



Sustainable Food and Agriculture and the SDGs

Brief summary of discussion. December 8, 2016. Rotterdam.

Introduction

Forty representatives of civil society, government, academia and business exchanged thoughts on the Dutch food and agriculture system in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They gathered during a sub-session of the Transform Your World Event, organized by the SDG Charter Foundation, the Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition (DSGC) and the study association of Erasmus School of Economics (EFR) at the Erasmus University. What was discussed? Participants talked about the current status and challenges with regards to the Sustainable Development Goals and possible solutions to close the gap. The scope was both agriculture and food production and consumption within as well as outside the Netherlands. As a next step organizations will explore to set up an SDG partnership to coordinate joint efforts aimed at realizing the SDGs.

Status quo and challenges

Goal 2 of the SDGs is specifically dedicated to zero hunger. In the report of CBS 'Measuring the SDGs: a first picture of the Netherlands' (Meten van SDGs: een eerste beeld voor Nederland, 2016), obesity and nitrogen, phosphate, methane emissions during food production are mentioned as challenges. The discussion about the status quo and challenges centred around production and consumption.

Production Speakers emphasize that many SDGs are related to the food system, like the ones focused on life on land, sea, partnership and climate change. Much of the existing Dutch government targets and policies address the SDGs. However, a participant remarks that the measurement of targets is not yet optimal and that existing policies and practices will not meet the targets. One participant observes that local bottom up initiatives are not sufficiently taken serious, despite their potential to contribute to the SDGs.

Within the Netherlands, the horti- and agriculture is efficient, but not sufficiently sustainable. Issues mentioned in (livestock) production were nitrogen and CO₂ emissions, biodiversity, water quality, waste and phosphates scarcity and emissions. A quarter of carbon emissions and 60% biodiversity loss is related to agriculture. So called lock-ins prevent change from happen. Producers who want to change feel price pressure and limited willingness to pay from their customers. This is partially caused by the power asymmetry between producers and retailers. Also, specialization leads to narrow scope and prevents system perspective.

Internationally, one participant questions the value of Dutch export in the first place. At the same time, the Netherlands is considered by others to be an international expert on smart and efficient production and as such a potential contributor to the realization of the SDGs. And according to participants small farmers have an enormous role to play. A gender lens is important as 70% of farmers is female.

Consumption The role of consumers are important to consider. Although obesity is a growing problem, hunger is a persisting problem according to participants. In addition, participants see that more biological and in general sustainable food is consumed in the Netherlands. At the same time, not all consumers do that. In addition, willingness to pay more is perceived as a challenge. A lack of awareness about what is sustainable and biological food is observed. Finally, participants noted that eat consumption is not steered on by government.

Solution

An important focus of the SDG Charter Coalition and the DSGC is to facilitate solutions and partnerships. The final part of the discussion focussed on a wide variety of possible solutions to contribute to reaching the SDGs were suggested. Five directions were discussed as possible entry points for solutions:

1. **A joint vision.** A joint (integrated) vision is needed that even goes beyond 2030. In the Netherlands, the Energy Agreement (Energie Akkoord) is a successful example which could be mimicked. The Netherlands has expertise on smart and efficient production and can contribute with this to the SDGs. A joint vision could include amongst others the following:
 - A link to the circular economy;
 - A broad vision, focused on impacts;
 - Scenario's on how economy would look like if it was 100% sustainable;
 - An integrated approach with multiple indicators;
 - A link between food production, climate and migration;
 - An overview of regulations that enable and hamper progress.
2. **An inclusive approach.** Stakeholders in the whole value chain, including consumers, municipalities, local communities (break lock ins), relation with circular economy. With regards to the government, ministries should address challenges in collaboration. The Ministry of Healthcare and Economic Affairs for example can collaborate on healthy food. Involve retail and producers.
3. **Improved communication.** The right framing and communication between stakeholders is important, as this determines which solutions are considered. Also, definition of what is biological and sustainable. Science based approach on the level of LCA. Mind shift should focus: not only industrial large scale agriculture. Also systems like joint veggie gardens, community based agriculture. Education on food to children and consumers.
4. **Improved production.** Farmers should feed the soil, in addition to feeding people. Rich agroforestry, mixed cropping, not just monoculture and mass production. Biological agriculture is an example of how agriculture can be done sustainably. Participants had discussion on whether this holds on all dimensions and whether sufficiently includes animals and health. The provision of financial support and an alternative plan for farmers that want to transform their practice is mentioned as a solution.
5. **Improved consumption.** External costs of import should be considered. Charge external costs of production or other financial incentives. No subsidies for unsustainable products. Higher VAT for meat. Participants mention reduction of meat consumption as a way to reduce footprints and saving costs.

Do you want to be involved?

Participants indicated that they are interested in exploring to set up an SDG Charter Partnership on Agriculture and Food. In the beginning of 2017, Emma Klamer (Natuur & Milieu), Hilde Engels (Natuur & Milieu) and Michel Scholte (True Price) will explore with participants how this can take shape. Do you want to be involved or if you have any questions/remarks regarding this summary, please contact Rosalie de Bruijn: info@sdgcharter.nl.