

11th Forum for the Future of Agriculture

HEALTHY FARMING, HEALTHY FOOD, HEALTHY FUTURE

CLOSING SPEECH

Ladies and gentlemen,

What a day it has been ... again. It is never easy to close such an event. There were so many constructive thoughts, in fact, that I am not even going to attempt to give you a summary.

Let me begin by **thankng everyone** for being here today, for being open to new ideas and for sharing your views with us. I hope that you were inspired by what you have heard, and that you will take some of the ideas home and act on them.

I would also like to thank all of our **speakers** for sharing their thoughts with us. They have come from all over the world to join us, and they deserve your appreciation.

Before I begin my closing remarks, I would also like to thank the organisers and staff at the ELO and Syngenta. They work all year round to make this event happen, and neither you nor me would be here today without their hard work and support. Thank you!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Achieving a healthy future through healthy farming and healthy food is not an easy challenge. If we want long-term health for ourselves and the planet, we must engage in a **complete transformation of all the systems that shape our society** and embrace **systemic leadership**.

We must **profoundly change our economic system**. Our decisions are still based on short-term growth measured by GDP and rising stock prices. We cannot rely on old maps to lead us to a new and sustainable future – we have to fix this.

We must profoundly **change our agricultural and food systems**. Right now, far too many of them exist outside the borders of what the natural world can supply and absorb. Our fresh water is receding, our soils are eroding, biodiversity is disappearing, and the resources needed to create inputs such as fertilizers are more and more scarce or difficult to extract.

We must profoundly change also **our own actions and behaviours**.

You have heard how much food we waste, and how easily this could be used to feed the hungry. This is not someone else's problem; it is ours. We here today are not powerless, and the solution lies in our actions – it is up to each of us here today in our personal and professional lives to take action.

To me, this is at the core of achieving a healthy future. **We must all become leaders**, and the bigger your role in this world, the more impact you must make.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The **challenges we face have little to do with lack of scientific evidence**. We know more than enough about climate change to act. Whole university departments can tell you about soil. A good farmer can tell you about clean water. You know.

Do not let anyone tell you that it is lack of money, lack of political power, or lack of resources that is holding us back. Our problem is a **lack of cooperation and a lack of willpower**. Above all else, we **need systemic leadership**.

The **complexity and scale** of our imminent crisis require us to go above and beyond what we have achieved so far. We must find new ways of governing that connect systemic thinking with practical, local solutions that work for people where they are. They must be agile, make use of new technology and be far more accountable and transparent than any time before.

What our leadership must offer, above all, is the **hope of a better, healthier future**.

We can all come together and say that climate change is a threat, that biodiversity losses will be catastrophic for humanity and that if we do not change, we will doom the world. All these threats are real and we must face them.

However, we cannot change our course if we do not **offer a hopeful vision of a better world**. If we are to lead, and so many of us are to follow, we must offer an exciting vision of something better.

Today, there are not nearly enough politicians, business leaders, farmers, agricultural associations or government agencies who are willing to do this. Most of us, especially here

in the West, prefer to enjoy the comfortable illusion of prosperity by **indebting future generations**.

Make no mistake: **young people know this**. They no longer trust us to hand them a world that is fair, that contains well-functioning ecosystems and sustainably produced food. Here in Europe, many of them are – for the first time – worse off than their parents. We cannot leave them with the systemic crises that we are, in large part, responsible for.

If we are to take back the momentum and bring people with us, we must offer a better, more hopeful future for all and we must offer a new vision of systemic leadership.

True systemic leadership with a bold vision must have **three core capabilities**:

- **It must help people see the larger systems in which they live.** This way, we build a shared understanding of complexity. Ignorance creates fear, but if we are honest and open, we can inspire people to act.
- **Systemic leaders must allow for complexity and difficult conversations.** The best ideas arise when people, your employees and voters - everyone is well informed. That way, they too can help generate solutions and take pride and ownership in the contribution
- And it should **shift the collective focus from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future**. We will not solve

our problems if we only try to solve negative outcomes like climate change and soil loss. Those are very serious, but they are only symptoms. Their causes lie upstream, in the much more complicated world of economic and ecological systems.

Ladies and gentlemen,

After the Second World War in Europe we agreed to **share some of our sovereignty** to avoid future conflicts. We learned the hard way and we succeeded. Sometimes we are not proud enough of that fact!

In the 21st century for the first time in a human history we face the emergence of a single, tightly coupled human social-ecological system of planetary scope. Our individual and collective responsibilities have increased enormously, and our current governing systems must be adapted properly to this new reality, to the fact that we are all interconnected and interdependent.

We must redefine sovereignty as well as economic and social power if we want to address all the challenges we are facing as humanity. It is as much about conflict, war and peace as it was in the time when a handful of visionary leaders took some brave decisions in Europe, only a few decades ago.

In this new world, where we rewrite the rules of our economic models, of our farms and environment, there will be enormous shifts in capital, politics and power. Some people will lose out as the nature of work and production changes. They must be helped and compensated. But as a society, we will not just gain a healthy future, but any kind of future at all ...

We need to create new political, business and farm spaces to solve our complex problems. We need to explore how we can all spend and invest to align our goals, rather than pitching them against each other. There will be some tough compromises. New winners will take the place of some of those on top now. There will be hard questions about who has power and who makes profit. But this is part of systemic leadership: we either have the courage to think and act differently, or we don't.

I do see many **hopeful signs**. The majority of the world has committed itself to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement. There are real changes being made to farming practices all over the world. Many politicians, at all levels, are standing up and creating real change in their communities.

Industry leaders are recognizing their responsibilities and are beginning to focus on the long-term sustainability of their companies and the planet. In 1970, the economist Milton Friedman, whose theories still run so much of our economy now, said "*What does it mean to say that „business“ has responsibilities? Only people can have responsibilities*".

Compare that to this year's World Economic Forum in Davos, where Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock – the world's largest investment company - said: "*Society is demanding that companies, both public and private, serve a social purpose. To prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes positive contribution to society.*"

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the last two Forums, I have asked you to be part of a **social contract for the 21st century** – a pledge between ourselves and the planet.

The time has come for us to amend that contract – to **make it less abstract and set out a positive vision of the world**. If we are to succeed, we must imagine a new, hopeful future that can inspire not just us here in this room, but 500 million Europeans and more than 7 billion global citizens.

Let me therefore give you **six concrete proposals** that demonstrate systemic leadership. Clauses, if you wish, for our global contract:

First, implementing all seventeen Sustainable Development Goals should be the strategic priority of any government, at any level. Their implementation must be supported by outreach and communication and linked to measurable indicators. Above all, the SDGs should be at the heart of our economic policy decisions.

Second, all policies – especially our economic ones - should be open to systematic and frequent adjustment. The synchronicity between economic and environmental policy to responses to global risks should be strengthened.

Third, all levels of governance and all stakeholders – from citizens to presidents, from civil society to CEOs – should be active participants in the systemic changes we need. We must engage potential losers and make sure their transition is as fair as possible.

Fourth, the EU is the best pilot for this new global governance. We have an enormous wealth of good and bad examples and the potential to mobilise vast resources for change. But this will only happen with a clear, hopeful vision and transformative leadership.

Fifth, nobody should wait for the leadership of other people. You must be the leader at your level of authority – on your farm, in your business, in your government.

And finally, stop holding workshops and group photos for the SDGs. Change does not come from putting them as an annex in your annual reports. It is high time we got serious about implementations. As I have said, change is unavoidable, and as humans we are supposed to be intelligent. It is high time we prove it.

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing,

We need **real, profound and systemic change**. A little bit of change will not do the trick. Our food systems cannot just be a little more sustainable. Our economic systems should not just be a little more equal – I could continue.

If change isn't brought about by **the will of the people first**, then rising temperatures and sea levels, eroding soils and disappearing biodiversity will make sure it does happen. I do not want to think of that world or persuade you through fear, but we cannot deny its potential reality.

Profound changes are not easy. They are difficult. We are people to radically overhaul the food and economic systems that they have invested in and that have contributed to their wealth and that of their children.

They will only do so on the promise of real hope, and if they are backed by systemic leadership. The transition to a more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable is an enormous triple opportunity. We cannot miss it, and we cannot be afraid of big ideas any longer.

I would like to leave you with **one final thought**.

It comes – again – from the “**warning to humanity, a second notice**” from over 15,000 scientists. They too believe a better world is possible, and they close their article with this:

“We require the help of the world community of scientists - natural, social, economic, political;

We require the help of the world’s business and industrial leaders;

We require the help of the world’s religious leaders; and

We require the help of the world’s peoples.

We call on all to join us in this task”.

I could not agree more. I wish you all the best and a safe journey home.

Thank you!