

Rudolph Kirst - Any Other Business

Food Security, balancing some points of view

Applying the Royal Society's motto 'Nullius in Verba' has been interpreted as 'don't believe in what you are told, instead look for the evidence'. I present here some evidence to balance certain views mentioned at the Westminster Food & Nutrition Forum Keynote Seminar on the 17th June 2010 and add a few points.

What was said:

We need to grow more food on less land with less water and less fertilizer, using a smaller carbon footprint while facing global warming in order to feed the world.

The evidence:

There are immense tracts of potential farmland in the world, which are not cultivated at all, or inefficiently or inappropriately. Tackling this gap will significantly improve food security, particularly in areas with the greatest population expansion.

About 18% of western European farmland is contaminated with excessive pesticide and fertilizer application! This represents nearly one fifth of all arable fields ¹. The problem exists also in vast stretches of land in the world ²

A global policy to formulate healthy sustainable soils by applying organic matter to the soil will increase food security now and for centuries to come. ³

A far reaching vision of water management, nationally and internationally is still eluding the big planners, despite some notable progress in the many ways of harvesting rainwater, in better crop irrigation, desalination of sea water, counteracting desertification and others.

Pollinating insects, which include honey, bumble and solitary bees, moths and hover flies are in dramatic decline. They are responsible for the fertilization of about one third of our food crops across the globe. Industrialized farming practices, the intensive use of pesticides, the reduction of habitat and a number of diseases are mainly responsible for the serious reduction in numbers and spread of these insects. Much evaluation of farming practices and therapeutic measures are needed and become part of the culture of agriculture to remedy the decline of pollinating insects and hence our food security. ⁴

Food waste accounts for about one third of all food produced and needs to be drastically reduced.

A reduction in our demand for meat and hence intensive meat production would enhance food availability substantially