



France was the ideal country for farmers from 16 countries to gather for the November 2007 International Farmers' Dialogue. Priorities in world farming are rapidly changing and France is leading the way in planning for the future. Farmers are facing the urgent need to tackle climate change, limited fuel supplies, rising fertiliser costs and reduced availability of agricultural chemicals in Europe where a number are being withdrawn from the market as the negative aspects of their use are being discovered. An intriguing picture of the differing farming methods emerged - highly mechanised farming where very rapid change is required and subsistence agriculture which is environmentally sustainable but needs modern science to make it more productive. Both farming systems need to change, but it could be that subsistence farmers have the least distance to go. In France we discovered a wealth of experience in terms of teamwork, the dynamism of the agricultural farmers union and the different farmers organisations. Throughout our stay we were impressed with the quality of the people we met, both on the farms where we stayed for the first weekend and the speakers we met during the week.



Christiane Lambert

A French perspective on the dialogue came from one of our hosts Mme Christiane Lambert, Vice-President of the National Union of French Farmers. She commented "I am impressed by the range of experience from around the world and examples of how to tackle the challenge of balancing the needs of the environment and food production. It seems to me that it is in the field of climate change that we need to agree to do things differently. The challenge posed by the environment, energy supplies and the need for food creates opportunities and constraints. It is up to us, farmers, to make the required changes possible."

In his opening talk Phil Jefferys, a woolgrower from Australia, set the scene for the Dialogue. "Farming is all about the 'Future', our future, the world's future. Farming is at the basis of human survival. There are many issues challenging today's farmers. At this conference I am interested in what it is that French farmers and agriculturalists can do for world agriculture. What can you offer if we are to create sustainable food production for us all? There are large numbers of people in the world who do not receive enough food to eat. How can we in all honesty continue to allow this to happen? The future may well depend more on our willingness to change our ways than on the technology required, that will follow."



Phil Jefferys



Stephane Le Foll

Stephane Le Foll, Member of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development in the European Parliament, leads a think tank to make proposals on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This will go through a 'health balance sheet' in 2008 leading to its revision in 2013. This group wants to build multi disciplinary exchanges "as the whole of society is concerned by the future of European Agriculture. As the world is changing, it is vital to reconsider the role of agriculture. Our life depends on the top 15 to 20 centimeters of our soil. It is what agriculture relies on." Agriculture should not withdraw from the World Trade Organisation as some suggest, said Le Foll, but it is necessary to add financial measures to the social, cultural and environmental criteria which affect agriculture.

There was a lively public debate on 'The practical consequences for the farmers of climate change and the need for protection of the environment'. This was led by M Bruno Parmentier, Director of the ESA Group in Angers. He had given a paper in which he assessed the present situation in the world and looked over the brink past the peak in world oil production. He predicted that this decreasing oil supply from 2015 onwards will affect everyone, leading to the end of large-scale mechanized farming as we know it today. It is clear that both the French farmers and government are taking this matter very seriously. In that part of France over 100 farmers have already installed photovoltaic solar panels on the south-facing rooves of their barns. The point was made that practices needed to be economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sustainable.



Bruno Parmentier



Shailendra and Sushila Mahato

Shailendra Mahato and his wife Sushila live in North Eastern India, in an area with no irrigation, where rice can only be grown during the monsoon season. After completing his studies, Shailendra decided he wanted to set up a business, and to do this he had to leave his village. He asked himself "Why should I have to leave my village to earn a living? I'm a farmer, I should be able to earn a living from my land and help others." He developed a project that would solve the irrigation problem. For financial reasons, it would take five years to complete. But as a result of a meeting of industry leaders organised by Initiatives of Change, an engineer lent him the equipment and he completed the system in three months. This has contributed greatly to agricultural development in the region. Shailendra's wife, who runs a self-help group for women, has also been touched by Initiatives of Change. When

asked what she would bring back with her from France, she said, "Sweets? They will only be eaten. Clothes? They will only wear out. What I will bring back are the ideas for people so they can help themselves."

Jamil Ssebalu, Principal of a business college in Uganda, spoke of the abundant resources throughout Africa and ways to overcome present challenges. "Africans need more than food aid, they need to be trained to benefit from their resources. Our farmers are mainly food gatherers and hunters. We need to improve the availability of training, use bio technologies, add value to traditional and indigenous food products, protect and promote indigenous knowledge, strengthen local communities and develop domestic markets. We also need to develop good governance, put an end to the cancer of corruption and heal internal and external divisions. Africa will not develop while corruption and division rules."



Jamil Ssebalu



Khuon Chhoeut

Cambodia is a country still recovering from the time of Pol Pot when most of the educated people were sent to the countryside and many were killed. Khuon Chhoeut is one of those who survived; He is involved in a programme to help poor families. As a developing country, there are still lots of poor people, especially in the rural areas. He works with groups to enable them to develop their skills and raise their income so their children are able to attend school. Numerous agriculture-training programmes are provided. Each programme lasts 3 months. Finance is provided for tools and the families' needs over the training period. The income from produce grown during the programme is saved to finance their work after the course. During the programme, trainers go

to each family's hut to observe their work, send them on further training courses if required.



Juliana Swai

Mrs Juliana Swai, works for the Ministry of Livestock Development in Tanzania, responsible for about 25 farmers' groups, ten of which are female farmers. She allocates pregnant heifers on the condition that the farmers pay to go on a residential training course at a local Livestock Institute. In some cases the women are so poor they were not able to pay for the course so she trained them herself. Her most important role is in helping them believe in their own ability. They build their own cowsheds, feed and care for their cows, build better houses, send their children to school, paying the school fees and improving the diet of their family. Those who once thought they were too poor have emerged as very good farmers. She encourages the woman to start with the concept of "I can do. I can increase the income, I can create peace at home, I can reduce corruption between families, I can encourage other people to start farming". She describes this as a message for the family, the district, the country, Africa and the world. "We women can bring change."

Martin Simtenda, senior tutor at the Buhuri Livestock Institute, gave a paper on "The realities of agricultural development in Tanzania". Tanzania has a population of 33 million, 46% are under 15yrs, 50% live on less than US\$1 per day. Agriculture is the backbone of the economy. It accounts for 46.6% of the national income, 32% of its foreign currency and 95% of food consumed, three quarters of exports and employs 80% of the population. It is dominated by small farmers with 0.9 - 3.0 hectares. Income from food has increased by 3.3% per year since 1985 and exports 5.4%. He said, "We have a network of training facilities and research stations, like the Coffee Research Institute which has produced a coffee breed resistant to coffee berry disease and rust. It has organized farmers into groups of 25- 30. In some cases production has increased 100% and quality has improved, increasing income by 57% - 200%."



Martin Simtenda



TroyRoush

Troy Roush from Indiana in the United States farms 2215 hectares. He is vice president of the American Corn Growers Association, which believes current US farm policy encourages overproduction, and solves the U.S. overproduction problem by dumping U.S. commodities on the world market at prices often below the cost of production. This he describes as depressing prices around the world, often forcing farmers to become dependant on food aid. "The reason we believe that US farm policy is doing this is Agribusiness has an interest in perpetuating a supply of grain at or below the cost of production. They can then purchase the inputs they need at prices well below what it costs to produce. Our livestock industry is largely

vertically integrated. Agribusiness owns the animals from birth to selling in the supermarket. American Farmers are in a feudal system very similar to indentured servitude. Farmers in developing nations have no way to benefit from U.S policy, they would benefit if the U.S. and for that matter the EU decided to pursue a price support program, this would raise the world price of grains benefiting farmers everywhere. In the last two years the U.S. has seen a surge in biofuels. This use of corn has raised the price received by farmers to above the cost of production for the first time in many years. The developing nations of the world do not need cheap food to feed themselves, they need fair prices so they can afford to grow it themselves."

George Kamau Kiiru from Kenya, talked about the work he is doing since retiring as a forestry officer, and how at first people had laughed at him when he talked about planting trees. He told how the situation changed when the damage to the environment caused by soil erosion and lower rain fall became clear and they came to him for help. He was soon running courses for farmers and school groups. It is now fashionable to plant trees on every possible occasion such as birthdays, election meetings and marriage celebrations.



George Kamau Kiiru

Two people from Thailand were an example of the close relationship between agricultural universities and farmers. One farm managed by Tawan Hangsoongnern had developed organic rice growing to the point that it was as productive as conventional rice without the cost of many expensive inputs. The other a project that involved Nattaphon Chongkasikit who was studying the native cattle raising system in Northern Thailand. From Norway we had a passionate presentation by professor Herman Qvam who through his understanding of the need for simple robust tractors in Africa had developed a machine that could be made from local materials and reconditioned engines in Africa. There were also presentations from Brazil, Haiti and the United Kingdom.



Jim Wigan

Jim Wigan outlined some of the issues that will impact on us all in the coming years. The world's population is expected to peak around 9-10 billion by 2050. According to one research study, climate change will contribute to higher temperatures, more severe droughts, greater floods and rising sea levels. By 2025, 48 countries are expected to face water shortages. Oil production is expected to peak by 2015 and then steadily decline. We need to reduce carbon emissions. Markets need our attention; too often they seem to serve short-term profits rather than long-term survival. To underpin future society governments need the following qualities: servant leadership, honesty that creates trust and equal concern not just for ourselves but also for those with opposing ideas.

### **Some facts to emerge during the Farmers' Dialogue were: --**

2.1% of the world's farmers own 28 million tractors -- 18.6% or 250 million farmers own and use draft animals -- 79.3%, more than 1 billion farmers work with hand tools on less than one hectare -- There are another 1 billion people behind these 1 billion farmers -- 2 to 3 hundred million people have no access to land -- 75% of the world's poorest people suffering from lack of food are farmers.

- Something new is required to produce fair and stable markets from farm gate to the consumers' plate.
- Facing the hard facts about climate change, water availability and limited carbon based fuel supplies, we became open to concepts that a few days earlier we simply would not have considered.
- Is it a question of free trade or fair prices?
- Modern man is not the aeroplane maker he is the farmer.
- We now need to measure things in terms of energy and water - How much do we produce per litre of oil? - How much do we produce per litre of water?
- In the USA 3% of fuel comes from ethanol. If people ran their cars with the right tyre pressures they would save 3% of their fuel.
- Climate change affects us all and is affected by us all. Everyone must act on reducing climate change.
- To eat or to drive, is it necessary to choose?
- We need a new farming revolution.
- Farmers are not competitors, they are colleagues.
- Turning forest into desert is easy; it is more difficult to turn desert into forest.
- Free trade is the past, fair trade is the future.

The above gives only a glimpse of the week. If you want the full text of what people said let Jim Wigan know, as most transcripts are available. He can be contacted through [www.farmersdialogue.org](http://www.farmersdialogue.org)