



**WORLD FOOD DAY AND THE CLOSURE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF COOPERATIVES**

MESSAGE OF

JOSÉ GRAZIANO DA SILVA, FAO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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**Delivered by Ms Marcela Villarreal, Acting Director of Office
for Communication, Partnerships and Advocacy**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Mr. Jose Graziano da Silva, the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), I am pleased to participate in this closing ceremony of the International Year of Cooperatives, and to share with you FAO's observations on this important topic and its linkage to the theme of this year's World Food Day.

World Food Day, as you all might know, is observed annually 16 October around the world, and 2012 marked the 32nd World Food Day observance, which coincided with the 67th anniversary of the founding of FAO. The theme of World Food Day "Agricultural cooperatives – key to feeding the world" highlights the role of cooperatives in improving food security and contributing to the eradication of hunger. By drawing world attention to this strategic issue, it is my hope that this year's World Food Day will be an

important milestone on the road to achieving the sustainable policy and program efforts needed to feed the present and future generations.

Producer organizations and cooperatives need to be strengthened to be able to deliver effective services to their members, integrate markets and support the development of sustainable family farming. FAO has decades of technical experience in promoting and supporting sustainable producer groups and cooperatives. The knowledge generated and systematic documentation of good practices and innovative forms of collective action shows that much has been learned about the ways in which organizations develop, become providers of services to their members and link them to markets.

Often, close bonds among small producers in grassroots and self-help groups, local associations and cooperatives help small producers to gain the self-confidence and knowledge needed to analyse their own problems, make informed decisions, and act collectively. This in turn empowers them to connect and form larger organizations like federations and networks, which give them greater negotiation power and influence in decision-making processes.

To reach full effectiveness, these organizations must link with more powerful economic and policy actors, such as business corporations and the government. This is essential for creating the enabling environment and conditions for these organizations to develop in a sustainable way.

FAO will continue to actively engage in generating knowledge, and sharing and exchanging good practices and experiences through its country and regional programs. FAO will also continue to support and encourage its member governments to put into place an enabling environment that allows producer organizations and cooperatives to thrive and to make it possible for them to fully participate in markets as viable and influential economic actors.

The necessary conditions include sound policies, a transparent legal framework, economic incentives as well as consultation frameworks to benefit these organizations and their representatives.

FAO will not be able to achieve this without building strong and innovative partnerships with cooperatives, producer organizations and other forms of collective action and other relevant actors. It has re-launched its commitment to support and increase collaboration with producer organizations and cooperatives, who together, represent millions of farmers around the world.

World Food Day gave us an opportunity to take stock of the progress we made in our efforts to guarantee the right to food to all.

Just a few weeks ago, FAO, IFAD and WFP presented the 2012 edition of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*. The report shows that we have made some progress towards achieving the first Millennium Development Goal, to halve the proportion of undernourished people by the year 2015.

But it also shows that progress has slowed since 2007. Nearly 870 million men, women and children still go hungry every day. In Africa and in the Near East the number of undernourished people is still growing.

This is unacceptable in a world of plenty. We already produce enough food for every human being.

At the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the Zero Hunger Challenge, bringing together hunger eradication and zero stunting in children, 100% increase in small farmer productivity, 100% sustainable food production, and zero food waste and loss.

I truly believe that it is possible to reach zero hunger, if we work together, focus our attention, and coordinate our efforts.

Farmers are an important part of this effort. Small-scale farmers are the main providers of food in many countries around the world, but they are also among the world's poorest people. Cooperatives can help smallholder farmers to overcome these constraints. As the theme of this year's World Food Day proclaims: they are *key to feeding the world*.

This year, FAO opened a liaison office space for farmers and cooperatives, at Headquarters in Rome, Italy. And, we are working to raise awareness of the important role of agricultural co-operatives play and build joint programs with them.

We do this with the collaboration of IFAD and World Food Programme and in coordination with the Inter-Agency Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives.

We work also with other partners, such as the International Labour Organization; the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs; the International Co-operative Alliance, and the

World Farmers' Organization, private sectors and NGOs all around the world.

Cooperatives hold a key to feeding the world, but so do governments, civil society and private sector to achieve food security for all we need to work all together. It is not enough to reduce hunger. Let us set bold goals: With hunger, the only acceptable number is zero.

In my country there is a song that says a dream that we dream alone it is only a dream, but a dream that we dream together becomes real.

Thank you for your attention.