



## FAO-IGU-GECOAGRI Colloquium

### Final Declaration

Rome, 5 July 2005

All Participants of the International Colloquium *Quality Agriculture: Historical Heritage and Environmental Resources for the Integrated Development of Territories* – that has been organised by GECOAGRI, Research Group of A.Ge.I., based on a mandate from the International Geographic Union (IGU) “Sustainability of Rural Systems” Commission, on the FAO premises, declare the following with regard to the main theme of the colloquium i.e. *Quality Agriculture*:

**1-** The **farm** represents a key microcosm that reflects the problems affecting the rural world and the relationship between people and the environment. The greater the number of farms in the countryside, the greater the demand for services, social organisation and integrated development within the territory. All those who hold integrated territorial development and sustainable agricultural practice to heart (academics, politicians, rural people, and administrators) should turn their attention to these farms, since these are dynamic but often obstructed and marginalised as they are often less economically competitive than farms in the “industrial agriculture” sector. It is the type of agricultural system that defines the organisation of a territory and determines the various options available for its integrated development.

**2-** There is a need to strengthen the regional responses to mitigate the negative impacts, and take advantage of the positive impacts of globalisation, both with respect to poorer countries vis à vis richer countries, as well as in poorer regions within developed countries.

**3-** We are convinced that while international agricultural policy continues to smile upon the strongest agro-industrial systems, medium-small farms have a key role to play in defending the worldwide prestige of certain typical local quality products, sustaining the livelihoods of significant rural population groups, particularly in developing countries, as well as in maintaining specific biodiversity and ecosystems.

**4-** The definitive transition from a sectorial to a territorial growth model of agriculture took place in 2000 and thereafter. The colloquium has underlined that agriculture has entered a new season, unknown to the operators from the previous generation:

- a season that introduces the farm to a global dimension and at the same time focuses trans-national policy on regional issues;
- a season of forward-looking wisdom that obliges the present to operate bearing the future generations in mind.

**5-** Whereas until recently, increases in productivity and cultivated areas were good indicators to measure the exploitation of the countryside, today, the evaluation must also be based on qualitative parameters that consider agricultural reality in its entirety and complexity depending, from one place to another, on the specific relationship between the population and natural environment. This is not merely a return to former peasant wisdom. The proliferation of interventions, the extent and power of systems for managing the land, have increased output so much that western markets are saturated and natural resources have often been damaged, sometimes irreversibly.

**6-** For all these reasons, we believe that there is an urgent need to draw up a “**Catalogue of the rural countryside**”, above all of rural systems that risk extinction; a *geographical catalogue* to

consult in order to reveal the evolutionary cycles of agricultural spaces and to formulate effective economic and political interventions. It is the farmers, herders and foresters who are the real creators of the extraordinary countryside mosaic. It is they who ensure food security and the production of other goods essential for the well-being of the population, and who create inspirational agricultural countrysides throughout the world. Some of these are monuments to human endeavour and are increasingly being recognised as a heritage of human kind.

7- There is a new role for geographers - to recommend territorial based policies to politicians and governments at all levels, as well as civil society and academic institutions:

1. always to take the farm and rural community as the starting point;
2. to reinforce the contribution of diverse agricultural systems to providing food security and ensuring sustainable livelihoods, especially for the rural poor;
3. to widen objectives to include the aesthetic, cultural and ethical values of agricultural systems;
4. to draw up a catalogue that documents and conserves the wealth of historical heritage and environmental values embedded in the rural countryside.