Family farmers still matter in the U.S.

By Danielle Nierenberg, Barbara Gemmill-Herren, Benjamin Graub and Caterina Batello, Huffington Post

On Thanksgiving we express gratitude for the abundance on our holiday tables, but rarely do we thank the people who grew, harvested, and processed that food.

But a very diverse group of family farmers around the world, and at home, deserve our support – according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 98 percent of American farmers are family farmers. The United Nations recently declared 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming, celebrating the global community of family farmers. Forthcoming reports by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization and Food Tank: The Food Think Tank suggest that through local knowledge and sustainable, innovative farming methods, family farmers can improve yields and create a more nutrient-dense and diverse food system. They're even key players in job creation and healthy economies, supplying jobs to millions and boosting local markets.

In the United States, however, small and medium-size family farms are suffering. One bad harvest, a rejected bank loan, and too much or too little rain can drive farms out of business. In 2012, for example, a "once in a generation" drought cost farmers about $35 billion and reduced American GDP by up to 1 percent.

But in many parts of the country, farmers are finding ways to create resilience on farms.

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