

Sustainability and Agriculture – FAO Perspective

Dear Deputy State Secretary Feldman,

Dear President Györfy,

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is an honour and pleasure for me to address this distinguished gathering. The topic you chose for today's deliberations – The Environmental Sustainability Dimension of Short-term Outlooks of Agricultural Market - is very timely and important.

Allow me to provide you with some global perspectives from FAO regarding this issue – Sustainability and Agriculture.

FAO was founded almost 72 years ago in order to eliminate hunger and achieve food security in the world. Since then, FAO has made an important contribution to helping the millions of hungry people all over the world. Still almost 800 million people go to bed hungry every day.

Today there is a very real possibility of four famines breaking out at once in Africa – in Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria and Yemen - endangering more than 20 million lives. These famines are caused by droughts but also by armed conflicts.

I strongly believe that we are smart enough and capable enough to cope with these dramatic developments. That is why we took the responsibility to achieve Zero Hunger on our Planet by the year 2030.

We are optimistic because a lot has been achieved. Since 1945 food production in the world has tripled and average food availability per person has increased by 40 percent. Today the world already produces enough food for all. Even when the world population reaches by the year 2020 the number of 9.7 billion we may predict that there will be food for everyone.

Being optimistic, we need to recognize new challenges. By 2050, we need 60 percent more food, 50 percent more energy and 40 percent more water. And our resources are finite. We are witnessing degradation of soils, growing water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, spread of transboundary diseases of plants and animals, the loss and waste of precious food. And of course this is all happening in the new and dramatic environment of climate change.

Unless climate change is addressed, agricultural productivity will decline, with serious implications for food security. Food supply shortfalls could cause dramatic increases in food prices, with greater climate variability exacerbating price volatility. Millions of low-income people would be directly affected in regions with already high rates of hunger and poverty. FAO estimates that a “business as usual” approach could increase the number of poor by between 35

and 122 million by 2030 relative to a future without climate change, and I am citing from FAO flagship publication of 2016, “Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security”.

That is why sustainability has become the key approach to securing bright future for all. That is why United Nations adopted ambitious programme of achieving Sustainable Development by the year 2030.

The sustainability issue is of utmost importance for agriculture. Agricultural and rural development policies need to be reoriented to promote the adoption of sustainable practices in agricultural production, natural resources management and consumer behaviour. The crop and livestock sectors use 70 percent of fresh water resources and together with forestry occupy 60 percent of the Earth land surface. Livestock alone uses 80 percent of global crop and pasture areas.

Aquaculture accounts for a growing share of land and fresh water use.

The sustainability of agricultural production depends on such crucial factors as the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, the careful stewardship of soil and water, and equitable access to and use of natural resources. Sustainability of production requires a resource efficient increase in agricultural production. We need to be able to produce more with less resources and much more efficiently. It also requires an improvement of agricultural know-how and training and reduction of food losses and waste. New approaches

should be adopted at all levels. Among them climate smart agriculture and agro-ecological practices, which FAO promotes.

The “Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security” and the “Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems”, both adopted by the Committee on World Food Security hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization, are important milestones on the way to more sustainability. Accepted international voluntary and market-based production standards and sustainability certificates can help protect the natural means of production and at the same time increase consumer acceptance for sustainably produced, bio-based products. Existing systems offer a good platform for further development.

Economics and social dimension of agriculture should also be improved.

First of all more efforts should be applied to eradication of poverty. Everybody must have access to nutritious food.

Food systems should become more sustainable and accordingly policies must be adjusted. While food chains are becoming longer and food systems more sophisticated, the resilience of medium and small family farms needs to be increased. The producers, which are the backbone of rural societies, should have

an opportunity to get adequate rewards for their contributions in the new environment.

It is extremely important to give new opportunities in agriculture to women. In all parts of the world, we must eliminate all forms of discrimination against women under the law, ensure that access to resources is more equal and that agricultural policies and programmes are gender-aware, and make women's voices heard in decision-making at all levels. Women must be seen as equal partners in sustainable development. Achieving gender equality and empowering women is not only the right thing to do; it is also crucial for agricultural development and food security.

Same refers to young people in agriculture. Agriculture and food value chains are playing an important role in new job creation but the new labour market entrance will need to be absorbed by the expansion of non-agricultural employment. If this does not occur, mass migration and youth unemployment may become new threats to food security and social and political stability.

Summing up, allow me to emphasize once again that we need to approach sustainability in a comprehensive way –from a point of view of environment, social cohesion and economics.

In conclusion, allow me to say a couple of words about FAO activities in Europe and Central Asia.

Our Regional Office is located in Budapest, Hungary. We are covering the largest geographic zone for FAO – from Lisbon to Vladivostok, working with over 50 countries. We operate in the region which already eliminated hunger but is still challenged by the issues of sustainability. It is very diverse. It includes major agriculture producers and consumers, as well as smaller countries which rely on small and medium – sized producers. In our regional activities we focus on three main priorities – empowering smallholders and family farms, improving agri-food trade and market integration and dealing with the consequences of climate change for agriculture.

We very much appreciate our partnership with the Hungarian government, which supports our work in the countries of the region. I would also like to express appreciation of our cooperation with Hungarian Research Institute of Agricultural Economics, which is the organizer of today's Conference.

FAO has well recognized mandate which is very relevant today. It is increasing its knowledge base and promotes best practices for agriculture. Together with our partners we shall continue to promote Zero Hunger world and food security for all. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today and wish you very productive discussions.

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