

11th Forum for the Future of Agriculture
HEALTHY FARMING, HEALTHY FOOD, HEALTHY FUTURE
OPENING SPEECH

Your Majesty, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 11th Forum for the Future of Agriculture.

It is a great pleasure to chair this event for the third time, and I thank all of you all for coming here today.

Two years ago, we spoke for the first time about creating a global contract for a global community. An understanding between humanity and our ecosystems: we are partners in project Earth, and humanity is very much the junior partner in this arrangement. At the end of the 2016 FFA, I asked you to go out, think hard, and come up with new concepts.

Last year, when we met for the second time, I closed the event by asking you to move from theory to practical solutions. To make sure we live up to our end of the global contract.

I'm aware that more time is needed for the tangible results, but there is no more time to lose. The fact is, that **collectively, we are still failing ourselves and the planet.**

This not just my private opinion. It is shared by more than 15,000 scientists from 184 countries. In their article "**Warning to humanity: a second notice**", they write that "*Humanity has failed to make sufficient progress in generally*

solving these foreseen environmental challenges, and alarmingly, most of them are getting worse [...]

Especially troubling is the current trajectory of potentially catastrophic climate change due to rising greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels, and agricultural production – particularly from farming ruminants from meat consumption [...]

From 1992 humanity has unleashed a mass extinction event, the sixth in roughly 540 million year, wherein many current life forms could be annihilated or at least committed to extinction by the end of this century.“

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are **sleepwalking into a potential catastrophe** of our own making. We prefer to ignore our future so that we can make the present as pleasant as we can.

In his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, **Martin Luther King** wrote that *“the shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.”*

There are so few of us who are of genuine ill will, who reject the reality of climate change and ecosystem destruction outright. **Most of us have accepted that there are catastrophic risks out there**, and that our own behaviour is making them more likely.

Why then, are we so lukewarm about the changes we urgently need to make to our businesses, farms and the sustainable management of our ecosystems?

I believe that part of it comes from the fact that our ailments are both **too micro and too macro at the same time**.

The slow burning threats of climate change and ecosystem losses are so **vast and complex that they paralyse us**. The food system from farm to fork is often international and involves so many actors that the farmer and consumer cannot always see all the steps in between, or how they can personally act.

Species and biodiversity losses are similar; we can see at the local level that there is less bird song and farm biodiversity, but how can the individual respond to a trend like losing a species? How does the individual in a market economy change the fact that the world is so much richer, but its wealth so unevenly distributed?

Our other problem is that the farm level is too micro for society at large. The cures we need can only be realised at the micro level; at the individual farm, in changing how our own business operates or in adapting waste disposal in our local community or changing the incentives in a large corporation. But how can we design effective policies at this level, fund them, and link these disparate strands together in national and global goals and achievements?

Our food systems are a good example of this macro-micro disconnect. Tim Benton, speaking at this years' World

Economic Forum in Davos put it correctly: *“The food system is not a business and it has no CEO. Yet the facts stand for themselves: the food system is unequal, unsustainable, unstable, and in need of transformation. And it needs everyone – all stakeholders – to take action.”*¹

He is right, but **we cannot just talk about the “food system”**. It is too big, and allows all its parts to blame everyone else. We can blame the farmer for not protecting bees and butterflies, or the supermarkets for not paying enough for products, or the processing industry for adding too much sugar, or even the consumer for eating it. It is easy to blame everyone else, especially if there are real grounds. The hard thing, the right thing, is to acknowledge your own failures and make real changes.

Our crisis is global, and it is systemic. In Synchronous failure: The emerging causal architecture of global crisis, the group of scientists two years ago wrote: *“In a world where external reserves of resources are limited, and second chances are thus increasingly rare, humankind must develop the ability to proactively navigate away from this new kind of crisis - globally extensive and inter-systemic - that could otherwise irreversibly degrade the biophysical and economic basis for human prosperity.”*

¹ [Benton, Tim. “Our Food System Is Broken”. World Economic Forum 2018. Davos.](#)

We cannot wait for the climate and ecosystem crises to reach the phase where consequences would be unpredictable and uncontrollable. It will be a gradual failure, not a sudden collapse, and by the time our population truly sees the consequences of their lukewarm acceptance, it will be unfortunately too late.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I do not want to claim that we do not recognize the problem, or that we do not act at all. Many of you here today are actively involved. You have signed the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, and you are implementing sustainability in your business or have planted field margins on your farm. These are all positive steps and I congratulate you for it.

However, **many of our actions are still designed to clear up the mess our systems make.** Biodiversity loss, pollutions, oceans full of plastic and soil loss; these are the consequences of human activity and our economic systems. We do not value our environmental capital, undervalue labour and overvalue short-term financial gains.

If we are to be sustainable, we must **cure the illness, not only treat its symptoms.** We must fully take into financial account the negative environmental consequences of our consumption, re-value the hard work of most people, and stop the obsession with stock prices and quarterly growth.

That will not be easy. Fundamental change to our food systems and economic models will affect everyone, and some of us will not come out on top when we do it. However, many will be better, and many will have more opportunities. And even if that would not be the case, we have to be aware this transition is unavoidable if we want to protect our ecosystems, if we want to fight against changing climate in an efficient way or if we want to breathe cleaner air.

According to the **Business and Sustainable Development Commission**, led by 37 individuals from business, universities, labour and all corners of society, the prize of implementing SDGs is worth at least 12 trillion dollars if we just seize the top 60 market opportunities. Many of these upsides come from reforming our food systems.²

The same report also states that achieving the global goals will create 380 million new jobs – an opportunity also to help curing Europe’s unemployment and boost incomes all over the world.

I am therefore not asking you to give up your lifestyle, sell your car, and live in a tent in the woods. On the contrary - enormous opportunities do exist if we just reorganise ourselves, connect better, design products in a different way, change existing production and business models, remove externalities, adjust price signals ... and I could continue.

However, we must pull our heads out of the sand and see our future as it stands now, and as it could be if we just stop sleepwalking.

² [Business and Sustainable Development Commission. *Better Business, Better World*. January 2017.](#)

Ladies and gentlemen,

The FFA is a forum for leaders. When I look at you, I see a critical mass of stakeholders from all the areas of private and public life capable of moving the mountains – of completely transforming our food systems. When it comes to the SDGs, climate change and the big challenges of the 21st century, I believe that everyone here can, and should, lead.

Today, we will focus on healthy farming, healthy food and a healthy future – a good slogan for what we want, and what our children deserve. We will look at treatments, cures and new ways of living that will help us achieve these goals, from the global political stage to the individual farm.

Our **keynote speakers and discussants** have come from around the world to share their knowledge and ideas with you. They will take you from the fight for sustainable development and global politics to an organic farm in Sweden and a place where chefs feed both the body and the soul of those who are food insecure.

We will discuss how we can manage not just individual plots of land and farms, but how we can link those in broader ecosystems. How technology can help pave the way towards sustainability, and what changes we must make to Europe's agricultural policies.

Yes, we are in a moment of profound crisis that seems overwhelming, but if we are brave, if we are willing to embrace deep change, then, no doubt, there is also enormous opportunity.

If we are to achieve these, we must reach out far beyond ourselves and our national borders. By empowering those in developing countries, especially millions of women and girls, we will empower ourselves. It therefore gives me great pleasure to invite **Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan** to the stage for a special address.

Ladies and gentlemen,

... Enjoy the day!