



13 March 2013

“Food for All”
Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR)
95th Anniversary Symposium

Mr Martin Kropff, Rector Magnificus, Wageningen University,

Mr Mayor,

Ambassador Gerda Verburg, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to FAO,

Fellow professors, students and distinguished guests,

Having lived for more than 30 years in the academic world, I am always happy to return to it. Since there is a lot I want to share with you and I do not want to forget anything, I will be reading my speech.

I am especially honored to have been invited to speak at the 95th anniversary of Wageningen University.

And sign a new Memorandum of Understanding between our two Organizations.

In the fight against hunger and malnutrition, partnerships are absolutely essential.

No single government, international agency or university can do it alone. Each one of us has a different contribution to give.

I am convinced of this. That’s why since I took up office in January 2012 strengthening existing partnerships and building new ones have been a top priority.



Netherlands is supporting our effort to approve in FAO's governing bodies strategies for partnerships with civil society and with the private sector. A proposal for a partnership with academia will follow soon.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Wageningen University and Research Centre have made important contributions in the fields of food, nutrition and agriculture during its 95 years of existence.

It has also supported both the development of industrial agriculture and small-scale production. This is very important, as I believe there is room for both agricultural models in the world today. In fact, I believe we need both of them: big and small scale farmers.

WUR itself developed the styles of farming approach that recognizes that different agricultures can and do co-exist in the rural areas of many countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Just last week I was on mission in Uganda and Malawi, two countries where the importance of family farming is visible. Over 80 percent of the population in these two countries depends on agriculture.

In this context, the importance of family farming is twofold: not only is it the main producer of the food consumed nationally, but it is also the main source of occupation.

Note that I am not talking about employment, but self-occupation as many of them are subsistence farmers.

The importance of family farming not only as a producer of food but also as a provider of occupations will surely be further discussed during the International Year of Family Farming that will be celebrated in 2014.

Ladies and gentlemen,

FAO's mission to contribute to ending hunger in the world is as valid today as it was in 1945 when it was created.

But, the challenges are different today.

Let me mention the most obvious example: 70 years ago the world devastated by World War Two did not produce enough food for all. Increasing output was the natural way to feed the world.



In the past decades, we have succeeded in increasing per capita food availability by over 40 percent and already produce enough food for all. But nearly 870 million people are still undernourished.

So the issue is not only production. It's also access.

Food is not always available where it is needed the most. This is especially shocking since over 70 percent of the food insecure population live in rural areas of developing countries.

So we need more food, but we need more food to be produced where it is needed the most. And, wherever it is produced, we need food that is produced sustainably.

That is why, since joining FAO as its Director-General a little over a year ago, I have been leading a fundamental transformation of the Organization.

As a part of this, I started a Strategic Thinking Process to determine the future direction and priorities for FAO.

The 5 strategic objectives that we will concentrate our work on are:

First, ending hunger

Second, producing sustainably

Third, reducing rural poverty

Fourth, improving food systems and their fairness

And, fifth, increasing resilience to external shocks.

We also have a sixth objective aimed at guaranteeing the quality of our technical work and services.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I also want to take this opportunity to speak about some issues that are of particular relevance for ensuring a sustainable and hunger-free world.

I want to start with nutrition. Today, while nearly 870 million people suffer from hunger, about 1.7 billion are overweight.

And we are not being able to cope with it as well as we could.

Consumer awareness programs and food and nutrition education programs can help. But it is not only about consumers.



What food is produced and how is it marketed has an important impact on nutrition. And these are decisions that lie, mainly, with the private sector.

There are already many voluntary agreements in place to reduce fat, fatty acids in food, but we need to take that one step further.

We need integrated nutrition strategies, formed with the inputs of society as a whole – the private sector, consumer organizations and others.

The International Conference of Nutrition that will be co-organized by FAO and the World Health Organization in 2014 will offer us a golden opportunity to advance on this issue.

This nutrition approach is also an opportunity to recover traditional crops, which have lost space in modern diets. Every region has a variety of non commodity crops that were used in the past as food. One example is the quinoa, which is being celebrated in 2013 in an International Year.

I also want to address the role of science and technology as a main source of agricultural productivity and production increases, progressively driven by the private sector.

Most of the increases in global agricultural production and productivity have been based on yield increases.

However, increases in average yields have dropped in recent years. Furthermore, trends in yields are very variable both regionally and between crops. This shows the uneven impact of modern varieties and associated technological innovations.

I think adaptation is a key word for us. We cannot simply move technology from one place to another and expect it to work perfectly.

Agriculture is too sensitive and location specific. Soil, climate, water availability and so many other factors influence how one technology will work elsewhere.

So adaptation is essential and so is science-based agriculture. In our changing climate with increased competition for natural resources, drought resistant varieties are one obvious need.

Sustainability is another key word. Why are farmers important for this? Because they are among the main managers of our natural resources: around two billion people live on about 500 million farms around the world, most of them very poor subsistence producers.



We need to give these farmers the means to produce sustainably. We need to help them shift to production models that can maintain high productive rates and at the same time preserve the environment, and conserve biodiversity.

In other words, sustainable crop intensification. At FAO, we call this approach save and grow. Conservation agriculture is an example; smart climate agriculture is another.

But what is the use of producing more if we keep losing or wasting so much food? The numbers are impressive: about one-third of the food produced every year is lost or wasted.

In the industrialized world around 220 million tons, roughly the entire net food production in Sub-Saharan Africa, ends up in the trash.

Changing what we eat, how we eat and how much we eat is essential for sustainability.

If we look at food loss, most of it occurs in developing countries. We need better infrastructures to change this. They include community grain banks, such as the one that I inaugurated last week in Malawi.

Reducing post harvest losses, increasing smallholder production, adopting environmentally friendlier technologies... all of these require additional investments in agriculture.

As you know, over the past decades investment in agriculture has been falling. Between 1980 and 2010 international assistance focusing on agriculture fell from around 20 percent of total aid to 3 percent. Currently it stands at approximately 5 percent.

And investments also need to be responsible, contributing to the food security of the countries where they take place and, especially, the families who live in the rural areas that will receive investments.

It's important to agree on ways to ensure that this happens.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I also want to talk about the rural world. Agriculture is one important part of rural life, but it is still only one part. Poor rural families know this well and we are seeing more and more how, whenever they can, they diversify their work and forms of income generation.

One challenge is to integrate agricultural development into broader rural development, so that development is sustainable and can lift rural people out of food insecurity and extreme poverty.

Agriculture alone cannot do it. Poor rural families often need additional support through social protection, including cash transfers and food for work programs.



And whenever we can, we should link productive and social policies. This causes many win-win situations.

For example, money injected directly into rural communities can help boost local economies by creating demand. If smallholders can increase their production to meet the additional food demand, we are:

Creating new markets for smallholders
Helping the local economy to move

Increasing the availability of fresh food, which is healthier and has lower transportation costs. Small-scale production can also be used to provide food for social programs such as school meals, a program that has been tremendously successful in many Latin American countries, for example.

One final word on rural life. In recent decades, rural areas have become older and, in many cases, such as in several African countries, predominantly female.

This brings us two challenges.

First, empowering women in all aspects of rural life and food security. This means providing women with the rights, policies, tools and resources they need for their unrelenting role.

Second, the need to offer rural populations, especially the rural youth, opportunities to stay in rural areas.

Among other factors, migration to cities can be explained by the lack of decent jobs in rural areas and the appeal of the city lights. This movement is unsustainable because of the pressure it puts on cities.

There is a lot more to be said here, but this would be the subject of a whole new conversation that perhaps we can have some other time.

Mr Kropff, it's been a real pleasure and honor to be here with you. I look forward to increased cooperation between our institutions.

I want to thank all of you for your attention.