

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

9th Forum for the Future of Agriculture

Opening address

Speech by FFA Chairman Janez Potočnik

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning to you all and thank you for coming today.

It was only a year ago that I stood on this podium and opened my first FFA after taking over from my colleague Franz Fischler.

Last year we invited all of you to take up the challenge of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. From ending world hunger, to delivering on climate action and protecting our ecosystems, these seventeen Goals have now been universally agreed upon. They are the challenges we will need to master if humanity is to flourish in the 21st century.

This Forum has always stood for food *and* environmental security. These two goals go together; without long-term, responsible care of our ecosystems we cannot produce the food we need to feed our growing population with increasing consumption rates. But we must also see that the stewardship of our planet can only be done if those who live on it have a good income, a stable business, and a bright future. The Sustainable Development Goals recognize this balance and we should too.

Today, we must ask ourselves what it is we need to do in order to achieve these goals. Make no mistake; if we are to provide a truly sustainable world, then we will all need to do more.

We know that such changes need to happen at every level; by our consumers, producers, by nation states – by the whole world. It is therefore my pleasure to welcome Achim Steiner, executive director of the UN Environment Programme, who will open the first panel. With his global overview, he will challenge us and bring the environmental dimensions of the SDGs to life.

Today, tomorrow and in the future, we will need to ask farmers and foresters to do more to protect the environment as well as provide healthy, safe and nutritious food. However, be sure that land managers are not the only ones who will need to take up these challenges – They are for the whole of society, including its economic actors.

If we are to live within the boundaries of our planet and meet the UN goals we have agreed on, we will need to wholly transform our economic system. This is not just about the way we produce, but also about the way we consume. Our keynote speaker, and distinguished economist, Jeffrey Sachs will certainly address this in his speech: "SDGs and the economic model: what needs to change?"

Ladies and gentlemen,

While we have already made tremendous steps forward in the last decades, the 21st century needs to see even more changes. We need to seriously integrate the ideas of the circular economy into every aspect of our land management systems. This means increasing our nutrient use efficiency to reduce

current nutrient leakage into water and air. By maximizing the efficient use of our inputs, recovering most, if not all, the nutrients that currently flow away in our waste streams, we can produce more while using less. This means closing the loops on all our inputs in order to guarantee that future increases in food production do not cause further environmental damage. Because our planet can no longer afford it, we cannot afford it!

Today, our first session will discuss the needed transformation of our agricultural development strategies. We will hear from Commissioner Hogan, and FAO Director General Jose Graziano da Silva.

We will need to do more for our environment and we need to do it together. The SDGs have already shown that care for the environment is everybody's job. Today it is clear that we should not just depend on the state or on NGOs to do the work for us, but for each of us to take our responsibilities seriously. For many, that means no longer treating our limited natural capital as a free resource, but to be honest and to price in those externalities that we are currently ignoring. If we apply our best long-term strategic thinking, I believe that most land managers would welcome a move towards internalising the costs we currently take for granted. However, such costs will need to be borne by society as a whole.

For others, it will mean reaching out and working together with new partners in the public and private sectors in order to achieve bigger and better results. We can no longer afford to stay in our old, rigid ways of thinking and merely shout from the side-lines; it is up to all of us to find common ground.

However, it is unfair and unjust if we only ask those of you who manage and care for the land and for the environment to work harder. It is clear that consumers everywhere must play their part as well. This is not just in terms of being conscious of the environmental costs and negative externalities that our lives create, but that we must actively change our lifestyles to become sustainable.

Today, citizens of Europe, supermarkets, all actors in the food chain together still waste over 100 million tons of food every year. When we think of the natural resources that went into producing, storing and transporting all that food, it is a colossal waste. When the FAO¹ says that there are still 6 million people suffering from food insecurity in Europe, three times the population of my country Slovenia, then it is little short of criminal. When we compare this to serious problems of malnutrition in the developing world, our own waste becomes even more obvious and alarming.

Food waste is only one aspect that we as consumers must change; it is also our way of life when it comes to other uses of natural resources; The average European car, for example, is only effectively used 5% of the time and usually with just one person in it, when it could seat five. For the most part, however, it just sits still. Can anyone say that this is a particularly wise use of our limited resources, or indeed of our own limited incomes?

These changes in societal behaviour will be discussed during our second session.

Ladies and gentlemen,

¹ <http://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail-news/en/c/294330/>

To achieve the sustainable development goals and set a new course for the world, we will certainly need to be innovative in our approach. That does not just mean new, high-tech solutions, although they will play their part.

It also means reinventing the way our society is structured and the prices we do not pay for our lifestyle. It is extraordinarily impressive that we can now measure the farthest reaches of the universe and send men and women to live, in outer space, but actually, a lot of our solutions will be quite basic in nature. If we can bring better practices and more knowledge to the corners of the world where farming life has changed little in the last decades, we can already make a huge difference.

The need for disrupting and rethinking innovation model will be the subject of our final session today, where John Ingram, Food Systems Programmer Leader at the Environmental Change Institute of the University of Oxford will share his thoughts with a distinguished panel.

Achieving food and environmental security together will not be easy. In fact, I suspect that it is one of the greatest challenges we will face in this century and the next. We will need to do it in a time of economic troubles, strife, refugees in the Middle East and beyond. We will need to do it in a time where the Member States of Europe are embroiled in discussions that question its core values and, at times, when the distances between people seem to increase, rather than close.

We will also need to achieve this urgently because of the changes in our climate. According to NASA² this January was not just the hottest January ever recorded, but it was also the largest warmth departure from average for any month, ever. And February followed its path. Although the whole of humanity has finally recognized the climate challenge in Paris, now comes the very hard work of implementation.

To signify that the challenges we face are of a truly global nature, I am very proud to first present a welcome address by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. With his wisdom and leadership, he has undoubtedly seen the beginning of this era of change. I am sincerely grateful he will honour our Forum by opening it.

Ladies and Gentleman, Ban Ki-Moon ...

² <https://weather.com/news/climate/news/record-warmest-january-global-2016>