HOW WORRIED SHOULD WE BE ABOUT OUR FOOD AND OUR FUTURE?



Reflections on World Food Day by
Dr. MJ Khan, Executive Director, World Agriculture Forum

For the past three years, I have been participating in the World Food Forum at FAO headquarters in Rome. Over the last one year, I have travelled to almost 30 countries, holding extensive consultations with key stakeholders in each. Wherever I go, I hear growing concerns about the future of food. But I also meet hundreds of people determined to build a better future. That combination of concern and determination should guide us this World Food Day.



My recent participation at the Africa Food Systems Forum in Kigali, the Committee on World Food Security in Rome, the Brazil-Arab Economic Forum in São Paulo, and the WAFI Conference in Beijing has reinforced the urgency of action. Climate change is already manifesting itself through droughts, floods, extreme heat and unpredictable growing seasons. Conflicts disrupt supplies of food, fertilisers and energy, with consequences extending far beyond the countries directly involved.

Degrading soils threaten the very foundation of future harvests. The scale of the challenge is sobering. UN estimates indicate that hundreds of millions of people continue to face hunger, while billions cannot afford a healthy diet. Producing more food matters, but equally important is ensuring that nutritious food reaches families at prices they can afford, even when climate shocks or conflicts disrupt supplies.

How should nations respond? Every country needs stronger domestic capacity to feed its people. Agricultural trade remains essential, especially where land and water are limited. But nations must also invest in local and regional production, storage, processing and diversified sources of supply. Relying heavily on imports from a few distant markets leaves populations vulnerable when those markets are disrupted.

The challenge is especially pressing for the Arab world, with its land and water constraints, and for African countries striving to transform their vast agricultural potential into dependable food supplies, jobs and incomes. Each region has different strengths and needs, but both require investment, technology, stronger markets and partnerships aligned with national priorities. The growing urgency among Arab countries to strengthen food security through domestic production, overseas agricultural investments and long-term supply arrangements is particularly noteworthy



Dr. MJ Khan
Executive Director,
World Agriculture Forum
ed@worldagricultureforum.org

WORLD AGRICULTURE FORUM





We must also recognise soil health as a fundamental food security priority. Farmers cannot be expected to adapt to changing weather while the land on which they depend continues to degrade. Restoring soil health, managing water wisely and developing climate-resilient crops require sustained support. Food and agriculture deserve a stronger place in global climate negotiations, with COP commitments translated into finance, technology and practical support for farmers.

Recent international declarations, including those emerging from BRICS deliberations, have also recognised the importance of agricultural resilience, food security and smallholder livelihoods.

Yet there are compelling reasons for hope. Startups, driven by passion, determination and entrepreneurial spirit, are writing new chapters in agriculture. Through technology, innovation and new business models, they are addressing longstanding challenges in farming, water management, storage, finance and market access. Equally inspiring are farmers themselves, experimenting with innovative practices and delivering remarkable results, often with modest resources and limited institutional support.

These innovations should not remain confined to one farm, district or country. We need to identify promising ideas, help test and strengthen them, and bring them onto global platforms so that others can benefit. FAO, IFAD, the World Bank, IFC, CGIAR and the World Agriculture Forum have different but complementary strengths. Working in cohesion, alongside governments, businesses, research institutions and farmer organisations, we can connect local solutions with research, investment and opportunities for wider adoption.

At WAF, we are planning a Global Soil Health Coalition and a Global Agro Trade and Food Security Council to advance this cooperation. We are also moving towards a Global Soil Health Summit in Brazil, an Arab Agriculture and Food Systems Summit in Abu Dhabi, and an Africa Agribusiness and Investment Summit in Kigali. These platforms must ultimately be judged not by the number of participants or declarations, but by the partnerships they build and the tangible results they deliver.

Alongside these initiatives, WAF is working to establish national platforms in 60 agriculturally important countries. By engaging governments and aligning with national priorities, we aim to strengthen cooperation on policy, agricultural trade, technology and investment. Through FarmerPlus, we seek to make farmers more visible, better connected and better equipped to access knowledge, services, markets and finance. Global and regional partnerships must ultimately translate into meaningful support and opportunities at the farm level.

So, how worried should we be about our food and our future? Worried enough to act urgently, invest wisely and work together with greater purpose and determination. The challenges are formidable, but so are the ideas, technologies, innovations and human capabilities available to address them.

On this World Food Day, the message from my travels, consultations and interactions across continents is clear: no country, institution or sector can address these challenges alone. We need to act, and act urgently, in tandem and in unison, with a renewed spirit of cooperation and partnership.

Our food future is not predetermined. It will be shaped by the choices we make, the partnerships we build and the actions we take today.