

The Future of Agriculture in the European Union

Some Considerations

Given the centrality of agriculture to humanity's future, the need to revise critical aspects of current food systems will only grow in the years ahead. Whether these aspects pertain to various stages of the food supply chain, the allocation of land, or mechanisms for controlling food prices, effective reforms to food systems must be framed by broader considerations.

The Bahá'í International Community believes that these broader considerations, including those highlighted below, are essential to a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient future for agriculture.

The future of agriculture in Europe in light of the oneness of humanity

The overarching principle that should underpin any conversation on agriculture is the oneness of humanity. Agriculture and food systems have global ramifications and are interwoven with international trade, environmental policies, and economic dynamics. Decisions made within Europe regarding the agricultural sector have significant impacts globally, just as agricultural policies and practices implemented elsewhere have effects on European food systems.

Recognition of this interconnectedness does not diminish the critical importance of examining, for instance, the extent to which Europe should strive for self-sufficiency or prioritise locally grown products, nor does it lessen the necessity of rethinking international trade to minimise ecological impact. Rather, it requires that such decisions must be made with a deep understanding and appreciation of the broader global context. It is essential to recognize that, in the long term, the prosperity and sustainability of the agricultural sector worldwide are vital for the future of agriculture and farmers in Europe too.

The need to consider the agricultural well-being of the global community is not merely a strategic imperative, but above all a moral one. Indeed, this moral imperative is particularly pressing for Europe, given its pivotal role in the global economic and financial order.



Justice as a guiding principle

Unless and until a framework of just relationships among nations can be established, the fabric of global society will continue to experience disruptions and crises with far-reaching ramifications for all countries involved. In the arena of food systems, one of the numerous implications of the principle of justice is that trade is carried out in a manner that is fair and beneficial to all, and importantly, does not result in any one country or region becoming overly dependent on another. Efforts must be made so that every country - not only those privileged in the existing economic order - can work towards food sovereignty, ensure its resilience to ecological, economic, or other pressures, and maintain the ability to make independent decisions.

Revisiting assumptions related to economic system

One overarching feature of current economic systems is the assumption that competition and the relentless pursuit of growth are inherent to material well-being. This assumption shapes agricultural systems in ways which promote harmful incentives and leave farmers struggling with seemingly incompatible objectives, such as environmental protection and economic security.

Conversations about agriculture should therefore investigate alternative societal and economic models that align with all of humanity's needs.

Farmers at the heart of shaping agricultural policy and food systems

One of the predominant themes emerging from recent discussions on agriculture is the pervasive sense of powerlessness felt by many farmers. This sentiment is especially acute among small-scale farmers, who often find themselves at the mercy of various economic, social, and environmental forces, and who face immense pressure from external factors, including the market and the supply chains.

In such complex and challenging circumstances, farmers struggle to maintain autonomy over their production processes and to make decisions that best suit their unique reality and the needs of the environment. This leads to overarching questions: how can the needs of European farmers engaged in all scales of production become central to agricultural deliberations and policy-making? And how can these needs be aligned with the interests of the worldwide farming community, as well as global ecosystems?

A new generation of farmers

Addressing the challenge of an ageing farming population necessitates adjustments across many policy sectors. It especially requires ensuring that farming is an economically viable and desirable prospect. While there is much to be said, we wish to highlight the role of education in particular.

Central to raising a new generation of farmers is an educational system that emphasises the nobility of farming and that encourages youth to apply their intellectual and scientific capabilities towards the development of new, sustainable and context-appropriate technologies. Importantly, education should link the choice to become a farmer with a higher purpose and a vision for social change. Young people are often motivated by the desire to make a positive impact on the world. By framing farming as a pathway to apply one's intellect and creativity to, for example, reverse biodiversity loss, prevent environmental degradation or eliminate social inequities, the aspirations of youth can be aligned with the needs of our agricultural systems.

A global and cross-disciplinary conversation

The complex nature of agriculture's future, as highlighted by the various aspects mentioned above, underscores the necessity for continued and substantive dialogue among actors from various policy sectors. Such a dialogue should encompass participants from the grassroots level to policymakers, extending beyond occasional events and especially beyond European perspectives.

It is particularly crucial to explore creative avenues through which Europe can better understand the reality of the agricultural sector beyond its borders, in particular by engaging meaningfully with agricultural and other relevant stakeholders worldwide.

Such ongoing engagement will enable the integration of diverse perspectives, facilitate continuous reassessment of policies, and support the gradual refinement of a collective vision for the future of global agriculture.

