Rio+20: Investing in farmers as stewards of food security and catalysts for rural development in the green economy

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL: Farming First congratulates global leaders for their recognition of the central role of agriculture in the Rio Declaration, and the promise agriculture offers for delivering a green economy and food security and farmers’ role in driving these changes.

On Friday, global leaders agreed to adopt the Rio+20 text, marking the end of 2 years of discussions. The final text acknowledges food security and nutrition as pressing global challenges and reaffirms commitment to enhancing food security and access to adequate, safe and nutritious food for present and future generations. The outcome of Rio+20 recognizes the need to revitalize the agricultural and rural development sectors, particularly in developing countries and takes note of the importance of empowering women as critical agents for enhancing agricultural and rural development and food security and nutrition.

The outcome places particular emphasis on the need for action to enhance agricultural research, extension services, training, education and access to technology to improve agricultural productivity and sustainability through the voluntary sharing of knowledge and good practices.

Dr. Gisbert Glaser Senior Advisor of the International Council for Science (ICSU), says: “Farming First welcomes the positive language that recognizes the need to invest in science and research and knowledge-sharing mechanisms, and the value and role of technologies. Farmers need to have access to training, extension services, and sharing of traditional knowledge that will increase their productivity enabling them to feed their families, to grow their incomes, and spur innovation. Mobilisation of multi-stakeholder partnerships bringing together the scientific, donor, business, NGO, and farmer communities is needed to improve knowledge sharing and to build capacity.”

Ron Bonnett, Board member of World Farmers Organisation, says: “I feel it is important to emphasis that this text is the end of a long process, but for agriculture, it represents a new starting point. It gives us an opportunity, and a path forward to revitalize the agricultural and rural development sectors throughout the world. It is imperfect, and we are very disappointed there is not a clause fully dedicated to the specific needs of rural women who lag behind on every Millennium Development Goal. We must now focus on implementing the good ideas in this text and bringing real change for farmers throughout the world.”

Food security and sustainable agriculture were highlighted as one of seven priority areas at the Rio+20 negotiations. Feeding a global population of 9 billion people by 2050 will
require at least a 70% increase in global food production and a 50% rise in investments in food, agriculture and rural development.

Earlier in the week, 600 of the world’s leading agricultural experts came together at Agriculture and Rural Development Day, for which Farming First was an official partner, to ensure that the new vision for sustainable development outlined at Rio+20 recognizes the importance of agriculture and includes actions for achieving a sustainable food system.

Tracy Gerstle, Director of Global Policy at CropLife International, adds: “Rio is only one step along the way to achieving a sustainable food system. It needs to be seen as part of the global effort to revitalize and leverage the potential of agriculture to reduce poverty, which includes the G8 and G20, as well as other initiatives at regional and national levels. The announcement during the G8 Summit in May of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition is significant and promises increased private and public investments in African agriculture, a supportive policy and regulatory framework and a commitment to women’s empowerment. Global leaders must continue to build on existing efforts through commitments to the development of national, regional and global food security and green economy strategies that fight poverty and enable sustainable economic growth.”

In the context of discussions on the green economy, agriculture and food security, Farming First recognizes four key recommendations in the Rio Declaration:

1. Poverty reduction: Make agriculture a driver for rural economic development by ensuring policies that link producers to markets and enable value to be created throughout the supply chain, diversifying rural activities and creating jobs.
2. Focus on enhancing sustainable intensification: the world will need to produce more with less resources per acre in order to meet growing food and while reducing demands on water, energy and soil. Increasing productivity should be a priority to protect habitat, by not increasing the amount of land under cultivation.
3. Invest in training, knowledge sharing, extension services, as well as research and development to close the uptake gap for existing tools and ensure new solutions are available for tomorrow.
4. An emphasis on the role of rural women, empowering them to become leaders in the rural economy and to achieve income gains which they will reinvest in families and communities.

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About Farming First
Farming First is a global coalition representing the world’s farmers, scientists, engineers and industry as well as more than 100 national farmers’ associations and agricultural development organisations. Farming First calls for a broad-based, knowledge-centred approach to increase agricultural output in a sustainable and socially responsible manner.

To view Farming First’s position on relevant topics, visit:
Green Economy (includes interactive infographic and animated video):
http://www.farmingfirst.org/green-economy/
Food Security: http://www.farmingfirst.org/foodsecurity/
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