

Farming First



Enhancing Sustainable Development through Agriculture

Addressing the common need for food, feed, fibre and fuel requires a global action plan to increase agricultural output in an **environmentally-sustainable, economically-feasible, socially-responsible manner**.

At the heart of the solution are farmers - they are the ones who grow our crops, manage the land, and safeguard biodiversity. The global population has almost tripled since 1950. By 2030, there will be an additional 1.7 billion mouths to feed, most of whom from developing countries. To cope with this reality, the world's farmers need to double or even triple food production by 2050. However, farming policies have neglected the critical role which farmers, especially smallholder farmers, must play in making sustainable development a reality. The development pressures are acute. The ratio of arable land to population is expected to decline by up to 55% by 2030. By 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living with acute water scarcity. Simultaneously, climate change will put regional and global food supplies at risk. The basic livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people in developing countries will be threatened.

The Principles

Returning farmers to the centre of policy decisions is fundamental to sustainable development. Governments, businesses, scientists and civil society groups must focus attention on the source of our food security. All these groups must work together to enable the many millions of farm families, especially smallholders, to grow more crops sustainably through effective markets, more collaborative research and committed knowledge sharing.

A broad-based, knowledge-centred approach to agricultural development is needed. The approach starts with focusing on farmers and the tools and information they need to steward land, grow crops, bring in their harvest and then get it to market. While modern agricultural technologies and management approaches have doubled the production of world food calories over the past half-century, many smallholder farmers struggle to achieve even the most basic level of subsistence. New investments, incentives and innovations are needed to achieve greater sustainability, while delivering increased agricultural production. These benefits must be made available to all farmers, recognising their role as guardians of our shared environment, biodiversity, and ecosystems. There is a need for a radical shift in thinking which places the farmer at the centre of sound and sustainable agricultural practices.

This approach - delivering productivity and sustainability - must also lead to a more equitable and efficient production system. Combined with better functioning markets, an enhanced farming system will contribute to improved economic development, providing food security, fair prices and improved land management.

To succeed, any new approach must be based on a stable policy environment within which farmers can work and invest. This, in turn, requires us to establish stable, long-term policy and regulatory frameworks for the development of agriculture; to enhance national financial allocations; to direct international development assistance towards the agricultural sector in developing countries; and to undertake comprehensive stakeholder consultation processes in the design and implementation of agricultural programs.



A Call for Action

Farming First provides a call-to-action for policy-makers and practitioners to develop a locally sustainable value chain for global agriculture. It emphasises the need for knowledge networks and policies centred on helping subsistence farmers to become small-scale entrepreneurs. The framework proposes six interlinked imperatives for sustainable development.

Supporters

Crop Life International
International Federation of Agricultural Producers
International Council for Science
International Fertilizer Industry Association

Safeguard natural resources.

Land management should be improved through the widespread adoption of sustainable practices of land use.

- Conservation agriculture can be used to prevent soil erosion and land degradation
- Manage watersheds and water use more efficiently
- Protect wildlife habitat and biodiversity through an integrated ecosystems approach
- Provide incentives for improving ecosystem services

Share knowledge.

While much of the knowledge needed to improve global agriculture already exists, including within remote indigenous communities, it often does not reach those farmers that could benefit most.

- Increase the level of education on crop and natural resource management for farmers
- Promote the development of village-based knowledge centres
- Provide access to scalable information technologies for farmers to receive weather, crop, and market alerts, as well as other early warning systems to help them make the right decisions for sustainability and productivity.
- Establish open and transparent two-way exchanges that capture the 'voice of the farmer' in the process of policy formulation and implementation.

Build local access.

Fundamental resources should be available to farmers to help them manage their production process more reliably and at less cost.

- Secure access to land and water resources, especially for women farmers
- Provide rural access to microfinance services, especially to microcredit
- Build infrastructure – particularly roads and ports - to make supplies available to farmers
- Improve access to agricultural inputs and services, including mechanical tools, seeds, fertilizers, and crop protection materials
- Encourage and co-ordinate multiple local actors to ensure information and supplies get into farmers hands
- Invest in bioenergy where it contributes to energy security and to rural development

Protect harvests.

In many of the poorest countries, 20-40% of crop yields are lost because of inadequate pre- and post-harvest support. Likewise, vast quantities of food are squandered during production and consumption phases of the food chain.

- Build local storage facilities and transportation mechanisms, including cold chain storage for food preservation
- Localise the application of agronomic knowledge, pest-identification and meteorological information
- Educate the public on sustainable consumption and production needs and behaviours
- Provide risk management tools to support farmers in managing weather and market variations.

Enable access to markets.

Farmers need to be able to get their products to market and receive equitable price treatment when they do.

- Provide remote access to up-to-date market pricing information
- Develop well functioning markets through transparent information, fair prices, sound infrastructure and reduced speculation.
- Encourage co-operative approaches to marketing for smallholders
- Improve smallholder farmers' marketing skills through entrepreneurship training
- Reduce market distortions to improve opportunities for all strata of agriculture worldwide

Prioritise research imperatives.

Achieving sustainable agriculture requires intensified, continuous research, prioritising locally relevant crops, stewardship techniques, and adaptation to climate change.

- Conduct agronomic research related to water availability, soil fertility and post-harvest losses as well as climate change challenges
- Conduct research into crop varieties needed by the poorest and most vulnerable regions
- Promote farmer-centred research in accordance with their needs
- Improve productivity through the responsible use of science and technology
- Establish public-private research collaboration around integrated solutions
- Increase investments from governments and business towards relevant R&D