



To: IFAJ member journalists in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the UK  
From: IFAJ / Agriterra  
Date: February 27, 2013  
Subject: Let's report on agricultural development!

Dear all,

The European Journalism Centre (EJC) launched an open call for proposals focusing on the eight European countries with the highest development spending. The eighth country, France, is not an IFAJ member country. The EJC will provide a selection of innovative reporting projects with the necessary funds to enable journalists, editors and development stakeholders to perform thorough research and to develop entirely new and experimental reporting and presentation methods. See also [www.journalismgrants.org](http://www.journalismgrants.org).

Agriterra – as a development stakeholder – would like to work on this trajectory with a few journalists from several of these countries. Our idea is simple and complicated at the same time: we want to make a story beyond boundaries and beyond media restrictions on the basic fact that organized farmers bring equality and economic development. See the annex for the more detailed story idea.

#### **What will happen?**

In order to really substantiate this story, you need to talk to scientists, historians, development experts and farm leaders. In due time we will be able to provide you with a proper list of experts in these fields.

Furthermore you would need to travel and talk to the people at stake: for instance in Jordan we see a clear relation between organized farm women and democratisation/development and women emancipation. We see lots of comparable examples in countries like Peru, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Zambia or Niger.

However, we do not want to point it all out for you. We expect interested IFAJ journalists and editors to come with their own ideas on people to interview and countries where you see a link between organized agriculture and development.

#### **What do we offer?**

Our idea is to apply for funding with a group of interested journalists from several of the above mentioned countries. The funding will cover all the expenses to complement the costs for travelling and other necessary direct costs. However, we do expect you to finance your own time; this trajectory might take quite some research time, so it is good to be aware of that!

Agriterra and the IFAJ will apply for the funding. Being granted the funds is a condition to proceed. Apart from the mutual part of this journalistic project, you are free to write/broadcast on your experiences in your own country and for your own magazine/company. Agriterra will consult the IFAJ on the journalists that we chose for this project. The application for funding will be tuned with the selected journalists before it is sent to the EJC.



**Interested to join?**

This journalistic project could provide all of us a special experience. If you think you are up to such an experience, if you can make the necessary time for yourself available, if you are up to some thorough research and if you are willing to travel, let us know! You can write an email to [vangelder@agriterra.org](mailto:vangelder@agriterra.org).

This should be done not later than March 13 as we have to apply for funding on March 22. Please add your curriculum, including your present employer and your experience. Please also describe on maximum 1 page how you would proceed in this challenge. Please also let us know if you would want to be 'just' part of the group or whether you would be willing to take the lead. Finally let us know the amount of time you would have available for this project.

Best regards,  
On behalf of Agriterra and the IFAJ,

José van Gelder

## The story idea

No doubt there are many ways to fight inequality; we at Agriterra are convinced that the presence of strong membership organizations is of fundamental importance. Such organizations, by their very nature, give voice and (market) power to their members, who would not have much leverage as individuals. Their presence means that the powers that be cannot just act as they please: they are being watched! This controlling function is essential for the relationship between strong associations of people (farmers, labourers, retailers...) and equality. If interest groups are organized in a solid way, they can never be ignored; they constitute a vital countervailing power, and a necessary condition for achieving more equality.

European history is a case in point, and also points to yet another element in the causal relationship between farmers' organizations and equality. European farmers emancipated themselves by starting to found local cooperative societies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in order to conquer a fairer share of the pie. This happened in the context of the transition to a non-agrarian society (the structural transformation). Cooperative societies and other forms of associations mitigated the disruptive impact of structural transformation on employment and food availability, with a growing population that is increasingly employed outside agriculture. Many European countries would never have been countries with so much equality within and among economic sectors if it was not for organized farming and other economic associations, like, for example, trade unions. Mergers and growth transformed these local coops into internationally active farmer-owned cooperative societies. This gradual process guaranteed a relatively rapid economic growth and structural transformation, safeguarding employment and food balances; and fostering a more equal distribution of income and wealth.

That is why Agriterra works at making genuinely membership-based rural membership organizations - that is, associations, farmers' unions, cooperative societies - stronger. They are good for equality. And there is evidence that in developing countries the same holds true. For instance, African farmers' organizations lobby to increase the share of public spending on agriculture. The Confédération des Associations de Producteurs Agricoles pour le Développement (CAPAD) of Burundi, for example, succeeded in forcing that share up from 3% to 6.2%. Still not the 10% agreed in the 2003 Maputo Declaration, but it is progress, brought about by the controlling function of a strong association. Also, a recent study in over 2,500 Chinese villages showed how the presence of producer organizations fostered agricultural specialization, and this specialization in turn made rural incomes increase. This means that villages with more cooperatives and more farmers in cooperatives were wealthier and more prosperous than others.

Developing countries will undergo a structural transformation, whether we want it or not. But this can happen either by means of relatively sudden high-scale and sophisticated industrial investments, or through gradual rural farmer-led industrialization. The former occurs in selected countries and regions, it takes a very long time to spread, and the employment effects are low due to the use of technology that requires little labour; markets are flooded with products ousting local producers from business.



The second 'roadmap' is based on the processing and marketing of agricultural produce and initiated by the organizations of the people who live and work in rural areas. This will also take a long time, but probably not as much, and with less disruption. Growth rates will probably be even higher. Imagine its impact: it will be impressive in terms of the employment created in rural areas, and the growth and distribution of rural income. Strong farmers' associations can make this happen!

Nowadays we see for instance in the Netherlands that agri-business shows more and more interest in this second road map: connection to local development. We see that the small farmer has become 'hot' in the modern world. He even is central in the 2014 UN International Year for Family Farming. Yet, even more appealing is perhaps that multinationals such as Unilever, Wal-Mart and Starbucks are looking for the small farmer as their supplier. They may mainly do this out of spreading their risks, but the effect is the same: they need the connection to organized farmers and subsequently they can take up their role in local development.