

SPEAKING POINTS ANIMAL TASK FORCE 5th SEMINAR

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Thank you for inviting me here,

I happen to love meat. I also love cheese. But since I consider myself a green liberal politician I want to enjoy my meat and cheese with a good conscience. That's one reason why I accepted the invitation to speak at this seminar.

The title of this seminar is new global challenges for animal productions. And there are indeed challenges.

There is growing global middle class, longing for more and more protein as their income rises. There is a rising global demand, a good thing for all the producers of animal products. But this demand must be matched with a sustainable supply. The people in the middle class doesn't only get richer, they also get more well informed, aware and they can afford to be critical to what type of products they choose to buy.

The global food production is in many ways similar to any industrial process. The main goal is to produce large amounts of food to a growing population at a low cost. That will still be very important, but the industry must adapt to changing consumer demands. Global food business must be transparent, must be able to prove that the animals are kept in reasonable conditions. Unnecessary suffering for the animals must be avoided. Otherwise consumers will look to other sources of protein. To achieve this and still keep up production, we need good animal husbandry practices. I think European food production is better than in many areas in the world, but it can always get better. This can be achieved by stricter legislation, but the sector also has to respond to the changing consumer demands.

There is another even bigger challenge:

Many thousand years ago, mankind settled, became farmers and started to domesticate animals. That is probably the most important moment in human history (although of course it wasn't a single moment) That was the start of our modern civilisation. It also started a new era for another global player: the bacterial strains. Keeping animals close to humans created diseases that didn't exist before and mankind took some hard punches from this relationship. The explorers from Europe didn't kill the people in the civilizations of indigenous people in South America, the bacteria that the Europeans had created from intense animal husbandry and brought to the new continent killed them.

We face a similar as threat now, hundreds of years later, when irresponsible large-scale use of antibiotics creates antimicrobial resistance. I assume that you all are aware of the catastrophic scenarios we are facing here unless we take immediate action? Predictions point at a situation in 2050 where antimicrobial resistance will be even deadlier than cancer. The O'Neill report published in 2014, predict a risk of a 2 to 3,5 % negative impact on global GDP. This calls for immediate action. We need to enforce a prudent use of antibiotics in food production and the political pressure is building up at the moment.

In order to have a responsible use of antibiotics in animal productions there must be better animal husbandry. And that is only possible to achieve through sharing of best practise, research and good monitoring. As a politician I will fight for tougher legislation in this field but I also count on your cooperation. At the moment we are negotiating the veterinary medicine file and the medicated feed file in parliament. We must ban the routine prophylactic use of antibiotics. Some member states have proven that this is possible. I notice that the Dutch farmers have decreased their use of antibiotics quite dramatically in recent years.

Another mayor challenge is of course global warming. Agriculture must, as all sectors in society, contribute to lowering emissions. I believe we don't have all the answer to this, we need more research. The sector must communicate very clearly on what is possible to achieve in terms of lowering emissions.

I know that there is a lot of knowledge out there, I think there are good solutions to these problems, but we face big challenges and they can only be solved through good cooperation between the productions sector and politics.