

Statement of Young Farmers at the 2022 virtual Global Forum for Food and Agriculture

*Farming is our passion – and our profession. Farming should be a business that allows making a living by improving the environment, rather than just exploiting it. We don't expect to receive "free money", but need an environment that is likely to form entrepreneurs. We call upon policy makers to provide a framework that will help to make sustainable farming – farming that takes care of economic, environmental and social aspects - a vital business model. We understand that we borrowed the land of the future generations and we endeavor to leave it in a better state than we received it. With this in mind, we would like to comment on different aspects of “**Sustainable Land Use: Food Security Starts with the Soil**”.*

1. How can we improve soil protection and restore degraded soils?

Food security starts with the soil. On average global croplands are bare for half of the year. Bare soil is more vulnerable to degradation due to erosion by water and wind. Degraded soils are deficient in nutrients, minerals, lack soil structure and biodiversity. Transforming conventional agricultural practices into more **sustainable practices** such as cover cropping, conservation agriculture, climate smart agriculture (CSA), integrated landscape approaches, agroecology, and other dynamic biosystems will protect soils and aid in restoring degraded soils over time. Increasing the **organic matter** in the soil is key to improving overall soil health.

To protect and restore already degraded soils, **education** is imperative. Every piece of land is different. So there is no one-size fits all solution. However, the knowledge about best agricultural practices that help to protect soils is there. Recommendations must be handled individually and be checked and evaluated against the situation of each farm to suggest the best agricultural practices. Farmers need to be educated as to which farming practices are suitable at restoring the soils in their particular area and climatic conditions. Also, guidance is needed as to which corrective mineral and organic fertilizers can be used to rectify fertility problems in their soils. Finally, assistance for rectifying drainage, as well as soil sampling would greatly benefit farmers.

Raising awareness of **consumers** on the way food is produced would make them more conscious of the food that they purchase. This would increase the demand for more sustainably grown food.

Degraded soils put food security in jeopardy in the near future. Therefore, the State must generate **public policies** that incentivize farmers to produce with soil protecting practices.

Incentives need to be implemented that reward farmers for adopting farming practices that improve soil health and productivity, slow erosion and increase water filtration. Incentives could be implemented by governments, private agencies and the marketplace. Public policies should differentiate between needs of different farm sizes and focus on farmers most in need. Lower tax rates, subsidies over credit interest rates or insurance might be a good incentive for big companies and family owned farms to apply soil protection practices.

In addition, farmers might also need a sustainable production system that considers multiple animal and plant species living together. Smallholder farmers, because they might not be profitable, may require much more support from the State. Agroecological approaches might be an excellent basis to develop a public policy focusing on this group of farmers. Special focus should be put on transition periods before investments in shifting to soil protecting practices will yield a return.

Finally, farms and ranches applying soil protection practices such as rotational grazing, no-till and others improve the capacity of the soil to capture carbon from the atmosphere, turning agriculture from a big greenhouse gas emission activity into an activity that actually helps to reduce carbon in the atmosphere. So **carbon markets** should be considered as another income for farmers and ranchers, or as another way of financing public policies focused on this issue.

2. How can we make the use of finite land resources more sustainable?

The resources of agricultural land globally are limited. In order to keep the land in good conditions, investments back into the land in terms of liming, drainage etc. are essential. Government incentives are needed to encourage these practices. Furthermore, a sustainable increase of farm productivity systems globally through **science and technology** with the goal of improving productivity is needed to feed a hungry planet. Some examples include precision agriculture, drone usage, satellite imagery, development of more efficient mineral fertilizers and equipment, genetic modification, etc. In addition to that more research into varieties of crops that can handle adverse growing conditions due to climate change needs to be promoted. Incentivize and support the use of science and technologies in food production, for example in the creation of models for land resource planning through farmer friendly software programs.

Governments should design **spatial planning instruments** allowing balancing different interests and preserving agricultural land needed to provide enough food.

3. How can farmers worldwide get fair access to land?

To make sure everyone has fair access to land it is crucial to have a **functioning property law**. Policies need to be put into place that secure people's rights to own land and policy makers need to guarantee legal certainty.

In this context, not only the ownership of land needs to be addressed but also the use of land. **Land use plans** should be set and available for farmers as it plays an important role in

future planning. In case that there is unproductive land registered, independent agencies need to be installed to work as a mediator between landowners and farmers.

Fair access to land does not only mean securing land rights for those who already own land and are pursuing a farming profession. Governments must **support family farmers and new farmers** with subsidies for buying land and equipment or machines. In many countries without financial support from governments, it is almost impossible to get a piece of land in order to start a farm. Policy-makers need to be aware of supporting new businesses as well as helping new farmers to start their farm. In this context, **gender equality** also needs to be addressed. Women need to have the same possibilities as men when it comes to owning land. If redistribution of land is considered, fair compensation in case of expropriation must be guaranteed.

Final thoughts

As a final thought, we think that it is important that we as farmers unite and connect to exchange good practices, and create an innovation network to increase sustainable solutions. It is also necessary to involve people from the cities to share these issues directly affecting food security, and build a more sustainable food system together.