

International Federation of Agricultural Producers

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Message from the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) on the occasion of the International Day of Cooperatives - 7 July 2007

The theme of International Day of Cooperatives in 2007 is “**Cooperative Values and Principles for Corporate Social Responsibility**”. It draws attention to the duty of agricultural cooperatives to be an example for consumers and private corporations in terms of respect of social values and responsibilities. The essence of the agricultural cooperative system is to empower the farmers that deliver their products to it, which is not the same as other forms of business that seek maximum profits for investors. By definition, the cooperative system offers prospects for justice and social solidarity within the communities where it exists.

Each litre of milk or kilo of meat produced by cooperatives carries with it this value of social responsibility that is so dear to the agricultural cooperative movement. Through their consumption choices, consumers also endorse company values and principles and have the power to increase their social responsibility. To buy products coming from agricultural cooperatives is to support a social choice and a value of a responsible company. Social responsibility is in fact a true added value to farming products.

This Day is also an opportunity to recall that the agricultural cooperative also represents a social sharing within a rural community and is not reserved exclusively to its members. Improvement of farmers’ living conditions also supports rural development and preserves the vitality of rural communities. By improving the economic conditions of their members, and the communities in which they live, cooperatives create economic justice while at the same time promoting social dialogue.

Of course, cooperatives provide real economic benefits to farm families through increasing the stability of the farming sector, improving market access for their products and strengthening the farmers’ position in the agri-food chain. But beyond making farmers economically stronger through organizing them in the market, cooperatives make the world a more socially responsible place by promoting understanding among people through democratic business structures.

IFAP promotes the benefits of the cooperative system as a model of sustainable development and a marketing system for farm products. We believe in the practice of cooperative principles and values which encourage social responsibility both within rural communities and with consumers who buy their products.

IFAP is the world farmers’ organisation representing over 600 million farm families grouped in 115 national organisations in 80 countries. It is a global network in which farmers from industrialised and developing countries exchange concerns and set common priorities. IFAP advocates farmers’ interests at the international level since 1946 and has General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.