelid grazing in these unique bofedal landscapes in a sustainable way.

In their paper about reciprocity in the Florida Province, Bolivia, Florence Bétrisey and Christophe Mager draw similar conclusions and show that traditional reciprocal norms in this mountain area still play an essential role in decision-making on local water management systems; the use of reciprocity arrangements is in fact a token of small farmers' agency in an increasingly neoliberal world. The last paper focusing on family farming in this issue of MRD illustrates that family farms in a mountain region in Galicia (Spain) are struggling to adapt their strategies to remain viable, despite fairly supportive European agricultural policies: neither extensification nor diversification of agricultural activities have been particularly successful, due to the small size of farms, the lack of workforce, and the age factor; pluriactivity has been a more successful strategy.

In addition to these papers focusing on family farming, this issue offers an article in the MountainDevelopment section presenting a feasible method of analyzing post-disaster bark beetle outbreaks in the forests of the Tatra Mountains, Slovakia (by Christo Nikolov et al). In the MountainResearch section, analyzing historical material and "witness trees", Carolyn Copenheaver and co-authors access land prices from 1786 to 1830 in a small Appalachian county of southwestern Virginia, USA, and show that both environmental and social factors influenced land sale patterns during early European settlement in this mountain area. Finally, reporting on the results of a 7-year field experiment in Hainan, China, Xianzhao Liu and co-authors illustrate how self-restoration has been fairly successful in promoting native tropical forest regeneration, but point out the need for management interventions to achieve greater species diversity and functional complexity.

MRD chose to focus on family farming as a contribution to the IYFF 2014. This international year has highlighted the key role family farmers play in ensuring food and nutrition security, in managing natural resources and ecosystems, and in advancing economic development in rural areas (FAO, Committee on Agriculture 2014; Lowder et al 2014). The many regional and national dialogues and numerous civil society initiatives that took place in the context of the IYFF have emphasized the need for further actions, specific policies, programs, and partnerships to empower family farmers and support them in overcoming challenges and constraints. On 27–28 October 2014, the Global Dialogue on Family Farming will synthesize the outcomes of these efforts and develop a pro-family farming agenda for post-2014 action (<http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/global-dialogue-on-family-farming/en/>). Hopefully this agenda will address the specific challenges faced by mountain farmers and thereby contribute to more sustainable agriculture and equitable livelihoods in mountains, to the benefit not only of mountain people but also of people in the adjacent lowlands.

MRD will continue contributing to the debate about this important aspect of family farming in upcoming issues.

We close this Editorial on a sad note: as we were completing this issue, we heard from our former International Editorial Board member Fausto Sarmiento that his Venezuelan colleague Gerardo Budowski had just passed away. Dr. Budowski, a respected conservationist and key scientist in the field of tropical mountain studies, served as an MRD Editorial Advisory Board Member for many years (Sarmiento 2002). We would like to express our sympathy to his bereaved family.

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