

A SELF-CORRECTION FORCE: THE 10 THESES OF THE GERMAN AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

Early in 2017, the German Agricultural Society (DLG) publicly announced ten theses on agriculture in 2030. Experts from various professions in agriculture and stakeholders in other areas thus defined a position in enabling them to develop a future strategy for German and European agriculture. One central aspect in this context is the sustainability of production.

By Carl-Albrecht Bartmer

Every ten years, in the framework of a convention, the German Agricultural Society develops a future scenario for German and European agriculture for the next 20 years. In addition to the forecast market developments, the cornerstones of the conference in autumn 2016 above all concerned the sustainability of agricultural systems.

With a sustainability assessment of the individual farm and a survey of the sector in the context of a sustainability report for German agriculture (2014 and 2016), the DLG has already been pursuing an approach for ten years in which sustainability is not appraised qualitatively but quantitatively, on the basis of indicators. For example, the organisation has already been pointing out for several years that the task ahead is not only that of mastering the challenge of a growing demand for agricultural products, which is also a significant challenge that the European agricultural sector faces, but that we have to be self-critical in addressing the issue of whether the current agricultural production systems really meet the demands of sustainability.

THE GLOBAL SCENARIO REGARDING AGENDA 2030

In brief, we were able to establish the following in our analysis in the context of the convention:

In 2030, global agriculture will be facing the challenge of providing food for 8.5 billion people. According to calculations performed by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), by 2030, global demand for grain will have risen by around 8 per cent, for pork by 19 per cent, for poultry meat by 17 per cent, and for milk and dairy products by 10 per cent compared to 2015 figures. Over the same period, global available farmland per capita will have declined from around 2,200 square metres in 2015 to roughly 2,000 square metres in 2030. The reasons for these devel-



Cost-effectiveness and animal welfare are equally important in livestock husbandry.

Photo: DLG

opments are population growth, urbanisation, desertification and salinisation.

By 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations are to be achieved as well. A catalogue with 17 goals for sustainable development forms the core of this Agenda 2030. All 17 goals are of equal importance in this set, and they are closely linked to one another. For example, productivity and the conservation of important environmental goods such as climate, water and species diversity form a unit together with the other goals. Goal 2, “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”, describes a topic that is of outstanding importance to agriculture.

Further gains in productivity, attained in a sustainable manner in the sense of the Brundtland Report “Our Common Future”, assume a key role. The DLG Position Paper “Landwirtschaft 2030” (agriculture in 2030) takes a determinedly critical look at agricultural sys-

tems in fields and stables. Neither the aspects of nutrient surpluses, species decline and climate change nor animal welfare point to systems that are sustainable in every respect.

CHALLENGES FACING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE BY 2030

Restricted crop rotation, increasing resistance regarding chemical pesticides or diseases among animals kept in stables resulting from how they are looked after cannot be explained solely by referring to cost management aimed at more competitiveness. Rather, they challenge the creativeness of farmers regarding production technology and, in particular, their innovativeness. There are many options to simultaneously enhance productivity and sustainability, ranging from intelligently bred plant varieties or animal races through agricultural and animal housing engineering to the new opportunities that digitalisation offers.

This also requires a social environment that is open to such innovations. We have to garner understanding in society for our licence to operate. We have powerful arguments, both professional and emotional (“What is fascinating about agriculture”), and as farmers, we have a duty to deliver in terms of communication. This applies in particular, but not only, to developed, industrial societies.

Forward-looking agricultural policy also has to take up the challenge of sustainability and productivity. Here, modern processes are just as important as indicator-based measuring of sustainability. It can serve as a measure in a transparent analysis of the status quo, in measuring the success of political programmes and also for the benefits offered by innovations.

International agricultural trade provides the opportunity to balance local or temporary supply deficits among agricultural products. Especially given unevenly distributed availability of resources, natural precipitation, temperatures and soil quality, this has a considerable impact on productivity and sustainability. However, international agricultural trade ought to be in accord with development co-operation goals.

Farmers only rarely provide regional, national and, in particular international markets with primary products. Rather, the latter are further processed in an increasingly complex manner and are sold as quality products by food retailers virtually throughout the world. This is why integration in efficient quality chains that internally optimise processes and are able to organise cross-regional distribution is indispensable. In the long run, value chains can only be as strong as their individual segments. This would argue in favour of a fair distribution of value chain shares within the chain, which unfortunately is not always the case.

Today, one year after the DLG presented its ten theses on agriculture in 2030, one can observe a discussion process covering agriculture as a whole and focusing on a very concrete, more sustainable development of the branch in the future. That a branch should have the strength to engage in self-criticism and self-correction is increasingly proving to be a sign of strength and optimism about the future.

Carl-Albrecht Bartmer is Chairman of the German Agricultural Society's Supervisory Board and is himself a farmer.

Contact: HGF@dlg.org

THE TEN DLG THESES ON AGRICULTURE

- 1 Harmonise knowledge, skills and will.**
 Farmers need well-grounded and comprehensive training, and as honest entrepreneurs, must be guided by their professional ethics.
- 2 Get to grips with nutrient surpluses, loss of biodiversity, climate change and animal welfare.**
 This requires innovations, which make the production systems sustainable.
- 3 Enable innovations.**
 Willingness to innovate, inventive spirit, freedom of research and appropriate risk management are essential prerequisites in society to achieve sustainable agriculture.
- 4 Making animal husbandry fit for the future.**
 Cost-effectiveness and animal welfare are equally important in livestock husbandry. Conflicting goals can be minimised by precise observation of livestock, attentive animal care, good genetics and innovative livestock husbandry systems.
- 5 Harmonise crop production with environmental protection and nature conservation.**
 Loss of biodiversity, nutrient surpluses and resistance to crop protection treatments can be reduced. Raising awareness among stakeholders, innovative technology, efficient varieties, precision fertilisers, and effective and environmentally compatible crop protection products all help here.
- 6 Use the revolutionary potential of digitisation constructively.**
 Structural change is continuing to gain in momentum through digitisation. Structures and relationships in the food value chain are changing fundamentally. Digitisation should be used to sustainably increase efficiency and productivity.
- 7 Build engagement between society and agriculture.**
 Farmers should face up to the debate with society and open a dialogue that should be conducted fairly and respectfully by all involved. This includes listening, realistic self-assessment, factual reasoning and a readiness to act courageously.
- 8 Further develop the EU's agricultural policy.**
 Sustainable production methods should be supported with public funds. Key indicators and benchmarking should be used so that the practices attracting support can be verified and the efficiency of the policy programmes be quantified and documented transparently.
- 9 Harmonise international agricultural trade with the goals of development policy.**
 Trade needs binding standards on sustainability, good governance and combating corruption in order to compensate for production deficits and create prosperity for all partners.
- 10 Strengthen the food value chain and rural areas.**
 The agricultural and food sector is a strong segment of the overall economy. Without competitive agriculture that is integrated into thriving rural areas and ensures locally produced raw materials, the food sector will migrate away from Germany.