

**Statement delivered by  
His Excellency István Nagy, Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment  
of Hungary  
on the occasion of the  
43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)  
3 July 2023**

Dear Director General,

Ministers and distinguished colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to represent my country at the 43rd session of the FAO conference. The relevance of the conference is shown by the fact, that its topic is water, like the central element also of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The role of water as a resource of strategic importance has been significantly upgraded from a social, environmental and economic point of view, the protection and utilization of water resources has become one of the key factors of sustainable development.

We are well aware that the global climate change presents the farmers with challenges, as agricultural production is an increasingly risky activity due to the uneven distribution of precipitation.

Thanks to its fortunate environments and its location, Hungary is rich in high-quality water sources, so we regard clean water as a national treasure. Despite this, Hungarian agriculture also suffered last summer due to the drought, as the result, the most important task of water management is to keep the water in the landscape, in the backwaters of the rivers.

In order to maintain water security and safe food production, our goal is the sustainable development of agriculture, which anticipates and keeps up with the expected effects of increasingly extreme weather conditions. We can achieve this primarily through the development of irrigation management, so that the start of investments in this direction is always preceded by comprehensive analyses and complex decision-making work.

Hungarian regulations favour irrigation from surface waters, thus reducing excessive use of underground water sources. We have created the legal foundations for farmers to organize themselves into groups, that is, the establishment of irrigation communities. Until the beginning of July 2023, I have approved more than 200 irrigation communities that practice irrigation farming on an area of more than 80,000 hectares.

Sustainable irrigation management, thus primarily effective water retention solutions, typically require high-cost investments. The importance of irrigation communities therefore primarily lies in the fact that the necessary developments can be implemented in a more cost-effective way.

In order to reduce the financial burden of irrigation communities, the Hungarian Government also helps farmers organize into irrigation communities with non-refundable subsidies that can be used to support investments.

In addition, for the sake of sustainable agricultural water management, we also consider it important to improve the water retention capacity of soils and ecosystems, which we want to achieve primarily by encouraging different land uses as well as encouraging the alteration of land into mosaic-like surfaces and the use of water conserving agro techniques.

In addition, we have developed a new investment and maintenance support program for the creation of new areas where it is not worthwhile to continue arable production and where wetlands and small-scale water facilities for regional water retention can be created.

In addition to surface water, the possibility of using purified wastewater and grey water for irrigation has also appeared as a new element, for which various studies and pilot projects are currently underway in Hungary.

The appropriate agricultural practices of farmers are essential for sustainable agricultural water management: the use of natural water retention methods, e.g. infiltration within the field, protection against erosion and territorial water retention, and in general the adaptation of that mosaic method in cultivation are all extremely important.

In the field of increasing the efficiency of agricultural water use, the role of research development and innovation is of fundamental importance. The precision technology, which has been adopted, enables less and targeted water use, as it adapts the irrigation to the real needs of plants. In this way, safer and more predictable agricultural production is a possibility.

In Hungary, we launched the “National Laboratory of Water Science and Water Safety” in 2022, which is a complex large-scale project extending until 2026, with the participation of 11 domestic institutions.

A total of around five hundred researchers, PhD students and support staff are involved in carrying out the tasks. The National Laboratory carries out research activities taking into consideration Hungary's location, water management and water resources. The work takes place along six main pillars, affecting the issues of rivers, lakes, groundwater, rainwater, urban management and watershed management.

Dear Colleagues, I would like to thank you, ever so much for your kind attention.

Thank you.