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A woman is pictured in a file photo picking raspberries during a harvest season at a local farm near Chillán, Chile. World Food Day, Oct. 16, is celebrated in honor of the date of the founding of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization in 1945. (CNS/Jose Luis Saavedra, Reuters)



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Family farming is the key to making systems of food production and consumption more "inclusive, resilient and efficient," Pope Francis said.

"Family farmers are to be commended for the supportive way in which they work, as well as the for the respectful and gentle way in which they cultivate the land," the pope wrote in a March 19 message to a meeting of the World Rural Forum, a global network of partners that promotes family farming and sustainable rural development.

The three-day conference in northern Spain was titled "Family Farming: Sustainability of Our Planet."

Despite their "considerable contribution to global food production," Francis wrote, family farmers "continue to be hit by poverty and a lack of opportunity."

Recalling the "human, spiritual and social" needs of family farmers, Francis wrote that family businesses are more than a space for producing goods; they are "the place where people belong, the place where they feel understood and valued for their dignity and not only for what they produce or for the results they achieve."

In such a family dynamic lies "the importance of strengthening the bonds that join its members, of respecting their religious traditions, cultural wealth and agricultural practices," he wrote.

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Francis also highlighted the role of women in farming.

"Rural women represent a sure compass for their families, a firm foothold for the progress of the economy," he wrote, "especially in developing countries where they are not only beneficiaries but real drivers of the progress of the societies in which they live."

Young people, he wrote, also play a key role in the future of agriculture.

"The real revolution in the future of food begins with training and empowering the new generations," he wrote. Citing his 2021 address to the secretary-general of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, Francis wrote that young people bring "innovative solutions to address old problems" and have the courage not to be limited by "shortsighted thinking that resists change."

The pope prayed that the conference may be a step toward eradicating world hunger and caring better for the planet.