NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

press release

ENERGY-SMART" FOOD SYSTEMS NEEDED TO ADDRESS ENERGY AND FOOD SECURITY IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY

PRESS RELEASE:

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization

Rome/Abu Dhabi - FAO discuss how the food sector can tackle energy challenges to safeguard an energy and food-secure future in the context of climate change during a Roundtable discussion during the World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi, 18 January 2012.

The agrifood chain - Part of the problem…

"There is justifiable concern that the current dependence of the food sector on fossil fuels may limit the sector's ability to meet global food demands. The challenge is to decouple food prices from fluctuating and rising fossil fuel prices," says the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). High and fluctuating prices of fossil fuels and doubts regarding their future availability mean that agri-food systems need to shift to an "energy-smart" model, according to a recent FAO report. The food sector (including input manufacturing, production, processing, transportation marketing and consumption) uses approximately 30 percent of global energy consumption, loses a lot of energy due to massive food losses (30 percent globally), and produces over 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. For these reasons, climate, energy and food security are closely interrelated.

And part of the solution...

The food and agriculture sector is unique because it both consumes energy and can produce it in a sustainable way. Therefore the sector must be a key part of efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve food and energy security. If this is done in the correct way, it will also be possible to reduce poverty levels in rural areas in a sustainable way.

FAO contends that an energy-smart approach is crucial to achieving climate, energy and food security . It would take better advantage of this dual relationship between energy and food, through higher energy efficiency, including reducing energy losses related to food wastage, increased use of renewable energy, and improved access to modern and sustainable forms of energy along the agri-food chain. Energy-smart agri- food systems are also 'climate-smart', with climate security as a co-benefit of energy and food security. Efforts to achieve food and energy security in a smart way will be low carbon. They can also help adapt to climate change through increased reliance on local energy sources and income diversification. Therefore climate benefits will accrue through the achievement of energy and food security.

A long row to hoe

Given the complexity and challenges involved, transitioning to an energy-smart food sector will be a "huge undertaking" that will require long-term efforts and thinking, and needs to start now, FAO says. But given the importance of energy in achieving food security and sustainable development, we have to start working on this together now.

"The key question at hand is not, 'If or when we should begin the transition to energy-smart food systems?' but rather 'how can we get started and make gradual but steady progress?" says FAO Assistant Director-General for Environment and Natural Resources, Alexander Mueller.
A multi-partner programme, to be launched in 2012 is proposed to that effect. It will aim to help countries promote 'Energy-Smart Food for People and Climate'. FAO is organising a roundtable discussion on "Energy-Smart Food for People and Climate" during the World Future Energy Summit in Abu-Dhabi.

WORLD FUTURE ENERGY SUMMIT
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