Family Farming and Rural Economic Development
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Family farming is the predominant form of agriculture in the food production sectors in both developing and developed countries. It mainly includes all family-based agricultural activities, and it is linked to several areas of rural and social development. It is understood as a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and increasingly relevant on family labour of both men and women. In developing countries like India, a number of factors are key for the successful development of family farming, such as: agro-ecological conditions and territorial characteristics; access to markets; policy environment; access to land and natural resources; access to technology and extension services; access to finance; demographic, economic and socio-cultural conditions; availability of specialized education among a few. The United Nations has designated the year 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming at the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly recognizing the increasing role of family farming in poverty alleviation and rural development in particular.

The concept of family farming incorporates various elements. Considering the sociological perspective, family farming is associated with family values, such as solidarity, continuity and commitment/bonding; in economic terms, family farming is synonymous with specialized entrepreneurial skills, business ownership and management, choice and risk behaviour, sustainability, resilience and individual achievement. Family farming can be considered more than a professional occupation because it reflects a lifestyle based on beliefs and traditions about living and work.

Smallholder and family farming are means to reduce poverty and hunger in the rural areas of the developing world. The contribution of small farmers to total farm output in India exceeds 50%, while they cultivate 44% of land. They have lesser capital but require higher use of labour and other family-owned inputs, and usually have a higher index of cropping intensity and diversification. They grow a variety of cultivars, many of which are landraces. These landraces are genetically more heterogeneous than modern varieties, and thus offer greater resilience against vulnerability and enhance harvest security in the midst of diseases, pests, droughts and other stresses. The diversity in farming, crops and livestock, often results in higher productivity than the large farms practicing usually monoculture. The livestock forms are an integral component of sustenance for small and marginal farmers, especially in difficult agro-climatic regions. In arid areas where droughts are common, the livestock lend sustainability to rural economy. The diverse activities
contribute to food basket, nutritional security and household income of farmers and play a significant role in generating gainful employment in rural areas, particularly among the landless, small and marginal farmers including women.

The content of the book offers a diverse selection of chapters that address issues of importance to those in the agriculture industry, researchers, faculty, and others. The chapters focus on the role and aspirations of youth in family farming, economic opportunities for youth in farming that provide alternatives to migration to urban areas, challenges and mitigation strategies to the problems faced by youth in family farming, role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)/recent innovations in contributing to better family farming, cases of innovative ideas/strategies/business proposals for improving family farm’s productivity and production efficiencies, advances in research methods vis-à-vis participation of youth in family farming.

The book will provide valuable inputs on the diverse topics covered under family farming and is an excellent resource for researchers; instructors; students in agriculture, horticulture, environmental science, and other allied subjects; together with content of interest to policymakers.

We express our sincere gratitude to all the authors for their professional commitments and patience during the review and publication process. We would also like to thank the publishers which were extremely efficient, thorough, and professional in their outlook. Their concern for producing a high quality book was evident at every stage. Last, but never least, the Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour and its officials deserve special praise and recognition for their enduring support, trust and benevolent funding for the cause of family farming in the country.

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