

Keynote: A Farmer's View

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I thank you for this opportunity to address this distinguished gathering. I am deeply moved and honored by this gesture of good will from the international community, and organizers of this conference.

INTRODUCTION

Without becoming involved in technicalities as a practicing small farmer, I would like to suggest that sustainable farming is a system of farming or a "package of farming practices" that at least maintains but hopefully builds the productive potential of the land.

Sustainable farming is most likely to be practiced by those who love the land and will continue to do so even when it costs them money, time and personal effort. It would of course help if government could support with appropriate capacity building, training initiatives, financial and other incentives, and generally supportive legislation. It goes without saying that the constructive involvement of women, as is the case with us, and the youth can mean the difference between success and failure.

Constraints

In 1913 an Act, known as the Native Land Act, No 27 of 1913, was passed by the South African Parliament, and subsequent amendment Acts were passed, to confine black people to occupy 13% surface of the land, and the minority whites 87% of the land area. Our black people were forcefully removed from their fertile land they were farming and had to farm on communal land that later became known as 'Homelands'.

The small farmer community in my country were confined to farm on communal land, and allocated 1/2 to 10 hectare including women, with the lucky individuals getting up to 30 hectares.

The small farmers and women gardeners in my country do not find it easy to farm sustainably. The following are probably some of the constraints facing them:

- ◆ Communal instead of individual land ownership and the relevant problems of group decision-making;
- ◆ Insecurity of tenure and resultant collateral implications of being unable to get finance from financial institutions;
- ◆ Difficulties with the integration of farming systems into balanced self-sustaining units due to the fragmentation of individual interests; and
- ◆ Land invasion by elements not welcomed by the local communities including illegal immigrants from neighboring countries;

Most of these problems relate to the policies of the previous oppressive Apartheid dispensation.

Although the present democratically elected Government of Khehla Mandela is trying to do its best to correct the injustices of the past regime, due to a lack of financial resources, and there being so many injustices needing to be corrected, the process is very slow.

OVERVIEW

South Africa is a country that has many dichotomies. It is richly endowed in some natural resources, but poor in others. Climatically it is characterized by great variabilities while its soils in many ways are unique, although only a small percentage of the country can be regarded as having agriculturally high potential soils.

The condition and management of the natural agricultural resources has become an increasing matter of concern in recent years, due to pressure resulting from an expanding population and economic development. There is little scope for the expansion of productive land and we are thus faced with a need to increase production from the land, as well as share the land already in use by commercial farmers.

In developing national policies on sustainable resource use, it has been realized that causes of resource degradation are very complicated and that a multitude of issues needs to be considered in a holistic and integrated way. Our natural resources differ so widely from those in the USA and Europe that most conservation technologies from those countries cannot simply be applied in South Africa. Socio-economic and cultural conditions in Africa are also very different. Our policies and programs need to be based on our conditions, and be realistic, for over idealistic policies and program, which are not sustainable, will only cause further harm.

National policy on the promotion of sustainable resource use recognizes the resource user as the primary custodian of the land. Future policies and legislation can strengthen the rights of land users and facilitate their assumption of responsibility for the sustainable use of natural resources. This is an important part of the South African Landcare Program.

Some positive aspects:

Our present democratically elected Government and particularly the National and Provincial Departments of Agriculture render valuable assistance to the small farmers of our area.

We have:

- ◆ The R2.45million Mlondozi Liming Project with 22 000 tons of lime delivered on site free of charge by the present Government. Extensive on site evaluations are done by the Agricultural Research Council, while a participative Extension Strategy is followed. The South African Society for Agricultural Extension nominated the project for the prestigious Certificate for Outstanding Team Extension at their Annual National Conference three weeks ago in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The project was initiated after extensive soil surveys made in the area by local Extension staff indicated a serious soil acidity problem;
- ◆ The multi-million Rand Elukwatini-Mswati land rehabilitation project aims at the physical and biological

reclamation of mostly communal degraded land in the area. It was a belief of scientists that when farming interests are small it is important that one plans the entire catchment rather than individual small farms;

- ◆ A large number of other projects, such as women's community gardens, broiler projects, fisheries etc., addressing the household food security are in place, but there is still a lack funds because commercial banks will not fund due to a lack of collateral security; and
- ◆ The Landcare South Africa initiative, which at this stage is directed at creating greater public awareness through dissemination of information, including at schools, is being observed by the small farmers with great expectations.

Development Priorities

Development issues have been debated at length at farmer level and at Provincial and National forums. There is a general consensus amongst our farmers that the resolution of the land tenure issue is the top priority for all of us.

We are not convinced that communal farming can really ever become truly commercial farming. A second priority we would like to see in action is on skills development, followed by strengthening of infrastructure, particularly roads and electricity, and facilitation of markets and affordable finance.

I would like to end my introductory remarks by sincerely making an earnest appeal to the International Community at large to look seriously into the ways and means of giving us support financially, technically or otherwise, so that we can help ourselves to farm sustainably for food security.

Comment on the 10th ISCO Conference

This comment is made after having listened to a number of speakers from different countries of the World, and also having had an opportunity to travel on Wednesday to examine the conservation activities in the Corn Belt of Indiana on soil erosion research, soils and geology,

conservation tillage, precision farming, wetland restoration, urban sprawl, landscape hydrology and soil erosion.

I was highly moved and taken up by the fact that your farms are so well organized and upgraded that I would have found it difficult to litter with an empty tin of cold drink because of the cleanliness.

I am convinced that this Organization should be upgraded to play an important part as a mirror whereby farmers and persons working to promote agriculture can clearly look and examine themselves in that mirror to be able to adjust and correct their mistakes. It must be a forum where the agricultural community can examine themselves and identify their weaknesses, and where the International Farming Community and the persons working to promote agriculture can meet to iron out their problems jointly and concurrently.

Amongst all the very important papers delivered at the Congress, I was highly impressed and moved by the presentation of Bruce Moore from Rome, Italy, on his paper 'Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty'. Amongst all that he said in his paper, I would like to quote the following: "However then and now, land tenure and property rights touch on the fundamental inequities in rural society. Much of the cultivated, fertile land is held by a small number of powerful landowners and elites. It follows that tenurial security and property rights can reduce land hold inequalities, prevent conflicts, contribute to improved food security and increase the income of the rural poor. Secure access to land can catalyze practices of sustainable resource use and soil management including combating desertification."

I must thank the International Community for having listened to my small and humble remarks.

Last of all I wonder why we cannot stick out our necks and call this organization "SUSTAINING ISCO GLOBAL FARMING FORUM".

I thank you.