

Livelihoods grow in gardens

FAO Diversification booklet 2



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**Livelihoods
grow
in gardens**

**Diversifying rural incomes
through home gardens**

Chris Landon-Lane

Agricultural Support Systems Division
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
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Preface

FAO Diversification booklets aim to raise awareness and provide information about opportunities at the farm and local community level to increase small-scale farmer income. Each booklet will focus on a specific farm or non-farm enterprise or technology that experience has shown can be integrated successfully into small farms or at a local community level. We explore the potential benefits associated with new activities and technologies, as well as appropriateness and viability in differing circumstances.

The main target audience for FAO Diversification booklets are people and organizations that provide advisory, business and technical support services to resource-poor small-scale farmers and local communities in low- and middle-income countries. We hope to provide enough information to help these support service providers consider new income-generating opportunities, and how they might enable small-scale farmers to take action. What are farmer requirements and constraints? What are critical “success factors”?

FAO Diversification booklets are also targeted to policy level people in government and non-governmental organizations. What actions might policy-makers take to create enabling environments for small-scale farmers to diversify into new income-generating activities?

It is important to point out that the Diversification booklets are not intended to be technical “how to do it” guidelines. In order to provide farmer advisory and support activities relating to introduction of new income-generating activities, most organizations will find it necessary to seek more information or technical support. For these organizations, each booklet identifies complementary sources of information and technical support.

If you find this booklet of value we would like to hear from you. Tell your

colleagues and friends about it. If you have any suggestions where we can make changes for the better in our next edition, or topics for other booklets – this is equally important. By sharing your views and ideas with us we can eventually provide better services to you.

**Director, Agricultural Support Systems Division
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy**

Foreword

People have had gardens near their homes for thousands of years. It is not so hard to imagine: fruit, vegetables and grains gathered from the wild were taken to family huts for meals. Some seeds fell to the ground; other seeds were released after the fruit had been eaten. The seeds germinated and grew, and were cared for by those in the family who knew what the plants were. This was the quiet arrival of the home garden. Being near the home made it easier to protect the garden from foraging wildlife and reduced the work of gathering food from the wild.

It is argued that farming practices evolved from simple home gardens; even today in many parts of the world the difference between farms and gardens is blurred. The main visible differences are important and telling: gardens generally cover a smaller area, yet they have a wider diversity of crops. Using land adjacent to houses, home gardens can be established and maintained with little capital and labour. Intensively managed, they can be highly productive all year round in tropical and mild temperate areas. They can be worked seasonally to avoid difficult cold or dry seasons

and to fit in with other farming activities such as fishing, cultivating field crops and looking after livestock. A home garden can be a significant health and livelihood asset amongst urban households. Garden diversity includes vegetables and fruit and can include staple food crops, livestock, aquaculture and nursery production; plants for medicinal use, fuel and fibre, and plants for household social or spiritual functions such as flowers. All these items have an economic value in the smallholder farming system and many may be traded by barter or for cash.

In addition to the important economic function of production for consumption and income, the area around a home is used as a work area and a place to store farm produce and equipment; it also has important social functions. Trees may be planted for their beauty or to provide wood, fruit, privacy and shelter from wind and dust. Establishing or improving a home garden can assist a household's ecological sustainability and help sustain its livelihood. Potential benefits from integrating home gardens into smallholder farming systems include:

- income and enhanced rural employment through additional or off-season production;
- improved food security;
- increased availability of food and better nutrition through food diversity;
- decreased risk through diversification;
- alleviation of seasonal food shortages and seasonal supply bottlenecks of labour, transport, draught power or equipment;
- environmental benefits from recycling water and waste nutrients, from shade, dust and erosion control and from maintaining or increasing local biodiversity.

Despite this potential, the contribution of home gardens to livelihoods is often considered too small and their establishment too complicated for inclusion in agriculture and rural development. Economists and even households themselves sometimes find it hard to describe and value the benefits from a diverse home garden. Planners, research officers and extension officers often lack the information to identify opportunities for developing home gardens, and evaluate the feasibility of home gardens

under particular conditions. Home gardening is traditionally handled as a minor activity by specialized horticulturists in agriculture research and extension institutions, independent of field crop, livestock and aquaculture institutions. To introduce integrated home gardens successfully, policy-makers and planners must take sufficient account of diverse and often location-specific economic, cultural and environmental conditions in traditional farming systems.

This publication will help agriculture, livestock and aquaculture specialists to see how home gardens can be integrated with other components of the farming system. The main focus is on semi-intensive, small-scale, diverse and integrated home gardens for rural income generation. The main objective is to create awareness about the prerequisites and semi-commercial opportunities available for improving livelihoods through appropriate home garden technologies. This book provides examples of successes and lessons learned, and points out considerations that are crucial to the successful integration of home gardens and agriculture on smallholder farms around the world.