

SYMPOSIUM
“WHAT FUTURE FOR THE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECTOR IN AN INCREASINGLY
GLOBALISED WORLD”

30-31 March 2009

Objectives of the Symposium

Around the world, policy makers would like to be prepared for future events, so as to be able to give appropriate policy responses. More or less structured thinking about the future helps to avoid surprises, by identifying possible key developments that can help in developing ‘robust’ policies for alternative futures. The symposium is about identifying key policy issues for the future, and not policy solutions. The results of the symposium are intended to be an input into the OECD agriculture Ministerial that is planned for 2010.

The symposium can be seen as an instrument to ‘harvest’ in an effective way the issues that are widely seen to be driving the future of global agro-food. Driving forces are spanning multiple dimensions, which includes environmental, social, political and economic elements. It is therefore important that the themes of the symposium are broadly defined, and are not limited to one single dimension, and that the format encourages as much as possible the exploration of innovative avenues of reflection. The symposium is forward looking in its nature, and will ideally go beyond the extrapolation of current trends. The time horizon envisaged is about 20 years from now (say 2030).

The distinguishing feature of this symposium relative to more nationally-oriented exercises is the multi-country environment. The OECD can provide a platform for debate on more collective – as opposed to individualistic/national – policy responses to challenges that lie ahead.





Draft Programme

The planned duration of the symposium is 1.5 days, scheduled for 30-31 March 2009, just prior to the spring 2009 Committee for Agriculture meeting. The symposium aims at about 150 participants and will feature two keynote addresses, four breakout panels, one plenary panel and one plenary address. This setup is expected to maximize discussion. Each of the four breakout panels is structured along one specific theme (see below).

Keynote 1: Global economic developments
shaping the future of agri-food

Keynote 2: Competing claims: resources, climate change

Breakout panels: 4-5 panellists with 3 minutes
speaking time plus active chair/ animator.
About 40 participants in each breakout session

Innovation	Competing claims	Agriculture and its neighbours	Great expectations
			

Plenary panel: What is on the horizon?
4 Chairs from breakout panels
plus 2 keynote speakers plus 1 chair

Plenary address: A different future for agri-food?
This plenary speech summarizes and draws conclusions
with policy relevance

Day 1:
full day

Morning

Afternoon

Day 2:
half day

Short description of sessions

Key note address 1: 'Global economic developments shaping the future of agri-food'

Recent global economic events have (once again) made it clear that the agriculture and food sector is tightly interwoven with the global economic system – agriculture both relies on fuel-based inputs and increasingly supplies biofuel for various uses; credit markets ensure needed capital for both short and long term investments, while broader financial market developments can either ensure or constrain risk management options, for producers and processors; and so on. Perhaps more pronounced than ever are economic developments in non-OECD countries that are changing the face of global agriculture, on both the demand and supply sides. Global food supply networks are changing to satisfy the new demands both in emerging economies and mature OECD markets.

International factor mobility is a key element in the re-shaping of global food supply chains. While capital in the form of foreign direct investment in the agri-food sector has been rising in the recent past, the production factor labour is generally far less mobile. Yet seasonal labour, is essential for certain sectors in OECD countries not only due to lower costs of this type of unskilled labour but also due to the simple lack of substitutes. Some sub-sectors are essentially independent from the immobile production factor land: the production locations of high-growth activities like horticulture, floriculture, intensive livestock industry and aquaculture are not primarily determined by availability of land and labour. This keynote will address these and other issues: which major economic developments are, or might become, the driving factors for the future of agri-food? The address should focus on economics, while sustainability, climate change etc will be taken up in the second keynote.

Key note address 2: 'Competing claims: resources, climate change'

The big 5f (food, feed, fiber, fuel, forest) and non-agricultural sectors lay claim to the same limited natural resources: land, water and minerals. Some observers expect limited resource availability to lead to severe difficulties in satisfying current and future needs. Availability of water and arable land are obviously well known resources constraints, but a possible shortage of minerals and micro-nutrients for fertilization may be a newly emerging challenge for the future.

Resources are unequally distributed across regions in the world, leading to a risk of conflict between nations. New challenges are emerging from climate change, leading to the need for adaption of agricultural production and to the need for mitigating the contributions of the entire food system to climate change. Technological solutions can contribute to lower and more sustainable resource use.

This keynote will address these questions. It should also venture into an outlook for technological solutions.

Panels

All four panels should (obviously) first of all concentrate on identifying the big trends within their respective theme, with a view to distilling the main 'drivers' relevant for the future development. Each panel is encouraged to deal with at least three dimensions of each of these main drivers: the uncertainties behind the trends, the implications for the future of agro-food and the key 'institutional' features behind the drivers; private sector developments and government policies that are seen as key contributors to these drivers.

Panel 'Innovation': What can technology and innovation contribute?

Impressive productivity growth in agriculture has historically been a main driver behind human development, enabling an exponential growth of population and allowing labour to be employed in non-agricultural activities. What can innovation contribute to overcoming 'new scarcities' that are emerging?

- Which are the key developments in agri-food innovation (perhaps broken down by specify sub-sectors, e.g. farming techniques, aquaculture, novel foods, bio-based economy, nano-technology)
- What are key factors helping and hindering innovation (private versus public funding, intellectual property rights regimes, regulation (e.g. biotech))
- How can developing countries participate and benefit from innovation?

Panel 'Competing claims': What are the main scarcities that will drive agro-food developments?

The panel will take a broad view of sustainability, i.e. including economic and social sustainability as well as environmental sustainability. The panel will work towards identifying the main resource constraints (which may differ between regions in the world) and draw implications for future developments of agro-food.

- What are the main constraints?: Water, land, minerals, energy, labour...
- What are the implications of demographic changes?
- Climate change implications

Panel 'Agriculture and its neighbours': What are the links with non-agricultural sectors?

Integration of agri-food with other sectors in the economy: does the panel see major changes relative to the past? (e.g. more or less dependence on financial markets)

- Have the links with input markets, energy markets and financial markets become stronger?
- What are the trends and uncertainties in the industrial organization of the food chain (e.g. vertical integration, market structure, FDI, trade)?

Panel 'Great expectations': What is society expecting from the global food system?

Consumer attitudes and consumer concerns and expectations *vis-à-vis* agriculture (food safety, food quality...)

- What is the likely nature of societal demands on agriculture round the world? (provider of food at reasonable prices, provider of green space for recreation, a custodian of natural heritage, an engine of development in poor countries, source of rural well being, an alternative source of energy – and other non-food uses, and much more?)
- Is the global food system evolving to a dual system: food for the poor, food for the rich?
- Corporate Social Responsibility and public policy: private and public responses to changing demands.

Plenary panel: What is on the horizon?

The panel will be formed by the four chairs from the breakout panels, the two keynote speakers and a Chair. The panel should bring together insights from the previous thematic addresses and breakout panels. One function of the plenary panel is reporting about what happened in the breakouts; another function would be to try to identify which of the trends and developments signalled in the previous sessions should be taken on board by governments in framing longer term policy developments. The plenary panel would not focus on policy conclusions or policy recommendations, rather on better understanding which of the projected developments need to be on the policy-makers horizon in the longer term.

Plenary address: A different future for agro-food?

This plenary speech, finally, will summarize and draw conclusions with policy relevance. Is the medium term future for agro-food different from the recent past? Can we identify broad areas where policy (in-) action would be desirable? What are those? What can be done at national level, what should be addressed multilaterally, including at the OECD?