



Hans Alders
Conference Chairperson
Opening Address
FAO/Netherlands Conference on the Multifunctional Conference on
Agriculture and Land

Mr. Minister,

Your Excellencies,

Friends and Colleagues,

You have already elected me as your chairman.

Thank you for all the confidence you put in me yesterday.

Yet I have the impression that a number of delegates does not really know me.

So, let me introduce myself to you.

I was minister of Environmental Affairs from september 1989 till august 1994.

In that capacity I was vice-chairman of the Rio de Janeiro-conference of June 1992.

Thereafter I served UNEP as a regional director for Europe.

I had a special assignment within UNEP for trade and environment; economics and environment and international environmental law.

Since 1996 I am the Queen's Commissioner of the Province of Groningen.

In geographical terms – within the Netherlands - quite the opposite of the Province of Limburg.

However, we do not mind these regional differences in the Netherlands as you noticed during the excellent reception yesterday.

POSITIONING OF THE CONFERENCE

As you all know, the chapters 10 (management of land resources) and 14 (sustainable agriculture and rural development) are on the agenda of the 8th session of UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), next year.

Early last year the Netherlands ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries took the initiative to organise an international conference to prepare for this session of CSD.

Sustainable agriculture and land-use have a place on the international agenda as has food security.

It was however felt, that something had to be done to further the progress on these subjects.

In that sense a good tradition is continued.

I remember the Den Bosch conference of 1991, which had an important input in UNCED in 1992 and Agenda 21.

I also remember the Wageningen workshop on integrated land management in 1995, of which I had the honour to be chairman.

The results of the workshop were discussed during CSD-3 in 1995.

The new initiative offers the opportunity to link the results of the World Food Summit to the CSD-process.

Another tradition is also continued.

As was the case in Den Bosch and Wageningen, the Netherlands sought and found close cooperation with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization.

FAO is as you all know task manager for these chapters of Agenda 21 and has to contribute to the report of the Secretary General to CSD.

Moreover, FAO has an important role in the process of implementing the results of the World Food Summit.

So, a new intersessional event was born.

At this stage I want to stress the importance of intersessional events like this one.

They are meant to explore and deepen the understanding and knowledge of certain issues, in this case sustainable agriculture and land-use.

If we succeed in making the event successful, it can make the decision-making process in international fora like CSD, FAO, WTO and others probably easier.

Intersessional events have the important task to facilitate the process further on, in this case in CSD-8 and other international fora.

It is an important tool.

We should use that tool with wisdom.

With the agreement on Agenda 21 during UNCED in June 1992 and the World Food Summit Plan of Action in 1996 the goals and targets for sustainable agriculture and land-use and food security have been set.

The main challenge of this conference is to identify concrete policy options and practical methods in order to make progress in reaching the goals and targets mentioned.

We have to translate these goals and targets in concrete actions.

As your chairman for this week I will vigorously look for as concrete and practical ideas and solutions as possible.

That is the way to further progress towards sustainable agriculture and land-use and enhance food security.

This conference can contribute to the process of CSD-8 and other international fora.

Let us remember that political decisionmaking on the two Agenda 21 chapters is at stake during CSD-8 in April-May 2000.

In my view the conference and the CSD-8-session are the starting-point of an ongoing dialogue in different international fora and on a national level, where the results have to be implemented.

PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE

Agricultural producers all over the world use land to produce food crops, fibres and forest products.

At the same time there is a strong relationship with the social, economic, biological and physical conditions of their production units, communities and countries.

Although this relationship has not always been positive, there are important developments in the right direction.

We have to strengthen those developments.

International understanding of the related issues of sustainable agriculture, rural development, integrated land resource management and food security has grown after UNCED and the World Food Summit put these issues high on the international agenda.

From my experience as a Netherlands minister of Environmental Affairs I know that the traditional view on sustainable agriculture is that this is a means of producing food and generating income whilst minimising negative environmental impacts.

This view has been increasingly replaced by a more complex and positive vision.

This recognises the substantive contributions that agriculture can make towards goals of sustainable development in general.

Reference to the multifunctional character of agriculture and land therefore recognises that in addition to the economic aspects, agricultural activity has the potential to jointly produce a range of social, economical, environmental and cultural benefits.

Goods as well as services, that can contribute directly to food security, rural development and enhanced environmental sustainability.

The challenge of this conference is to identify ways of maximising these positive effects.

Not by formulating new goals and targets, but mainly by focussing on the implementation of the already agreed goals and targets.

In that light, the overall objective of this FAO/Netherlands conference is to identify both new policy options and practical methods and the necessary enabling environments that will lead to increased sustainable agricultural and rural development.

Particular emphasis will be placed on raising awareness, at all levels, of the multiple contributions that can be made by agriculture and related land-use in enhancing sustainability and food security.

The two principal tasks of the conference are:

1. Reviewing progress towards the principles contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21: Programme of action for sustainable development;
2. Identifying the main issues to be addressed in the future, taking into consideration the continually evolving nature of agriculture.

The Stock-taking Paper and the Multifunctional Case Database provide us with many lessons already learned.

They show amongst others that the awareness of the multiple functions of agriculture can be very useful in analysing all the functions of agriculture and related land-use in order to get a better understanding of the contributions of all these functions in reaching sustainable agriculture and land-use.

The concept of the multifunctional character of agriculture and land, as described in the Issues Paper, can answer the question of how these multiple functions can contribute to the implementation of the already mentioned goals and targets.

DISCUSSION ON THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL CHARACTER OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND

The use of the phrase the multifunctional character of agriculture and land in the subtitle of the conference has given rise to misunderstandings on the character of this conference.

Let me be very straight on this issue.

There is a difference between the word multifunctionality and the multifunctional character of agriculture and land.

The multifunctional character of agriculture and land is agreed language from the World Food Summit (commitment 3) and is concerned with the substance of agriculture and related land-use.

Multifunctionality has been tied to the issue of "non-trade-concerns", as referred to in the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture and covers more specifically the effects on trade.

The trade-related discussion on multifunctionality belongs to the mandate of the WTO, which in a few months starts its new round of negotiations on worldwide trade liberalisation.

This conference will stay within the mandate of FAO.

We will discuss the agricultural aspects of the multifunctional character of agriculture and related land-use.

A better understanding worldwide of the multifunctional character of agriculture and related land-use can contribute to the process of rural development and to reaching the goal of food security for all.

Related issues come forward.

They are not a task of this conference.

The conclusion of this conference may be that there are other fora that are more appropriate and more prepared to take the discussion on these issues aboard.

Programme of the conference

The Netherlands and FAO have tried to develop a conference programme that fits in with the purposes of our meeting as set out earlier.

In the first place by learning from practical experiences and discussing the lessons learned from the interesting casestudies.

In my view, this is a promising way of reaching concrete and practical solutions.

In the second place by making the process of reaching a final outcome a process of all participants, not only gathered here but also delivering input via the Internet.

It clearly has the character of an intersessional event, clarifying, broadening and deepening the discussion on sustainable agriculture and land-use.

We will be doing the necessary groundwork for CSD-8 and other international fora like FAO, CSD, WTO and other fora.

That will be a difficult task.

If we use the tool of the intersessional event well, we will succeed.

Well, firstly on Monday we will introduce the papers of the conference.

Secondly on the Monday-morningsession we will take a few minutes to answer questions aimed at clarifying the papers presented.

Immediately thereafter we want to start the general discussion on the main issues.

During the break from 11.00-11.30 hours delegates who want to participate in this discussion will have to register on the platform with the conference secretariat, so a speaker's list can be drawn up.

On Tuesday we are mainly discussing in regional groups.

There we will discuss the concept of the multifunctional character of agriculture and land in general and more specifically in relation to presented case-studies.

There will be five regional groups.

This concept was chosen to give people who have the same language the possibility to talk to each other and to share similar experiences in the region which are familiar to all participants during the specific session.

However, this concept does not mean that each delegation has to go in full to the specific regional meeting.

The meetings of other regional groups are also opened to delegates from other regions.

I have to remind you of the possible language problem.

Regarding the possible outcome your chairman is prepared to listen to every delegation.

Heard these discussions I will present as chairman on Tuesday afternoon some structure and elements of possible conclusions of the discussion.

You can discuss these elements during our Informal Field Day on Wednesday.

On Thursday I will present to you elements of the final outcome that reflect the discussions we had during our conference up till then.

We will discussing those elements during the Thursday night.

It is my aim to agree - on Thursday night - to chairman's conclusions based on the discussions we had.

So the process will be transparent and participatory.

The discussion on Thursday night may take the form of "informal informal" without translation.

To be honest to you: I want to present to you an outcome of the conference on Friday morning in which the conference can recognize itself.

That is my programme until Friday, September 17th 1999.

Thank you.

