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**International Years 2014, 2015 and 2016:
activities and impacts in ECA region**

I. Introduction

1. The following information note is intended to provide a short review of the activities and impacts of the International Years 2014, 2015 and 2016 in the region of Europe and Central Asia. It should be noted the document only contains examples and highlights countries where FAO programmes and activities are being undertaken.

2. The General Assembly of the United Nations declared 2014 the “International Year of Family Farming”, 2015 the “International Year of Soils” and 2016 – the “International Years of Pulses.”

3. The International Year of Family Farming 2014 promoted awareness among all groups of stakeholders on the vast potential family farmers have to eradicate hunger and preserve natural resources and stimulated broad discussion and cooperation on national and regional levels about the challenges faced by smallholders and efficient ways to support family farmers. The year also built on existing countries’ and regional initiatives and plans, aiming to reposition family farming at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national agendas.

4. The International Year of Soils 2015 helped to create awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food systems, essential ecosystem services and better adaptation to climate change for present and future generations. The Year also triggered the strengthening of existing national soil programmes, the launching of new national soil institutions and soil science societies, and the development of national soil related policies and laws.

5. The International Year of Pulses 2016 created a unique opportunity to raise awareness on the valuable contributions of pulses in terms of food and nutrition security, health, poverty reduction, sustainable agriculture, and environment in the region. It opened up opportunities for information

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exchange, improving mutual understanding through education and communication activities, promoting inclusion of pulses into healthy diets and supporting development of appropriate policies and necessary skills to enhance the production and trade of pulses in the region.

6. The International Years were funded entirely through voluntary contributions, therefore the budgets for their implementation were rather limited, not allowing for in-depth impact assessments at the regional level. The inputs from FAO staff working in the countries of the ECA region were used herein as the best available source of information, as well as information published on the thematic websites of the respective International Years. Unfortunately, the level of countries' reporting on their activities and progress on the achieving objectives of the International Years was limited and is not representative of the real impacts the Years had in the region. Due to these limitations, a comprehensive assessment was not possible. Therefore, the review only provides a snap-shot of multiple initiatives which took place and the significant impacts they made in the region of Europe and Central Asia.

II. International Year of Family Farming 2014¹

7. The ECA region has family farmers that range from households with limited access to land, small-scale subsistence farmers who produce for their own consumption and sell part of their produce in local markets, medium-scale commercial farmers and large well-established commercial family farmers. In the FAO programme countries in the region except in Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, farm structures are characterized by a large number of smallholders and family farms and a small number of large-scale corporate farms.

8. After the UN Resolution asking FAO to lead the implementation of the International Year of Family Farming, the ECA region has seen a significant interest to support development of family farming among all groups of stakeholders. UN agencies, governments, family farmers' organizations, civil society, private sector, academia, and many other actors joined efforts to celebrate this year, calling for political support to include family farming in political agendas. Numerous national committees and multi-stakeholder platforms for policy dialogue are continuing their work after the Year itself. Globally and regionally civil society have been particularly active not only in the international year initiation but also in its implementation.

9. The Committee on Agriculture in 2014 agreed to include family farming into the Strategic Framework of FAO. To this effect, one of the main priorities of FAO's work in Europe and Central Asia is to provide policy advice to governments in support of sustainable intensification for small farms. Building on the legacy of the International Year of Family Farming, FAO launched from 2014 the Regional Initiative on Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for Improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction. This important outcome continues to provide impact beyond the year itself through support to development commercial family farms and at the same time promoting inclusive and gender sensitive growth. The regional initiative is continually developed towards a more programmatic and integrated approach. The ERC 2016, outlined the priorities for the Region for the Medium Term Plan 2018-21 with support to smallholders and family farms as one of four regional priorities for FAO. IYFF is therefore one of the few international years that activities continued after the year, a "Legacy of IYFF 2014 and the way forward" was approved (www.fao.org/3/b-mm296e.pdf) which is guiding future work.

¹ FAO, 2014. International Year of Family Farming. FAO thematic website, www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/en/ and FAO, 2014. Legacy of the IYFF and the way forward, www.fao.org/3/b-mm296e.pdf

10. The Family Farming Knowledge Platform, hosted by FAO in collaboration with many stakeholders, was created to serve as a comprehensive and up-to-date digital collection of policy, scientific, legal and statistical information on family farming, to support policy making.

11. Three cornerstone events in ECA region, which drew attention to the important role of family farming, the key challenges and priorities for the future, were:

- Conference "Family farming: A dialogue towards more sustainable and resilient farming in Europe and the world", organized by European Commission.
- Europe and Central Asia Regional Dialogue on Family Farming: "Working towards a strategic approach to promote food security and nutrition", was organized by FAO jointly with the International Cooperative Alliance, the World Farmers Organization and the World Rural Forum.
- Global Forum and Expo on Family Farming, hosted by the Hungarian Ministry of Rural Development.

12. Advocacy efforts throughout the Year allowed to raise public awareness on the critical contribution of family farmers to food security, nutrition and sustainable development. Countries of the region have organised numerous fairs, public fora and festivals, as well as cultural activities such as family farming themed exhibitions and competitions. Examples include,

- YOREX *Local Products Fair* in Antalya brought together private sector representatives, civil society organizations and local producers giving them the opportunity to form partnerships and source new markets.
- In Tajikistan, in line with World Food Day celebration, *one-day event on family farming* was organized jointly by FAO, WFP and IFAD.

13. Engagement of research communities has allowed technical knowledge to be further developed through conferences and the publishing of scientific papers and publications. For example, Romanian farmers and national leaders came together in Bucharest for a two-day (8-9 October) *national conference "Family Farms—The Core of Sustainable Agriculture"* with more than 200 participants. Ankara University, in line with World Food Day activities, hosted a two-day *symposium on family farming* which generated the publication entitled "*National Family Farming Symposium*".

14. In many ECA countries technical capacity of family farmers has been increased through organisations of trainings, workshops and implementation of number of projects. For example,

- The project "*Capacity building and awareness raising for the sustainable use and tenure governance of pastures in Kyrgyzstan*" was implemented from 1 May 2014 to 31 October 2015. Family farmers were equipped with knowledge and skills in responsible pasture management.
- From 1 January 2014 until 31 December 2017 a project "*Towards Sustainable Aquaculture and Fisheries Development in the Kyrgyz Republic*" is being implemented, targeting predominantly small scale fishers and fish-farmers.
- The project "*Sustainable Agricultural Development of Issyk-Kul region*" is being implemented from 1 July 2015 until 31 July 2018 in the Kyrgyz republic, where family farmers are supported through technical assistance and training in implementing sustainable agricultural techniques.
- Nine *workshops on family farming*, initiated by the FAO, have been organized in various Turkish cities. They concluded with a national meeting aimed to generate an action plan for supporting, revising and innovating family farming policies in agricultural agenda of Turkey.
- During the *four-day fair* (21- 25 May 2014, Izmir, Turkey), in cooperation with Garanti Bank, FAO launched small workshops for 4,000 family farmers in seven provinces in Turkey with the purpose of introducing integrated crop and pest management (IPM) methods and the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) approach.

- In Tajikistan in 2014, on-the-job training sessions for family farmers were carried out on maintenance breeding and seed crop management. Workshops on safe application of herbicides to control weeds in wheat fields were carried out in the project sites.
- Family farmers in Tajikistan were also supported through implementation of the project on adoption and promotion of Conservation Agriculture. FAO and donors provided political and investment support of the approach in the country. Planting of winter crops and establishment of demonstration trials of Conservation Agriculture, as well as seed production of alternate crops have been initiated in two districts.

15. The Year emphasized the importance of implementing an enabling environment for family farms to access and use natural and financial resources of which they are usually cut out. For example, in Turkey even private sector institutions such as Seker Bank in 2014 developed special loan products for small-scale farms.

16. The impact of the IYFF regarding political commitment resulted in a number of high-level political declarations, juridical frameworks and policies at national level:

- The 6th Berlin Agriculture Ministers' Summit at the Global Forum on Food and Agriculture issued a declaration signed by 65 ministers in support of family farming, on 18 January 2014 (Germany).
- Romania implemented new measures to support family farms through 2020. Under the country's National Rural Development Programme, family farmers will have access to new funds that will help them modernize their tools and equipment, gain access to new markets and develop alternative forms of rural income like agro-tourism.
- In France, the Association des Régions de France (Association of French Regions) recently issued the Déclaration de Rennes (FR), which recognized the importance of promoting local food production systems.
- The Italian National Committee is backing the National Campaign for small-scale and family farming, which is in turn advocating for a framework law specifically focused on small-scale farming.
- In Turkey, a decree on supporting small-scale family businesses engaged in plant production was issued by Council of Ministers in 2015. Another decree on supporting young farmers' projects within the scope of rural development was issued in 2016.
- In Ukraine the core objectives of IYFF were included as an outcome of the Priority Intervention on Development of Small-scale Farming under "3+5" approach of the Joint Comprehensive Strategy of the Development of Agriculture and Rural Territories of Ukraine 2015-2020.

III. International Year of Soils 2015²

17. The International Year of Soils has offered a unique opportunity to engage not only farmers and land users, but also wider community, in the mission to protect and improve soil resources. The Year greatly contributed to improved knowledge and information, while establishing a solid momentum for sustainable soil management practices being promoted and adopted by various stakeholders in the future.

18. A broad range of awareness raising material was produced and widely distributed, and numerous thematic events were held in the countries of the ECA region, which helped to create awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food systems, essential ecosystem services and better adaptation to climate change for present and future generations. For example,

² FAO, 2015. International Year of Soils. FAO thematic website, www.fao.org/soils-2015/en/

- In Tajikistan a *National Soil Day celebration* was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO as part of the World Food Day activities in 2015. More than 2000 brochures, posters and leaflets have been disseminated.
- *National Soil Day celebration and Farmer Fields Day Fair* were organized by Turkey's Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, private sector and universities. As part of the IYS activities, a *social responsibility project* was launched, which is part of a wider *project on soil and water*, operated by Turkey's Ministries of Agriculture and Education, with technical support from FAO and the Soil Science Society of Turkey.
- On February 29 - March 2, 2016 the *International Conference on the Eurasian Food Security and Nutrition Network and Eurasian Soil Partnership* in the Kyrgyz Republic was organized by the Eurasian Center for Food Security in cooperation with FAO, the World Bank, International Food Policy Research Institute and Global Forum on Agricultural Research. The Conference offered the floor to the Eurasian Soil Partnership Plenary meeting.

19. In order to enhance the quality and availability of soil data and information, several activities were implemented in the region:

- In Turkey under the FAO-Turkey Partnership Programme, a project was implemented to establish a *consolidated national soil information system* which can be accessed online by farmers, land users, researchers and decision-makers. FAO provided technical assistance to the Soil, Fertilizer and Water Resources Central Research Institute, training the research staff on soil organic carbon analysis, digital soil mapping and the development of a web-based GIS portal for soil data sharing and dissemination.
- In FYR Macedonia the new *Macedonian Soil Information System* was developed with support from FAO and its Global Soil Partnership. It is expected to be fundamental for guiding decision making at national and local levels, it will also make possible to monitor soil condition and effect of human interventions on it.

20. Capacities of all groups of stakeholders such as farmers, civil society, academia, private sector and governments were strengthened through the implementation of the range of projects in the region addressing issues of land degradation and promoting sustainable soil management. For example,

- In Kyrgyzstan, a *project aimed to strengthen the capacity of farmers in the adoption and support of improved methods of management of soils and crops* was implemented in 10 pilot villages. 20 farmer field schools were organised on methods of Conservation Agriculture and integrated plant protection, agricultural equipment for implementation of soil conservation was purchased and demonstration plots were established.
- In Ukraine, following to various national events organized by or in cooperation with FAO in the frames of IYS, the Organizations has been requested by the Government to develop a *Middle Scale Project (MSP) on combating Land Degradation in Steppe and Forest-Steppe Zones of Ukraine*, funded by the GEF. The project has recently been approved by GEF CEO.
- In Tajikistan, technical capacity of about 2300 family farmers was improved through conducting formal and *on-the-job trainings, workshops and field Days on land management*.

21. The International Year of Soils also triggered the strengthening of existing national soil programmes and the development of national soil related policies and laws. For example,

- In Ukraine, the core objectives of IYS were fully covered under the *Joint Comprehensive Strategy of the Development of Agriculture and Rural Territories of Ukraine 2015-2020* in the 2 priority areas – Land Reform and Sustainable Natural Resources Management.
- In Turkey the second Plenary Meeting of the Eurasian Soil Partnership (EASP) was held in Izmir from 16-18 June 2015 for finalizing a five year rolling sub-regional 'Implementation Plan'. The "Izmir Communiqué" was adopted and signed by all participants highlighting

commitments for promoting wide uptake of sustainable soil management and restoration of degraded soils in the region.

- In Tajikistan FAO projects in 2015 supported the review of the National legislation on organic production; formulation of the National Program on Development of Organic Agriculture in Tajikistan and formulation of the National Strategy of Adoption and Promotion of Conservation Agriculture, all going to play an important role in improving soil health and quality in the country.

IV. International Year of Pulses 2016³

22. The International Year of Pulses 2016 created a unique opportunity to raise awareness of all groups of stakeholders on the valuable contributions of pulses in terms of food and nutrition security, health, poverty reduction, sustainable agriculture, and environment in the region.

23. The Year opened up opportunities for information exchange, improving mutual understanding through education and communication activities, promoting inclusion of pulses into healthy diets and supporting development of appropriate policies and necessary skills to enhance the production and trade of pulses in the region.

24. FAO's Regional Initiative on enhancing agrifood trade and market integration in Europe and Central Asia is supporting countries in developing capacity on international agrifood trade agreements, aligning with global food safety standards related to sanitary and phytosanitary issues, promoting access to domestic and export markets, and sustainable value chain development.

25. Two cornerstone events took place in the ECA region to highlight the important role pulses can play in achieving food security in the region:

- Promotion of pulses has been a central agenda item at the *Regional Conference for Europe* which was held in Antalya, Turkey in 2016. A paper was prepared to highlight various benefits of pulses, providing data on regional production, consumption and trade.
- Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey, France, Italy, and Ukraine participated in a *FAO Regional Dialogue on pulses* held in Rome, Italy in October 2016. The recommendations from the RD-EuCA have been presented at the IYP Global Dialogue held in FAO-HQ, Rome in November 2016.

26. Awareness raising events on various benefits of pulses have been held with FAO support and participation throughout 2016. For example,

- A FAO-organized *seminar on "Pulses and oilseeds: prospects for development"* was held in Kazakhstan, in Astana EXPO 2017, gathering farmers and their associations, agricultural enterprises, grain traders, academia, NGOs and FAO experts.
- A half-day *seminar on beans and lentils* was organized by the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry, the Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiative and FAO in Stockholm on 14 December 2016, gathering all Swedish actors involved in the production chain of pulses.
- In October 2016, *National workshop on seed sector development* had been organized by FAO in Tajikistan in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture. Two field days and training sessions on Seed quality control and certification, including pulses, had been organized with participation of more than 170 farmers and 20 seed specialists.

³ FAO, 2016. International Year of Pulses. FAO thematic website, www.fao.org/pulses-2016/en/

- On 29 September, the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture convened an expert conference in Budapest dedicated to the hidden potential of pulses. A photo exhibition, food tasting and a display of pulses were other popular events of the day.

27. Numerous other campaigns and thematic events took place in the countries of the region to raise awareness of benefits of pulses and to increase the recognition of IYP 2016. For example,

- *The international conference “Pulses: Focusing on maximum efficiency”* took place in Ukraine on 17 Nov 2016. The conference brought together the Government, farmers and Trade Company, academia and international experts.
- *The International Agrarian Forum AGROPORT-2016 – East Kharkiv* was held in Ukraine from 20 Oct 2016 to 22 Oct 2016. Among multiple events were those dedicated to the development and promotion of pulses in Ukraine.
- *Bean Field Day* was celebrated in Turkey on 25 Aug 2016, in Black Sea Agricultural Research Institute, Samsun. Among the activities which took place were expert speeches, field trip, discussion of issues and solutions with farmers and demonstration of bean varieties.
- *The week of pulses* (05 Dec - 07 Dec 2016) was announced in Russia by the Omsk State Agrarian University in Omsk city.
- The *Workshop “I legumi: semi nutrienti per un futuro sostenibile”* was organised in Italy by the University of Pisa on 2 Dec 2016, which focused on social and economic importance of pulses, ancient legume varieties and their nutritional value.
- Turkish top chef was featured in FAO’s cookbook, several awareness-raising activities were carried out including issuing a postage stamp and use of IYP banner in a national league match. Also the Republic of Turkey has launched an *official website for IYP2016* to share information on the benefits of pulses, the latest news and events.

28. The Year had important role in promoting the development of national policies and programmes for inclusion of pulses into healthy diets and enhance the production and trade of pulses in the region. For example,

- The Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine included pulses as recommended niche cultures as an outcome of *Priority Area on development of organic and niche cultures* under “3+5” approach.
- The government of Kyrgyzstan is putting together a *Strategy on the production of beans* in the country.
- *The National Strategy on Seed Sector Development (including pulses) and the National Seed standards* of Tajikistan are finalized and officially submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture for approval.

29. A number of projects was implemented with the assistance of FAO, aimed to popularize and promote pulses in the region. For example,

- In a newly launched *project*, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture of Kyrgyzstan will work together to popularize pulses in schools and households, developing informational materials on pulses, Pulses Day campaign and short video and audio advertisements for national TV and radio networks.
- The *project “Improving access of small-scale farmers to high quality seed in Tajikistan”* includes provision of seeds, demonstration and maintenance breeding of pulses’ new varieties, conducting field and on-the-job trainings for farmers and seed specialists.

30. Keeping up the IYP momentum, countries continue their efforts to promote pulses beyond the year 2016, and significant change in terms of production and consumption of pulses can be observed in the region. For example, pulses acreage in Kazakhstan has increased 2.8 times since 2016.

V. Relevance of the International Years in relation to the new SDGs

31. The 17 SDGs and related indicators allow international years and specific regional challenges to be monitored. In particular, these include: i) rural livelihoods, migration and rural poverty (SDGs 1, 2, 8), ii) farm structure (SDG 2), iii) sustainability of food production and food systems (SDGs 2, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15), iv) food insecurity (SDG 2), and v) agricultural trade policy (SDG 2, 14, 17).
32. Family Farming is relevant to a number of the SDGs, in particular SDG 2 which explicitly notes the role of sustainable family farming in achieving food security. Family Farming also plays a key role in the SDG 1: as to end poverty in rural areas needs to focus on the needs of family farmers, small-scale fishers and pastoralists.
33. Four out of the 17 SDGs directly address soils and their role in enabling life on Earth and ensure human well-being. In particular SDG 15 specifically calls for halting and reversing land degradation by 2030.
34. Pulses have been recognized for their role in creating sustainable production systems and creating nutrition security. The international year is therefore relevant reducing stunting during the first 1000 days of life (SDG 2, target 2.2), in reducing chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease (SDG 3) as well as creating sustainable production systems (e.g. SDG 2, target 2.4) and increasing soil fertility by enriching soil with nitrogen (SDG 15). Pulses are also essential for mitigating and adapting to climate change - they reduce fertilizer needs across the whole crop cycle and lower greenhouse gas footprints. Many pulse crops are adapted to arid growing conditions and can tolerate drought stress better than most other crops (SDG 13).