

## Keynote Dr Hans Hoogeveen

Delivered at the EurSafe2024 Conference,  
12 September 2024, Ede The Netherlands

### Introduction

Happy anniversary. Your role and discussions are more important than ever. In a world that is colored by climate change, global conflicts, energy and food crises, and post-Covid challenges, innovations and paradigm changes are needed to contribute to more sustainable food production and consumption. Next to technical challenges, sustainable innovations come with value assumptions, discussions on moral norms and the need for ethical decision making. Therefore, the ethics of agriculture, food, animals, and the environment is even more essential to study and discuss.

We must face the reality - the uncomfortable and immoral truth - that the world is completely off course in meeting global food security and the other Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

We also live in a time with political landslide in Europe.

- We live in a time of declining solidarity.  
Never has spending on development cooperation in the EU, including in the Netherlands, been so low. And furthermore, we bring the funds needed for peace operations also under that budget. You hear more and more the slogan “Europe first” or “Netherlands first”.
- We live in a time of increasing inequalities worldwide.  
It is evident that inequalities across food systems and related systems affect food security and nutritional outcomes. Concentration of power in food production, food trade, food transformation and distribution, as well as unequal distribution of agricultural assets and access to natural resources, tenure rights and finance are deepening inequalities among different actors in agriculture and food systems
- Never have we had so many conflicts and wars. Hundreds of millions more live in hunger. Hundreds of millions more are fleeing. Migration has never been higher. Rising food prices will lead to more conflicts and wars.
- In a recent conversation I had with Pope Francis, he emphasized that if we would spend the resources for weapons for wars and conflicts for this year for food security, we could solve the global food security problem.
- We live in a time of unprecedented and unlimited scientific opportunities and possibilities. Innovations are sprouting like mushrooms, especially in the EU. But what

about the access to those innovations and technologies, are they equally spread?

- We live in a time when the international political agenda is dominated by climate change. But we see the biggest crisis ever, the food crisis, unfolding. Let's realize that there is no successful climate change polity without food security, and there is no food security without coping with climate change.
- Multilateralism and the UN system are under criticism and are challenged every day. Let's not forget that the UN is the only global forum we are meeting to discuss the biggest challenges of our world, whether is it food security, is it climate change is it water management.

Most important principle is "one country one vote".

But major economic powers don't like this and are giving more and more emphasis to the G20 and G7 meetings. So are 20 countries going to dictate the world?

In about 2 weeks our head of States are in New York for the General Assembly of the UN discussing progress made on implementing Agenda 2030 with its Sustainable Development Goals, including achieving a world without hunger by 2030.

With 6 years to go we are lacking far behind, and we know we are not going to achieve the SDG's in 2030. Nevertheless, they are going to solemnly pledge that they will step up their efforts and promise to meet the SDG's in 2030. But, three months ago Ministers of the EU already agreed that to lower the target for achieving food losses from 50% to 30% in the EU. So, they already state that the EU will not achieve SDG 12.3. So, is UNGA now a fake show with fake commitments?

### **Let's face the uncomfortable and immoral truth about food security**

We hold a profound responsibility in shaping the future of our food systems within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We stand at the forefront of this transformative journey, recognizing the imperative to foster resilient, sustainable, and inclusive food systems that nourish our people and planet.

Anno August 2024, with only 6 years to go until the promised world without hunger in 2030, we are faced with chilling statistics.

How is it possible that anno 2024 we still have more than 800 million people live in hunger as a result of wars, conflicts, and climate change. World Bank research tells us that every 1% increase in prices leads to an additional 10 million people in hunger. So, if we do nothing, this number will grow to 1 billion within 2 years. A road to the biggest disaster ever.

A moral outcry. To me the biggest ethical dilemma!

It is mind-boggling to think that 27 years after the first World Food Summit, where we discussed how to support 800 million people, in 2024 we are still talking about 800 million in hunger. And we have more than 280 million people in acute famine in 59 countries. The recent FAO report "State of Food and Agriculture and Food Insecurity shows that the situation continues to worsen

How is it possible that still have 3 billion people without access to sufficient, affordable, and healthy food in 2024.

And we have 2 billion obese people worldwide.

At the same time, we are losing 1/3 of our food worth \$3 trillion annually. Think how we could invest with \$3 trillion. In Afrika they lose 70% of their harvests.

In 2050, we will have between 9 and 10 billion people on this planet. To feed them, we need to increase our agricultural production by between 40 and 50%. And in a sustainable way.

### **Let's zoom in and look at the challenges**

The food security situation for many people around the world is downright dramatic. Persistent droughts and floods, locust infestations and increasingly unpredictable weather are having disastrous effects on crops and livestock. Hundreds of millions of people's livelihoods are threatened, while their contribution to the climate crisis is minimal.

Having no money to arm themselves against extreme weather and crop failures, the resilience of many communities has been completely wiped out.

Food was thus already barely affordable for many people in many countries.

In practice, we see that people in these countries are faced with impossible choices.

Much of their income is spent on food. In the Netherlands for example, we spend about 13% of our income on food. In many developing countries it is more than 50%.

With rising food prices, first the portions become smaller, then the diet becomes more one-sided, nutritious food is no longer affordable.

Then children - especially girls - are withdrawn from school because school fees can no longer be afforded.

Women are also at additional risk of sexual violence because they have to walk further and further to fetch water or buy or sell food. We also hear harrowing stories of parents marrying off their daughters early, in order to feed one less mouth.

These are impossible dilemma's, what would you choose? The medium- or long-term future of global food systems can hardly be predicted. A complex set of interrelated activities, including primary production, processing, distribution, trade and consumption, all integrated into

socioeconomic and environmental systems, depends on the behavior of billions of people.

All we can predict is that we will face significant challenges. How and to what extent we decide to address them will determine the future of the food issue, as well as our future and that of future generations.

How to deal with the ethical dilemma and trade-offs. Different dimensions of sustainability do not always relate to each other in harmony, and sometimes even tense. It is not uncommon to find that solving one bottleneck leads to new bottlenecks: working on one dimension of sustainability can result in conflict with another.

Sustainability requires continuous care and attention for unintended consequences and for preventing contradictions and shifting of responsibility.

- The *first challenge* is that food and food production are *very unequally distributed* across countries and households. We currently produce enough food to feed people worldwide, but the distribution and production is dramatically uneven.
- The *second challenge* is climate change and the fact that our agricultural and food systems will become unsustainable if we continue as we are. Agriculture is already affected by climate change and by more and stronger extreme events such as drought, floods, extreme temperatures.
- The *third challenge* is that we need to *produce more with less*. But this is only achievable if we distribute it better and make sustainable solutions available to farmers. The United Nations predicts that it is very likely that farmers will have to feed an additional 2 billion people in less than 30 years.
- The *fourth challenge* is *migration*. Migration is peaking and there is foresight of declining. No wall or no financial pay-off agreement will stop them. We have to invest in economic development in these countries.
- The *fifth challenge* is *geopolitical interdependencies* between regions and food systems. Globalization, including trade, has further increased geopolitical interdependencies between food systems. Already mentioned the dependence on soy from Argentina or Brazil. Escalating geopolitical tensions could lead to volatile commodity prices, while further trade fragmentation risks additional disruptions to trade networks.
- The *sixth challenge* is the growing fragmentation in the world orders. There are diverging forces pulling apart the existing order. This disparity of powers leads to an unstable situation in which different superpowers turn to different instruments according to their strengths and weaknesses. Commodities, water and food are increasingly being used as weapons of war. Think about Gaza.

## Let's dive into dilemmas and trade-offs

The big question is: how? How are we going to make the change we so desperately need?

As said: we know our challenges, with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, we have set our goals and targets. We know the solutions, or at least we think we do, and we have the technologies and funding to do it.

Why is it not happening? But how do we do it concretely? Answering this question often leads to a deafening silence when it comes to implementation, even within FAO. There comes a time when silence is treason, said Martin Luther King. We must break this silence and turn our knowledge into action. The magnitude of these challenges calls for more radical actions at all levels. We must focus on implementing solutions.

This requires a change in mindset and a willingness to think outside the box. Addressing the challenges first requires moving away from "business as usual."

*The first one.* Internationally, we often still have a sacred belief in the social engineering of society and continue with a state centric approach.

Many roads lead to Rome, but the solution can no longer come from there. It now comes down to countries specific approaches. Of course governments are important, but there is a growing awareness that real solutions and breakthroughs can only come with a leading role of the business community. The challenges are not only more complicated, but also different and more complex than before. Other players have emerged to give expression to the desires of consumers and social groups, and thereby influence the way of production and its consequences.

Without companies strongly involved the change won't happen. But it also requires a radical shift in business thinking and behavior. Every company for itself and God for all - principle must be abandoned. We need from company's sound and transparent governance (corporate governance), production of safe and healthy products, acknowledging human rights and avoid child labor, cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), fair trade (fair trade), sustainable investment, social dialogue, safe and healthy working conditions, and diversity in the workplace.

In May of this year, the International Seed federation celebrated its 100 anniversary in Rotterdam. Today the seed sector, with a leading role for Dutch companies, has an annual turnover of more than \$80 billion worldwide. The sector is getting this turnover mainly through access to genetic material from developing countries. These countries are now asking for benefit sharing. But the industry is not willing to fund \$ 8 million for their benefits. Is this a sound policy?

*Secondly,* we face conflicting goals: we need to increase agricultural production while reducing the carbon footprint, conserve our biodiversity; pursue sustainable yields while minimizing land

use expansion to protect our forests; increase productivity while maintaining employment, to name a few. A successful climate change approach is not feasible without addressing food security, and achieving food security is impossible without fighting climate change.

A good example dilemma is the pursuit of sustainable forest management internationally. In 2007, in New York, I had the privilege of leading the negotiations for an international instrument on sustainable forest management. The negotiation had been stuck for about 15 years and it had become a north-south fight.

Western countries, especially the EU, thought for reasons of climate change and biodiversity it was necessary to make an international agreement to prevent further deforestation. The G77, developing countries took the position that the western countries had become rich by cutting down their forests and that if developing countries did not get these opportunities they should be compensated. Only then could internationally goals and targets be agreed upon. The EU, for all intents and purposes, refused to do this, but at the end had to agree to a financial mechanism to support developing countries. We see similar negotiations now around biodiversity with the same dilemmas

*Thirdly*, an adapting dilemma is achieving healthy and sustainable diets: Different choices regarding quantity, safety, nutritional content, social and environmental footprint of food to be consumed and waste can lead to completely different outcomes of agri-food systems.

For example, the famous discussion about eating less meat. International discussions are often dominated by calls to eat less meat. FAO reports show that the global demand for meat will grow with 20% the coming years, especially in developing countries. Let's look to a dilemma behind it. We in the West can choose our diet, many people in developing countries have less choice and have to deal with a mostly one-sided diet. With the increase in economic development, they can afford also a more varied diet, often with meat.

Are we going to deny them this? Shouldn't we put much more effort into sustainable meat production? Is Food security - ensuring that all individuals have consistent access to nutritious food - not a fundamental ethical imperative?

*The forth one* is increasing food transparency. Demand-side policies and provision of general public goods, such as education and transparent information, can promote critical thinking and awareness. For example, awareness campaigns on food waste have proven very effective in reducing food waste. Behind this is the dilemma of fair pricing. Internationally, there is a growing call to factor the ecological or environmental costs of food production into the price. Leaving aside that to date no methodology can be scientifically developed, the question is why only these costs? Why not also the costs of food insecurity?

*Fifthly* the call for more sustainable farming practices. Precision agriculture, adapted to and appropriated by small-scale producers, could also lead to sustainable intensification, more

resource efficient use and better logistics. We see many innovations in agricultural methods, from the more traditional forms to regenerative agriculture, nature-based agriculture vertical and urban agriculture, climate smart agriculture and agroecology.

No single agricultural technology or practice is socially neutral. There is no silver bullet. We have to be careful, the call for agroecology is no solution for food security, it cannot be implemented without high subsidies and certainly not feed the world.

Innovation and technology transfer: to address the challenges, investments in science, innovation, and technology play a crucial role in increasing agricultural productivity. Globally we should support the call to increase funding for agricultural research and development, focusing on priority areas such as drought-resistant crops, climate-smart agriculture, precision agriculture, and improved storage and processing technologies.

But if we don't make innovations and technologies, accessible, affordable, and ready to implement by small scale farmers, no change will happen.

Facilitate unfettered food trade: avoid export restrictions that exacerbate the global rise in food prices. Ensure that supply chains are organized so that food gets to where it is needed. Diversify trade, promote access to knowledge, keep (regional) borders open for trade or build buffers by different actors in the food system. For more opportunities for local farmers with the higher grain prices, we need to look mainly at access to capital, agricultural inputs and starting materials

### **Ladies and gentlemen, let's look to some demographic dilemmas**

Neither the EU nor the Netherlands has food security at stake. The European and Dutch food systems are robust, in the sense of resistant to shocks. EU countries are not at risk of food shortages. The EU is a top producer of agri-food products - it was the world's largest trader by 2022 - and although Russia's war in Ukraine and climate change are affecting production, the EU food system remains solid and reliable.

The EU cites climate, resource shortages and population growth as priorities its Food 2030 policy, which aims to make European food systems more sustainable while ensuring that everyone has enough affordable and nutritious food. At the same time, the EU is characterized by short-term policies and continues to promote questionable practices that run counter to the necessary transition to equitable and sustainable food systems.

Current EU sanctions affect the supply of food and agricultural products worldwide, especially in developing countries. Although Western states use sanctions widely as a tool, it remains an unregulated activity and increasingly questionable effectiveness. Many developing countries pay the price.

At the same time, we see the EU becoming more and more of a "fortress". The EU is retreating within its own borders, with ever higher tariffs, higher food safety standards, higher quality standards, through which it denies access of products especially from Afrika and Southeast Asia. Selfish won over solidarity.

The current CAP is an outdated, inward looking "and trade distorting system, increasing inequalities worldwide. Also, for Dutch agriculture and agribusiness. Where the EU ministers for environment have a clear international agenda and face, the EU-ministers for agriculture, including the Dutch, are "inward looking", have no position internationally and are invisible there as well. They are focused on protecting the current CAP.

To compare where the EU is retreating into its fortress, China's influence is growing worldwide. China is currently the biggest investor in the African region, including in agriculture. Other countries, including the EU are losing out. This has political. implications, also for the EU agribusinesses.

Furthermore, FAO and World Bank reports show that in 20 years our food will come from Africa. Africa is the youngest continent with enormous potential in agriculture and growing investments. This is certainly apparent in the agri-food sector: Agriculture holds great promise for Africa. More than half of the Earth's arable land - roughly 600 million hectares - is located in Africa. With agriculture at the core of Africa's economic transformation, the continent has the potential to become a global agricultural powerhouse and a net exporter of food. Roles are being reversed and the EU will become increasingly dependent on Africa for its food supply.

To survive the EU has to open up, show more solidarity and should call for a more radical transition to more sustainable food systems. In this, innovation but also solidarity must play a crucial role in achieving sustainable productivity growth.

## **Message of hope**

We can do it. We are seeing examples where we are making the change, for example in food losses.

Our food chain starts with the farmer; they are the basis for our food but also for the change we so desperately need. As said, Business as usual is no longer an option. Solutions need to be found in adaptation of eating patterns; increased transparency of food; more sustainable farming methods; effective access to affordable innovations and technologies; unimpeded food trade; large-scale private investment; priority to food losses. Can only be done if we address the dilemmas and trade-offs. A paradigm to solidarity, open and transparent EU, and breaking inequalities is eminent.

Crucial are private investments, knowledge and know-how of the business community. It is certainly not about "charity" but concrete business for profit. In this way we can create a more



food secure future. Positive developments can be seen here. Champions 12.3 can help countries meet this challenge. Champions 12.3 is a voluntary coalition of leaders from governments, businesses, international organizations, research institutions, farmer groups and civil society organizations committed to inspiring ambition, mobilizing action and accelerating progress toward achieving SDG 12.3 (halving food losses by 2030).

Following a successful pilot in Nigeria with the Dutch dairy company FrieslandCampina, we will launch a concentrated effort in 9 developing countries in the second half of this year and first half of next year. Based on a World Bank analysis, concrete business cases for investments will be developed. Companies together with the government will lead the investments.

### **To conclude**

Let's not forget: Our food chain starts with the farmer; they are the basis for our food but also for the change we so need.

I am grateful for the many generations of farmers who have made our food systems what they are today. I am especially proud of all our young farmers who are taking responsibility for securing the future for future generations

As Nelson Mandela wisely said,  
*"It always seems impossible until it is done."*

*Let us embrace his spirit, courage, and passion as we strive towards achieving the seemingly impossible.*