



Keynote speech by Ilse Aigner, German Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, at the OECD Agriculture Ministerial Meeting

Today's meeting of the OECD Committee on Agriculture at ministerial level is the latest in a series of high-level international meetings on agricultural policy, stretching from the Berlin Summit of Agriculture Ministers last year, the meeting of Agricultural Ministers in Treviso and the G 8 meeting in L'Aquila to the FAO Conference, the World Food Summit in Rome and the 2010 Berlin Summit of Agriculture Ministers.

Each of these conferences represents a further step in the development of viable strategies for the future challenges that agricultural policy-makers will face. I expect the OECD Agriculture Ministerial Meeting to provide key impetus in this process.

Because we all know that the agricultural sector has a particularly tough battle ahead of it to provide a growing global population with a sustainable and adequate supply of food and energy and, at the same time, to make an active contribution towards combating climate change.

We will only be able to face these global challenges if we work together. That is another major task for agricultural policy-makers.

In 1998 the OECD Agricultural Ministerial Meeting called for trade-distorting measures to be dismantled. Even if there is still some way to go in this area, it is true to say that we have achieved a lot in recent years.

What we must do now is to establish a framework that will enable the agricultural sector to reconcile the requirement to increase production with the need for climate efficiency. When it comes to climate change, agriculture is both a victim and a perpetrator. This fact must be borne in mind.

To be viable for the future, the agricultural sector will have to

- provide enough food for a growing world population;
- contribute to efforts to achieve a sustainable energy supply;
- focus on climate efficiency and compatibility with nature in agricultural production;
- provide farmers with a livelihood; and
- meet society's growing demands to show responsibility in the use of soil, water, air and biological resources and to pay due regard to consumer protection.

Permit me to go into a few points in greater detail:

1. Food Security

Making the right to food a practical reality for a growing world population under conditions exacerbated by climate change requires all of us to make enormous efforts.

Hunger is not an inexorable fate, but can instead be overcome by astute policies.

The establishment of the Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition is the signal for a new kind of international cooperation.

The partnership brings together governments, international organisations, civil society and industry.

The G8 summit at L'Aquila and the 2009 Global Food Summit pointed the way forward.

People suffering from hunger must be able to profit from the synergies generated by close cooperation between experts from the fields of agriculture and development cooperation.

We must also ensure that we use available resources intelligently.

2. Sustainable Production

Sustainable production is the only way in which we will be able to provide a growing population with an adequate supply of food.

The key components of sustainable agricultural production are:

- the introduction of crop rotation systems;
- the use of organic fertiliser;
- being sparing in the use of agro-chemicals;
- effective technologies for nutrient supply; and
- the efficient use of external means of production.

New, innovative production methods must be used to further reduce emissions of ammonia and methane, two gases which play a significant role in respect of the environment and the climate.

Viewed globally, the rise in the world population and in income levels, particularly in developing and threshold countries, increases demands made on animal husbandry. On the one hand production must be increased significantly whilst on the other the damaging impact that animal husbandry has on the environment must be reduced.

To this end we must continue to press ahead with breeding measures, technical solutions and construction programmes in the fields of animal husbandry and the storage and use of animal waste.

When weighing the demands made of the agricultural sector, priority must be given to maintaining and increasing the efficiency of agricultural land.

Land is a resource that is in short supply. I therefore support preserving agricultural land and am against putting more land to other uses at the expense of agricultural production.

3. Climate Change

At the 2010 Berlin Summit of Agriculture Ministers, the ministers gave voice to their responsibility regarding climate protection, adaptation to climate change, global food security and land use.

Important approaches to address the issues were highlighted in the summit's final declaration. These approaches comprised: technical advancement, greater climate efficiency in agricultural production, renewable energies, carbon storage in soil, research, extension services, training and technology transfer.

The funds required to implement strategies for adapting to climate change and improving global food security should be used in a targeted and coordinated manner.

To this end, all governments must support the agricultural sector in maximising climate and environmental compatibility.

We want to create a global network that enables every country to contribute its knowledge and experience regarding climate protection and to share this with other States.

4. Consumer Demands

Consumer protection in respect of food has gained in importance in recent years, in both Germany and many other countries. Consumers demand that all food offered for sale should be safe.

Ensuring that food is safe is an ongoing task for all those involved in the food chain: farmers, the processing sector, trade and final consumers. For Germany it is a matter of course that all regulations should be based on scientific assessment and should comply with international agreements.

This may mean that entrepreneurs can gain specific competitive advantages if they adapt to these increased demands and base production on the principle of process quality.

Consumers in many parts of the world also expect the agricultural sector to show responsibility in the use of our natural resources.

The growing demands being made of animal husbandry mean that the research and development sector must focus on this issue and develop sustainable animal husbandry concepts. This is the only way in which consumers can gain trust in the production process and then strengthen markets.

Another field which will be of importance in the future for research, industry and agriculture in Germany is biotechnology. The primary objective of German genetic engineering law and legislation remains the protection of people and the environment. All scientific aspects of each individual case are consequently subjected to intensive analysis and assessment.

5. Agricultural Policy in the Future

The agricultural sector of the future will have to satisfy many expectations.

First and foremost, farmers will want to be able to earn their livelihood from farming. This is true today, and it will remain true in the future.

The greater market orientation that now exists means that farmers are required to demonstrate their business acumen.

This involves knowledge, training and performance, and offers both opportunities and risks.

Another aspect which will become increasingly important is the requirement of the agricultural sector to provide sustainable resources for energy generation.

Agricultural policy must react to these developments.

We in the European Union have created a good starting position with our current Common Agricultural Policy. We would like to safeguard the basis of our production in order to be able to provide a secure supply and maintain our natural resources. A safety net of market instruments is designed to support agricultural holdings in coping with extreme crises.

We must, however, provide more support for the services to the environment and to society that are provided by the agricultural sector, and even greater support for climate protection and the sustainable development of rural regions.

What must agricultural policy do, and where can it start?

Allow me to elaborate on three aspects:

1. Functioning trade
2. The strengthening of research and innovation
3. The maintenance of rural regions

Functioning Trade

We want to stick with our policy of open markets, also with a view to the current economic crisis. In the future, agricultural trade will continue to gain in importance. In the future, a fair and open agricultural market will continue to help increase prosperity – both in developing countries and in the developed world.

Germany therefore continues to lend its support to the Doha Round being brought to a rapid, balanced and ambitious conclusion this year.

That would be a clear signal that the global economy was becoming more open.

The strengthening of research and innovation

Knowledge is the prerequisite for progress and creates better prospects for the future.

Germany focuses on research and innovation in order to contribute towards climate protection, food security and sustainable agricultural production through state-of-the-art technologies, excellent training and high-efficiency farm management.

The problems we are facing are global problems; the following must therefore hold true for all those involved: Those who share knowledge will win. Germany welcomes in this regard the work of the OECD Cooperative Research Programme on the use of natural resources for sustainable agricultural systems.

Strong agricultural research must not be a privilege of wealthy countries; it must also and in particular benefit developing countries.

Agricultural research must be accompanied by the training of a skilled workforce. Germany is willing to bear its responsibility and is already actively involved in a range of cooperative projects.

Agricultural producers throughout the world must have sufficient resources, knowledge and technology at their disposal.

The maintenance of rural regions

Sustainable agricultural production and the viability of rural areas are topics that cannot be treated separately. They are in fact in many ways mutually dependent. Agriculture and forestry are distinctive features of land use and the landscape of rural areas.

Agricultural policy is therefore at one and the same time always a policy for rural areas as well.

Rural regions are facing huge challenges in terms of their development. These include demographic change, increasing urbanisation, the globalisation of markets, an often difficult situation on the labour market and last but not least climate change. This cannot be tackled using a policy focusing on agriculture alone.

Agricultural policy must therefore pay particular attention to integrated rural development if we want to make the right to food a permanent reality.

These challenges must now be taken up and translated into governmental action. In my opinion, assessing political options from an economic standpoint alone does not go far enough, as other issues often play a role in the political decision-making process.

It is our task to establish conditions that will facilitate both performance and sustainable production.

This is the only way to make future agricultural policy a success.