

# Sleuth into Food Growing for Families

Continuing the 2014 biodiversity series and introducing the IY Family Farming in Otherways by Jeanie Clark

This article follows on from the last where we found that over 700 food gardens had been lost in just one part of Honiara in the Solomons, in February's floods.

## Why grow food at home?

Do you grow food plants at your place? Maybe you and your children can interview someone who does – try a relation first! Try to sleuth out reasons people have for growing food:

- Why do they choose to grow some of their own food, when we have plenty available in shops?
- Is it for something to do outside?
- For getting children into dirt?
- For fresh food for the family?
- For taste?



- For food security?
- For saving money?
- For greenhouse action?
- For getting close to nature?
- For teaching children responsibility?

There are lots of reasons for growing food plants, and they may not be on the above list.

## Farming v gardening

What about what we call the food grown? When you look at the photo above, do you think 'farm' or 'garden' produce? What differences do you expect between 'farming' and 'gardening'?

My dictionary says that farming means 'cultivating the soil', while a garden is more about 'ground with ornamental plants, trees, etc used as a place of recreation'.

Talking with people this year about this, I have found that the perception of 'farming' has been lost, but older people appreciate recognition that they are farming, even when it is in their backyards and in a small way. They also appreciate hearing that their food growing has value at the global level!

In 2014, recognition is being given to family farms – i.e.

places where a family produces food, and some is used for the family. At the small scale, that may involve a lemon tree or tomato bush in a backyard garden or veggie patch. On the large scale, it may be some stock and fields of crops, more commonly thought of as a farm, run as a family concern. They are really diverse.

## Global thinking

What about global values for growing food for one's family? This info-graphic answers that: <<http://www.fao.org/assets/infographics/FAO-Infographic-IYFF14-en.pdf>>



Look for how it shows family farming is the main form of agriculture for producing food in and for the world\* by:

- Number involved – over 500,000,000 family owned farms producing food
- Amount of production – over half

Put together, this food growing provides for global food security, and in many countries – national food security.

(\*So why does Australia have none on the map?)

Across the world, family farming used to be part of life (check with your grandparents), while the world was more rural than urban. In the last decade, urbanisation has reversed that balance. Family farming has come under threat in many places as farmlands too are 'developed' and people lose sight of its many values.

The UN 2014 IYFF (International Year of Family Farming) raises awareness of its contributions to:

- food security
- national economies
- preserving culture
- caring for the environment.
- sustainable use of resources

Summarised in the UN's World Rural Forum's slogan as *Feeding the World, Caring for the Environment*

Is that what you see your food growing for your family as doing? When you think about it:

- *The World* starts with family.
- *Caring for the environment* has so many aspects and levels and implies 'sustainability'.

Did you discover any of these ideas when you answered the questions at the start?

If you are not growing any food, is now a good time to buy a pot and put in one plant as a start?

## Family farming

Who are the family farmers? The UN definition of *family farming* has these features:

- Grows or catches food
- By their own labour (and maybe some extra help at busy times)
- For family use (with excess shared or sold).
- It can be part-time or full-time.
- Size doesn't matter – it can be as small as food plants in pots up to paddocks.
- Location doesn't matter- it can be in a rural area, or in an urban one.
- And while doing this, care for the local environment and thus benefit the Earth.
- Produce can be plants, creatures, or fibre.

What are family farms like? Amazingly diverse! To capture this as an educational resource, I set up a website to collect first-hand accounts of family farming (*snapshots*) under the WRF's IYFF slogan above. Diversity comes from all four parts:

- Family – how many, who does what jobs
- Farm- size, location, environment
- Produce – for family and food and how it is used
- Sustainability – so many ways of caring for the Earth, even if you only have one food tub!
- Visuals – photos or drawings of the farm, and some produce (optional usage) and some way of caring for the environment.



Consider the two photos above, or other photos of food growing. Our sleuthing here uses visual clues with background knowledge:

- What sort of family farms are these?
- How much of the farmer's food needs could they supply?
- What do you think the foods produced are?
- How could they be used?
- How might these farmers be caring for the environment, here and globally?

If you want the family farmers answers to these, visit <http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/family-farm-snapshots/>. This is the index and links to the snapshots that are being contributed to this collection. There are some urban (e.g. photo above left) and rural ones (e.g. photo above right); there are some small and large scale

ones. Each one has something different to contribute, especially in sustainability. However, I am looking for a lot more, to show more variety, not just from Victoria, but Australia, and overseas.

## Sharing a family farm experience

To contribute such information for a snapshot is a great learning activity, which involves English, Science, Geography, Communication and the Arts. Names of the family farmer are not needed, nor are photos of them, nor the exact location, so that privacy is protected – but can be included if desired for publicity. If you are not a family farmer, then why not interview one? Detailed instructions for entering and collecting the needed information is given in the 'guidelines pdf' on the 'Join us' page of my website.

## Honiara's family farm voice

Returning to the IYoSIDS, let's sleuth Honiara's *Island voices, global choices*, for family farms. If there is no direct interview or reporting, photos and web articles can be used to sleuth out a description for family farms. This brief description for Honiara's does that, coming from references used in my last IYoSIDS *Otherways* article:

- Family – family based, women's work mainly, (so many families involved - 700+ farms lost)
- Farm - small, suburban, many on river flats.
- Production - local staples like yams, taros, and fruit and vegetables, excess sold in the market
- Sustainability - food security, low food miles, nutritious food, plants evolved for the local environment, and preserving traditional culture.

Nutritious food? Yes, there was a focus on backyard 'sup-sup' food gardens in Honiara in the 1990s to improve children's health. The Honiara Garden Club helped people moving into the town, who had traditional knowledge of food production into their new urban environment to grow food differently, i.e. in backyards, with new local plants, and burying organic refuse there in their soil. (For more details, see <http://www.agriculturesnetwork.org/magazines/global/creating-healthy-environment/good-gardens-healthy-children/>.)

When the floods came in February, many of these family farms and their homes were destroyed. Along the river, some were buried under a metre of silt. There was a huge loss of local food production, market stalls were empty and remaining food prices for staples rose 400%. (ref: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-04-21/an-food-security-concern-in-wake-of-solomon-islands-floods/5401342/>) Food aid was needed. This *island voice* reminds us how important *family farming* is for *feeding the world*- locally first.

What happens when your crop fails? Returning to the questions at the start, this was one I didn't pose then. Growing one's own food is important for each family, and collectively across the world, for *feeding the World*. Be proud and celebrate the family farmer food growers you know!

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