

## **13<sup>th</sup> Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) How to Feed the World in Times of Pandemics and Climate Change?**

### **Statement of the Young Farmers Forum, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

In recent times, we have not been spared of global crises. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the pre-existing challenges of climate change have severely disrupted the agricultural sector. Farmers are now faced with increased pressures to guarantee a resilient food system. As young farmers and future leaders in agriculture, we want to send out a message on how we tackle the challenges both pandemics and climate change bring.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as any pandemic, came unexpected. Unfortunately, it did not leave the farming & food sector unharmed. Prices of food plunged or became unstable, trade stopped, access to labour became uncertain and all of a sudden, availability of foodstuffs on markets could not be taken for granted anymore. Indeed, it is unequivocal that acknowledging the significance of a robust food security system has never been as high. In many countries, it was self-evident that a wide array of healthy, safe and high-quality foods was available. Eventually, Covid-19 has compelled the world to be mindful of the importance of championing local food producers and the risks that are inherent in current food distribution systems.

Unlike the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis is not an unforeseen calamity. For years already, the majority of scientists have been warning the world for the impacts of climate change. Yet, the world leaders have not been as active to counteract this global threat. We, as young farmers of the world, will be the first to be affected by climate change, due to difficult farming conditions.

Nevertheless, we do not want to be seen solely as a victim of climate change. We do believe that farming even more is a solution to counteract climate change. Now already, farmers across the globe are taking measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Land is our first tool and we take care and are worried about it. Often, the land has been improved within the family farm for years and shall be for the years to come. This means that farmers have already found answers to overcome the challenge of climate change. Next to that, there is a vast untapped potential within farming to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and adapt to climate change. Young farmers are willing to take up their responsibilities; however, young farmers cannot do this alone. Since farmers stand at the heart of sustainable food systems, they have to strike a balance among many factors. As such, they need the assistance of consumers and thus, wider society. As consumers and producers are interlinked, it is essential that the fight to mitigate, adapt and encourage resilience at all levels in the food sector is seen as a joined effort.

In light of the above, we, as young farmers, see three overarching themes. These themes have both been affected by global crises as well as are key to feeding the world in times of the double burdens of the pandemic and climate change.

The three focal issues are defined as follows:

### **A. Food security**

Both pandemics and climate change increase the risk of food insecurity throughout the world. As farmers, we see it as our responsibility to feed the world. Yet, this is increasingly difficult in times of crisis. It is in these times we see it as essential that, together with citizens and governments, we can ensure food security for all and always.

### **B. Resilience of farmers**

Apart from food security, especially in times of crisis, fostering the resilience of farmers is important. After all, price volatility, unstable markets, high weather risks and uncertain future are synonymous to a great burden for farming. The lack of long and short time security impedes farmers from developing and future-proofing their farms. Although these risks can never be fully mitigated, increasing the resilience of farmers and the farming sector is essential to make the food & farming sector more crisis robust.

### **C. Awareness of farmers & farming**

It is in times of crises, one knows its friends. When the availability of food is not self-evident anymore, the producers of our food are acknowledged. The awareness of farmers and their focus of producing food, energy and fibers for a growing world population in a sustainable way is fundamental to feed the world in times of crisis. It is only through this awareness, both in times of crisis and in times of prosperity, that farmers are able to make their farms more resilient and ensure food security. Overcoming the challenges that the pandemics & climate change bring us is not something farmers can do alone; it is something we need to do all together. Think globally, act locally.

## **Recommendations**

In view of curbing the impacts of pandemics and the climate crisis, we want to make some recommendations.

### **Investing in research and innovation**

- Enable investments in machinery, technology, equipment, knowledge to facilitate food security and income generation.
- Find and enable business models that make it possible for farmers to invest sustainably to a greater extent. Properly targeted measures provide both food security, but also greater financial security.

- Identify, select and design an offer that provides technical know-how, manage the planting of food while guaranteeing the abundance of foods with export potential and utilizing smallholder pieces of land to provide quick sources of nourishment for local citizens.
- Promote research on plant and animal breeding. These are tools that can make agriculture more efficient and resilient.
- Promote the bioeconomy, in order to achieve optimal territorial and federal development in each region and in each community, achieving the diversification of our energy matrix through renewable energies (biomass, solar, wind, etc.) and the production of biomaterials through a biological basis.
- Promote the use of agricultural waste for energy generation, composting, biofertilization.
- Promote sustainable production systems, as no-till systems, to counteract the effects produced by erosion, the incorporation of service crops to increase biological activity, the carbon stock of our soils and at the same time biodiversity.
- Promote rural connectivity in each territory, either through 4G or 5G internet as well as through investment in rural roads, in order to achieve a greater rootedness of young people in rural territories in the face of the great demographic growth in cities.
- Improve rural credit offers by creating mechanisms that reduce the risk perception of agribusiness credit and provide greater transparency.

## **Local Production & Consumption**

- Invest in strategic reserves that serve as a buffer for times of need, certainly in those countries at high risk of food insecurity.
- Strengthen local production chains to bolster farmers to feed their region. This way, farmers are able to develop their farms in a sustainable way not dependent on a specific machine, tool or market.
- Increase the market access of smallholder farmers throughout the world to give them a profitable, secure and reliable income and all possible chances to develop their farm.
- Stabilize food prices for farmers so they are able to invest strategically in their farm and develop them to adapt to future crises including climate change.
- Place special emphasis on reducing the loss and waste of our food throughout our agri-food chain.
- Support national origin labeling of staple foods and main ingredients in processed food to strengthen local agriculture and reduce transport distances.
- Ensure young farmers have access to land for agricultural production and support them in gaining that access to farmlands. With this assistance, young farmers will be part of the solution to feeding the world in times of pandemic and climate change.
- Social safety nets are essential to protect smallholder farmers facing spiraling debt and bankruptcy.

- Covid-19 pandemic is bringing to light many more vulnerabilities and inequalities in the food system. As lockdown measures hamper farmers' ability to sell produce, even farmers whose crops have survived severe weather events, may still lose their livelihoods.

## **Government support**

- Establish and encourage support from governments to ensure food & nutritional security. While developed countries could establish this through their governments, developed countries should help developing nations by global cooperation to ensure food security.
- Governments and the global community need to join forces and step in as a last resort in times of crises to direct the funds needed to keep the society well fed and farmers afloat in times of crises.
- Mobilize financial aids to support the farming community. Policy and financial instruments should consist of incentives and investments for farmers to build on resilience against pandemics and climate change coupled with the restoration of the natural ecosystem. Farmers have to be engaged in the strategic decision-making exercises for investments that are directed to the sustainability of the farming sector.
- Advise governments on agriculture based import substitution strategy but also national agriculture export driven economic recovery plans and requiring formidable planning, coordination and resource allocation in agricultural value chains that can be easily nationally and internationally traded to earn the much needed foreign exchange.
- Coordinate engagement with resident development partners such as Farmer organizations, Development Banks, the World Bank, and other agencies in the development sector.
- Work with governments and create a sustainable support system to ensure the food and nutrition sector does not collapse.
- Provide funds and extension services for basic methods of cultivation or breeding to small-holder farmers to sustain production.

## **Education, Awareness & Inclusivity**

- Invest in education and awareness of the farming & food sector.
- Invest and incorporate environmental education content into the school curriculum.
- Provide training for young farmers from local and national entities, giving young agriculturalists more opportunities and connections with locals and help to increase their agricultural businesses.
- Appraise the instrumental roles of farmers' organizations and cooperatives in the Food System.
- Foster inclusiveness in the food value chain through the empowerment of young and women farmers in agriculture.