Manifesto of Gratitude to “Custodian Farmers of Agrobiodiversity”

The National Institute of Forestry and Agricultural Innovation (INIAF), Bolivia, recognizes that our national territory and in particular the Andean region is part of one of the largest centers of origin and diversity of crops and their wild relatives in the world. It is also ranked among the world’s 12 megadiverse countries.

This beautiful country is also host to peoples, communities and individuals with unparalleled wealth in knowledge and culture that is often overlooked. For centuries these peoples have suffered pressure on their cultural traditions and a lack of recognition of the value of their expertise, knowledge and culture. In this land blessed by Mother Earth, we have not only domestic animals but also varieties and ecotypes of plants that have been safeguarded by these communities and farmers acting as ‘custodians of agrobiodiversity’.

Colonization could not destroy this ancient cultural knowledge which thanks to the courage of the people who passed it down from generation to generation has maintained the national genetic wealth that is held in such high regard in the Western scientific world today. This wealth contains species that carry genes capable of helping agricultural systems adapt to today’s climatic, economic and energy crises.

This ancestral knowledge must be valued alongside that of the Western world, where learning is intertwined with the spirituality of indigenous people, which can weave other ways of thinking, feeling and building rural development, as suggested in the indigenous concept of ‘Suma Qamaña’.

Today scientists worldwide are analyzing genes contained in the species and varieties preserved by farmers and communities – the custodians of agricultural biodiversity who resisted the pressures of new ideas from colonizers in the past and the present and who through their ancient wisdom sensed that their greatest legacy was the key to adaptation to climatic, energy, economic and cultural crises. From this analysis INIAF, PROINPA and allied institutions express their appreciation and gratitude to ‘farmer custodians of agricultural biodiversity’ of our nation and from all over the world.

The diversity of native Andean crops and varieties in the area surrounding Lake Titicaca is an invaluable genetic heritage with great importance for our country, as well as the cultural diversity and traditional knowledge with which it is associated. This plant diversity plays an important role in the food security and sovereignty of the farming families whose livelihoods depend upon it and who through carrying out quietly and diligently their hard work have been safeguarding our crop diversity not only to support their families but also the world in this time marked by climatic, cultural, energy, and economic crises.

1 Concept of ‘Good Living’ in Aymara language
In consideration of the above, INIAF within the framework of constructing a National Genetic Resources System (SNRG) for implementation in the country, make this Manifesto to grant official recognition to ‘farmer custodians of agricultural biodiversity’ whose vocation and extraordinary dedication in managing their crops, genetic and cultural diversity in harmony with the rights of Mother Earth, form part of the SNRG as a cornerstone component of in situ conservation. We thereby take a fundamental step to initiate the establishment of a network of ‘farmer custodians of agrobiodiversity’ in the country to strengthen the function they have been doing throughout the centuries to safeguard the agricultural biodiversity and the biological and cultural heritage of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.