

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, thank you for inviting me to speak here. Of course, I have a special interest in the theme of the seminar. At my Ministry in the Netherlands, I have even set up a dedicated programme for the future of food. I would therefore like to outline for you my own vision for a more sustainable food system in the future.

Let's just consider this for a moment. We need a more sustainable food system.

Indeed, it is crucial. After all, there is now an incredibly high global demand for food, and that will only increase. We will soon need twice as many plant products to meet our food needs. And if we continue with the food system as it is today, we will soon need three planets instead of one to produce all the necessary food.

The whole food system is also increasingly global in its inspiration and organisation.

We are all familiar with the list of causes:

- A rising world population – set to reach 9.5 billion by 2050 – means there are more mouths to feed.
- Increasing prosperity means that people are tending to eat more meat and dairy products.
- Rapid urban growth, particularly in developing countries, means a worldwide loss of biodiversity, less clean water and impoverished and less healthy soils.
- The cost of raw materials will rise in the next few decades as they become increasingly scarce. And now, with climate change, we can see quite clearly what that means for food security in places like Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia.
- Existing agricultural production is no longer adequate. Some regions are turning into deserts; others have to contend with floods, yet in these same regions, three quarters of the population is- engaged in agriculture in one way or another.

This is the massive challenge we have to face. This is the Gordian Knot that has to be unravelled. In my view there is only one way to deal with this, and that is to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into making the production and consumption chains more sustainable, and by investing in that process, both nationally and internationally.

A lot of investment is needed, and it is needed quickly, because the clock is ticking.

Currently a billion people in the world are hungry or undernourished. Currently the number of plant and animal species is declining rapidly, and the time is approaching when we will no longer be able to reverse the impact on the health and welfare of humans, plants and animals. Currently, for every person who goes hungry, there are two who are obese due to overeating. We have to turn this around. However, in doing so, we have to take account of consumer demand. As the last seminar indicated, we also have to consider 'what the world wants to eat' in 2025. And how can we influence this process. With technology?, as also discussed in the last seminar? In the Netherlands scientists have developed a meatball in which some of the animal protein has been replaced by plant-based protein. Protein obtained from lupines to be precise. Is this our future diet?

Who knows? It is very plain to me however, that the only way to secure our food supply is to increase production in line with global population growth. And it must be done the sustainable way, with agriculture at the centre. Because I firmly believe that agriculture is one of the most important instruments we have to meet the great global challenges head on.

Therefore it is my ambition to ensure that, by 2025, the Netherlands is among the top ten most sustainable producers and consumers. I am guided by two principles: that of people, planet and profit, and that of improving sustainability. But sustainability in itself cannot be the ultimate goal. So we aim for the next best thing: a step by step improvement in the sustainability of production, processing and consumption of food. I adopt 'the Dutch approach'. We bring people together from different areas of society – producers, consumers, scientists, NGOs – who work towards a solution by drawing on their particular strengths, such as specific knowledge or networks. And it works! For example, in agriculture we have had some success with public-private partnerships and social arrangements, such as round table discussions on soy and palm oil, which concern the entire chain, from start to finish. And the Netherlands also contributed to the round table discussions prior to this seminar.

In addition to this Dutch approach, I also have my own 'Verburg approach'.

- I have informed the livestock farming sector that I expect it to be sustainable in every way by 2023, and producing with respect for humans, animals and the environment.
- I have made agreements with the sector accordingly. The farmer ensures that his animal housing is modernised, so that mineral cycles can be closed in the future. For my part, and on behalf of the government, I ensure that the necessary housing systems are developed, and that knowledge about the new systems is shared.

I make similar agreements with other sectors too, on precision-agriculture and fisheries. I also try to give a helping hand to promising initiatives, such as underground storage of CO₂, the use of plant-based material for diesel or other fuels, and of course by stimulating the bio-based economy: an economy no longer based on petroleum, but on alternative raw materials like biomass.

I also collaborate with other ministries. For example, I worked with the Ministry for Development Cooperation to develop a vision for assistance in the further development of agriculture in developing countries. Because we need to invest in agriculture now to banish poverty in the near future. The Netherlands has a lot to contribute. After all, we are a major world player in agriculture and horticulture – not only in terms of volume, but also when it comes to innovation and intelligent solutions.

Wherever possible, we seek to combine such innovative solutions with local knowledge. And then to help them further with input from all the partners – businesses, scientists, development organisations and local government. This gives rural areas the chance to develop sustainably, with all the opportunities that brings, such as new public-private partnerships. In Ethiopia, for example, I have seen how good water-

management and simple agricultural solutions can generate four times the previous yield, yet still maintaining biodiversity and enriching soil life. As I said before: agriculture has to be part of the solution!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

So much for the production side – the supply. Therefore, the demand side is at least as important. After all, supply is driven by demand. The consumer is thus an essential element in the process: without concerned and conscientious consumers demanding sustainable food, all our plans would be doomed. So in pursuing my policy I try to entice consumers, for example, into buying food produced with respect for humans, animals and the environment. There are a number of ways to do this. One is to use health marking, so consumers know exactly what they are eating, and how sustainable that piece of meat, fish or bread is. Another way is to provide information. We engage in social dialogue, for example, about animal proteins, and provide nutritional guidelines. And we keenly promote research into meat replacements - I already mentioned the sustainable meatball -, which incidentally also contains less fat. Because I see that too as a great challenge. For every person that goes hungry, there are two who are obese, due to excessive or unhealthy eating. Ten per cent of annual mortalities from cardio-vascular disease, diabetes and cancer can currently be ascribed to an unhealthy diet. And the cost to Dutch society of obesity problems is around an extra 3.2 billion Euros a year.

These are alarming figures. And that is another reason for tackling this problem at the root. It is enormously important, particularly for children, to get off to a good start. There is another problem associated with overeating. Our surplus encourages people to buy more. We often buy more than we need. So we have developed a culture of waste. In the Netherlands we waste 3.6 billion Euros on food every year. In other words, one in every five shopping bags of food ends up being thrown away. And this is not just down to private household waste, there is also waste in the food industry. And that applies worldwide.

Although... I need to make sure I don't generalise here, and that I don't tar all the producers, processors and traders with the same brush. Because I actually see some very encouraging developments. For example, more and more businesses operate on socially responsible lines: concerned not only with balance sheets, but also with the impact of their activities on people and the environment. And they look not only to the Dow Jones Index, but also to the Dow Jones Sustainability Index.

The food industry in particular is already showing greater respect for humans, animals and the environment. Food businesses have not only adapted their operating procedures, they have also begun to cooperate more, both within the chain and with organisations in civil society. And here and there they have even assumed a directing role, which was previously clearly confined to government.

Take retail for example. As retailers are in almost daily contact with consumers they often know best what issues concern their customers. They know what people want to eat, when they want to eat it and what standards it has to meet.

Many retailers use this information to their advantage. They can see that sustainability is a growing issue among their customers, and that if they don't act on it they will miss the boat. For retailers, increasing sustainability is practically a license-to-exist, and the retailers will steer operations of the chain, with directions about the desired quantities and quality, and the level of sustainability of the product.

The retail chain is also working more and more with private sector labelling. Sustainability is increasingly associated with health marking. This is not a problem, provided it stays within the rules on competition. Of course the retail sector is also responding by concluding more contracts with producers. This secures guaranteed sales, counters waste and also ensures the continuing high quality of the food and the way it is produced.

I sincerely hope that this way of producing with respect for man, animals and environment will be taken up throughout the sector. Not only because I will otherwise have to resort to government measures, but also because this is the perfect way to wean the sector off its practically immoral promotion of cheap food, including meat! I therefore urge the retail sector to grasp the available opportunities with both hands. And I will be very interested to hear any ideas you may have about this.

The financial sector is also responding to new opportunities. It also understands that there is money to be made, and indeed money has been made, by improving sustainability - think of the campaigns to save on raw materials through efficiency measures, first mover advantages, and so on.

But the financial sector is also keenly aware that sustainability can improve its image. Like the retail sector, it appreciates that sustainability is an issue for its customers. It also sees that a growing number of businesses are no longer focusing purely on profit, but are also addressing issues such as human rights, good governance and responsible use of raw materials.

In its report on the third industrial revolution ING refers to these companies as multi-committed companies or MCCs. The striking thing about these MCCs is that they usually have a higher stock market value than comparable companies with a lower score for environmentally responsible enterprise. This must be music to the ears of financial sector players. And it must set them thinking. Because there are opportunities here for the financial sector. A chance to rebuild reputations - which were largely lost in the financial crisis - specifically by offering credit on advantageous terms to MCCs and similar concerns, or by easing investment conditions. And it gives the sector a chance to speak from the heart. Last January the world's biggest investors appealed to all

countries to speed up progress towards a low-carbon economy. I naturally join in that appeal - after all the financial sector is a powerful ally. It also operates worldwide, so the sustainability principle can spread at lightning speed to the furthest corners of the earth. And that is necessary because, as I said at the beginning, efforts to improve sustainability must not stop at national borders, but must spread throughout the world. I therefore fervently hope that the financial sector will follow the retail sector in shouldering its responsibility, by supporting MCCs and similar concerns, or by steering other companies in a more sustainable direction. But also by withdrawing funds from unsustainable financial projects and investments. And by reminding fellow financiers of what I consider their moral duty - particularly those kept afloat by billions in government support over the last few years.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I have outlined a number of challenges - massive challenges when it comes to the future of our food. Today you will be talking 'out of the box' on this subject. And specifically about the role of the retail and financial sectors.

I will be very interested in the results of your discussions. Because although I have only touched on the sectors here, I am convinced that both the retail and financial sectors can, or rather must, play a significant role in the future. Both sectors represent great power, they can provide direction and they operate worldwide. And we need that because these challenges go beyond national borders: they affect the entire world.

We have to address these challenges accordingly and with some urgency. That is why I called on a number of European countries to make a concerted effort to improve the sustainability of our food system. Directors of the food ministries of Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Germany and Spain and of our host country the UK, -- who, incidentally, is also prepared to organise the next meeting--, will come together for the first time next month to lay the foundation for what is going to be a European food construction.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we need to sort this out together. We must work together for development that – as the Brundtland Commission put it – 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. This is the only way to clear the way for a healthy planet, with a future for humans, plants and animals, and sufficient food for a very large number of people.

Thank you.