

Statement delivered by
His Excellency Christian Hofer
State Secretary of the Swiss Confederation
on the occasion of the
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15 June 2021

Madame La Présidente,

Director-General,

Distinguished Ministers,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here with you today and to address the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference.

I was born in 1972 in Switzerland where I grew up as a farm boy and learned from an early age how important it is to care for nature in order to be able to produce food successfully and sustainably. Access to safe and sufficient food has never been an issue for my family.

Looking back over this time span, the sector achieved major improvements in agricultural productivity and innovation to satisfy the changing food demand of a growing global population.

The question for me is: will we continue to be able to satisfy this demand during my lifetime?

And even more importantly, can we do it in a way so that we can keep producing enough food for my children, grandchildren and their children, while guaranteeing the access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to everybody and preserving our indispensable production base at the same time?

The answer is a threefold “no”:

No, not if we do not transform our food systems. The current rhythm of incremental change is not enough.

No, not if we keep producing the way we do today;

No, not if we continue to consume and waste food like we do today.

Madame La Présidente,

Over the past years, the international community progressively reached the understanding that the way food is produced and consumed is not sustainable;

Today, 815 million people are hungry, and every third person is malnourished. The most recent estimates indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic will further increase this number. At the same time, more than a third of the food produced is either lost or wasted.

This reflects a global food system out of balance.

Food and agriculture stand at a crossroads. We need to change and we need to do it quickly.

That is why Switzerland welcomes the theme of today’s general debate "Transformation of food systems: from strategy to action", as well as the focus of the new FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031 and the selected biennial theme 2022-2023: we understand it as a determination to change fundamentally the way our

food is produced and consumed today, and to accelerate the transformation towards more sustainable, resilient and healthy food systems.

The theme also relates to the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit 2021 that calls on political commitment to place the transformation of food systems at the centre stage of our future actions, both at global and national level.

In my country, the political debate on the challenges and future of food production is currently very intense. Last Sunday, citizens voted on two referendums in relation to banning synthetic pesticides in agriculture. Further referenda on biodiversity and landscape protection and on the ban of large-scale livestock farming will be submitted to the Swiss citizens for decision through voting in the coming months.

Switzerland sees three critical aspects to support the transformation to more sustainable agricultural and food systems:

Firstly, involving all relevant stakeholders: Governments, the private sector, research, civil society farmers, and consumer organisations. This implies, as SDG17 notes, the promotion of inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives at all levels (National, Regional and Global). These partnerships need to build on a common vision and shared objectives, addressing both strategic decision-makers and operative actors on the ground;

Secondly, promoting all innovations especially co-creation of knowledge, farmer-to-farmer innovations and prioritising systemic approaches such as agroecology and;

Thirdly, putting young women and men at the centre of actions as key agents of change in the transformation towards sustainable food systems.

Madame La Présidente,

FAO's role is central in this regard.

Switzerland calls on FAO to fully play its key role in promoting this transformational change:

1. by promoting networks with all stakeholders, strengthening its science and evidence-based work, and living the spirit of the UN Development Reform;
2. by supporting the development of methodologies and indicators to measure the sustainability performance of all agriculture and food systems;
3. by supporting members in addressing challenges of sustainability, and by strengthening knowledge and understanding about practical, innovative and dynamic solutions along local, regional and transboundary value chains.
4. Finally, by ensuring that issues that are among the greatest challenges facing humanity, such as climate change, biodiversity and soil loss, are central in the implementation of FAO's new strategic framework.

Once again, Madame Chair, Switzerland stands ready to continue working with FAO and its members to make the transformation of the current situation into more sustainable food systems a reality.

Thank you for your attention.