Media Release

Rio+20 seen as an important step in the right direction for sustainable agriculture

The declaration of the Rio+20 conference due to be endorsed by Heads of State and Governments over the next two days marks an important step in developing a sustainable agriculture that can feed the world without destroying the planet.

This was the consensus among major players in the global food chain who sat down together for a sustainable dinner to discuss agriculture and food systems at a side-event to the UN conference on sustainable development. At the invitation of Swiss Federal President Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, the guests were not only treated to locally grown delicatessen prepared by American celebrity chef Domenica Catelli, but also to insights as to why global agricultural policy needs to be transformed.

Hans R. Herren, President of the event’s organisers Biovision Foundation of Switzerland and the Millennium Institute in Washington, said the summit’s outcome could be a milestone for a change to environmentally friendly, socially sound and economically viable food systems, and initiating a shift towards sustainable agricultural production methods.

For Mike Appleby, Chief Scientific Adviser of the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), a transformation of how the world feeds itself would also benefit livestock across the globe: “We want to ensure farm animal welfare is a core part of national and global policies for, and solutions to, food security, food safety and sustainable development”. Under the current policies, the global demand for meat, eggs and milk is due to double from 2000 to 2050 and would have a major impact on land and energy use globally, Appleby added.

Manuel Bessler, Deputy Director of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, said the declaration confirmed that food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture were among the key areas to achieve the objectives of the conference. “Sustainable agriculture is an important building block for the future sustainability agenda. It is recognised as a central element of the Green Economy and will be an element of future sustainable development goals,” he said on behalf of Widmer-Schlumpf, who had to cancel her trip to Rio on Monday.

The world is facing an unprecedented challenge of providing sufficient high quality food to nourish a global population that will peak at more than 9 billion by 2050. This is exacerbated by several factors, including climate change, resource depletion, loss of biological diversity, growing food insecurity, nutrition deficiency, marginalization of smallholder farmers, the diminishing area of agricultural land, desertification, land degradation and drought. Overwhelming evidence demonstrates that the majority of current agricultural and food systems are not sustainable, since they are over reliant on non-renewable external inputs, produce high levels of greenhouse gas emissions, and have negative impacts on soils and biodiversity, farm animal welfare, nutrition and public health, cause high levels of waste, and exhibit a low level of resilience against external shocks.

(You can find pictures of the event on www.biovision.ch/taste_of_change )

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