



The Patient is Sick

At the start of the 21st century, there can be no other diagnosis for the state of our planet. Whether we take our society, economy or biodiversity as vital indicators; they are far outside the boundaries of what anyone would call healthy. Both statistics and simple observation tell us that we are living beyond our means.

Janez POTOČNIK, FFA Chairman

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Who can look at another year of record heat, melting ice-caps and ferocious hurricanes and say all is well with the Earth? Through human activity, we are losing animal species at a rate 1.000 to 10.000 times faster than if humanity were not present and the IUCN Red List of endangered species has jumped from 5.205 in 1996 to 8.462 in 2017¹. By 2050, the estimates are showing we will have 9.7 billion fellow citizens, and many of them will have moved up to the global middle class. We have no way of providing all of them with our current way of life without finding an alternative planet to resource and host us. I should not need to demonstrate that our national and global political structures are ailing.

We must heal the patient. We must find the multiple paths that lead us away from a biological, economic and social catastrophe and into a truly sustainable future. This should begin and end with making sure that our land use and macro-economic structures fit within the constraints of our local and global ecosystems. This cannot be achieved by a single system for all sectors, cultures and societies, but it is the basic parameter. How we achieve this goal is up to each of us.

At FFA2018, we will showcase some of the existing solutions, explore how we can make sure our policy systems are up to the task of leading us there, and discuss what role each of us must play both professionally and personally. Only by doing so can we create a healthy planet fit for a healthy people.

The foundation of our recovery should be around our land, soil, waterways and

ecosystems. How can we recover what we have lost and maintain what we still have while making sure our farmers, foresters and land managers also live an economically and socially fulfilling life? The first thing we must do is factor in the true price of the food we eat, and be prepared to pay it. Right now, we do not value our natural capital and this has led to massive imbalances in our economic models; there is no place in our GDP for clean water, clean air, bees and butterflies. If we are to survive, we must start taking into account the negative externalities we create when we produce a kilo of beef and factor these into the final price. In this way, we incentivise the farmer and forester to be a wise steward and, not just a producer.

However, we must not simply place the burden of improving our wellbeing on the land manager. The private sector too must play a strong role; they have the agility and the capacity to adapt quickly to new



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realities, and today we must ask them to do so for the good of all. The 20th century model of extraction, use and waste no longer works - doubtful if it even truly did. Private business must (preferably voluntarily, but through legislation if necessary) be made to ensure that their end products and goods can be taken apart, recycled and re-used in the most optimum way. By embracing a circular economy, we can for instance halt the destructive rare-earth mineral mining that goes into making our smartphones, and we can take our “waste” and recycle it into nutrients for soil. In an ideal world, our children should

look in the history books to learn about the word ‘garbage’.

The outcomes of our current production systems are only too obvious in our societies; some of us are economically as well as physically obese, while the rest starve. When 8 people own the same wealth as half the world², then clearly our economic systems are unhealthy. It is the first time in history that we are bound so clearly together in one single socio-ecological system of planetary scope and at the same time technology allows nearly all of us to be aware of so much of it. In such a global

village, people need to understand the consequences of their own choices and the dangers of disposable consumption. If we are to heal, society too must play its part.

There has therefore never been a more urgent time for leadership at every level. We must face the challenges of the 21st century and take the steps that are needed to safeguard the survival of not just ourselves, but all species. To do this, we must sign a new global contract that states that humanity and the planet are a partnership, and that we play the junior role in this endeavour. If the last two centuries were about codifying the rules that exist between the state and society, then this century must be about the relationship between the whole of humanity and our ecosystems. We will need leaders and we will need new thinking. Global agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Climate Agreement provide a framework, but those are now well past the point of shaking hands; now comes the hard work of implementation and we are already in delaying.

At FFA2018, we cannot hope to heal the patient overnight. That is a long challenge, but we will do our best to show the way forward. We have invited some of the brightest thinkers, most innovative pioneers, and leading politicians to share some of their ideas and engage in an open conversation with you. We will discuss how we can transition our food systems towards a healthy future, how investing in nature can be good for the planet as well as the bottom line, and how Europe can deliver innovative policies to create a better future for farmers and consumers alike.

The FFA has always stood for combining food and environmental security. Over ten years, the event has helped create a dialogue and delivered solutions for today, tomorrow, and into the future. As chairman, it is my pleasure to invite you to attend, but also my duty to insist that you and your business become part of the solution. If our intelligence and responsibility does not motivate all of us to become better, then surely our desire for survival will.

1 Deutsche Welle: *Our Disappearing Biodiversity* - <http://www.dw.com/en/our-disappearing-biodiversity/a-41479657>

2 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/press-releases/2017-01-16/just-8-men-own-same-wealth-half-world>

