



*EU Environmental Policy Briefing\**

**UN FAO High-Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy, 3-5 June 2008, Rome**

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The focus of the UN FAO Summit in Rome this week, attended by Heads of State from around the world, anti poverty campaigners, and food and farming groups, has been on finding ways of providing secure sources of food for a growing population, by examining the causes for the global food crisis, and considering, from a global perspective, the potential means of dealing with these. Although the Summit was planned 12 months ago, food prices globally have increased 43 per cent since then, and it has been seen by organisers as an opportunity to re-launch the fight against poverty. A number of expert meetings and stakeholder consultations were convened earlier this year, from which a synthesis document has been produced, pulling together possible options for responding to the key issues. The document reviews the current state of knowledge regarding major challenges facing the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors, including: changing vulnerabilities in the food system; impacts on food supply and demand; commodity prices; nutrition and food safety; and the stability of the food supply system<sup>1</sup>. During the Summit, participants reviewed the strategies, policies and programmes proposed within this document, with a view to identifying relevant recommendations, which will be set out in a declaration on 'world food security and required actions', the publication of which is believed to be forthcoming.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon told the Summit that food production would have to rise by 50 per cent by 2030<sup>2</sup> to meet the rising demand for food, the key question being how this could be achieved. Alongside the Director-General of the FAO, Jacques Diouf, they cited the food crisis as an opportunity to review agricultural policies and invest in agricultural research and development<sup>3</sup>. The potential to increase the amount of land under production was acknowledged to be limited (although there is still some potential in Africa) and therefore 80 – 85 per cent of additional food production will need to come from increases in productivity per hectare. In order to achieve this, some have called for a second 'green revolution', particularly focused on Africa, which aims to increase fertiliser use, chemical inputs and irrigation, coupled with higher levels of investment in research and development

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to produce, for example, better hybrid crops that are resistant to drought. GM crops are seen to have a key role here.

Others, however, do not agree that food production needs to rise so steeply to meet the current food crisis, highlighting the fact that the key causes of the current situation are not lack of food, but a result of speculation on the food commodity markets, changing food habits and a series of natural disasters linked to climate change. According to this perspective, such significant hikes in production are not considered as imperative as other responses, including changing diets and reduced wastage and consumption patterns. Action Aid have stressed the critical importance of ensuring fair and open access to food to alleviate food poverty, and the need for investment to encourage the more sustainable and longer-term production of food at the local level.

### ***Biofuels***

A running theme of conflict throughout the Summit centred on the impact of the production of biofuel feedstocks on agricultural land availability and food prices. Dr. Diouf, Director-General of the FAO, opened the Summit on this theme, vociferously attacking the logic behind subsidies and policies that support the use of land for fuel over food. This view was supported by many developing nations and in principle by Mr Ban Ki-Moon, who pointed to the need to reach a 'greater degree of consensus on biofuel policies'<sup>4</sup>. The FAO believes that biofuels are responsible for 30 per cent of recent food price rises, but the US says this figure is only 3 per cent<sup>5</sup>, and the US, Brazil and some pro-biofuel European countries disputed the link between biofuel production and the food crisis, arguing that biofuels are being used as a scapegoat when other causes, such as changing consumer patterns, poor harvests and speculation on food commodity markets are far more significant. An open letter from the EU, US and Canadian biofuels associations stressed this standpoint, while an open letter from Oxfam and Action Aid called for the abandonment of biofuel targets and subsidies.

Given the lack of agreement on the 'biofuels versus food' debate, the Summit's declaration has not been able to include a firm recommendation on biofuels. The draft declaration recognised that biofuels present 'challenges' but also 'opportunities'<sup>5</sup>, and participants have agreed to establish an 'international dialogue' on the subject to continue the debate<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Agricultural Subsidies***

Developing nations called for the elimination of agricultural subsidies and import regulations, dubbed the 'absurd protectionist policies of the rich countries' by Brazil<sup>7</sup>, while various speakers, mainly from developing nations, highlighted the continued need to ensure that small-scale farmers could access international markets<sup>3</sup>.

COPA-COGECA, however, asked world leaders to promote food security through ensuring market stability and securing prices that allow farmers in Europe to make a living<sup>8</sup>. The need to retain agricultural support and even to allow for the recoupling of payments to some forms of production has been the focus of their response to the CAP Health Check proposals. This position, however, is counter to the future direction of travel set out for the CAP in the Health Check proposals, published on 20 May. As Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fischer-Boel reiterated in her speech at the Conference on Food Security in Ljubljana on 2 June, the European Commission's position is that agricultural trade is essential to address food security issues and that

this goal should not be compromised by a drive for self-sufficiency. However, the market cannot tackle all issues and, in line with the EU position in the Doha Round talks a reasonable level of border protection needs to be retained, whilst also continuing to maintain a high level of agricultural imports.

### ***Technological Developments and GMOs***

The debate on how to increase food production has centred predominantly around the ways in which crop yields can be increased. While some have advocated a second green revolution, many have highlighted that the current pressures of climate change (in relation to water scarcity and the impacts of fertiliser and pesticide use), and rising oil and gas prices, mean that technologies to increase crop yields must distance themselves from increased irrigation, fertiliser and pesticide use. Dr. Diouf called for, ‘Governments, supported by their international partners... [to] undertake the necessary public investment and provide a favourable environment for private investments’<sup>6</sup>. Suggested developments include improving water management through more expensive irrigation sprinkler and drip systems, and more efficient fertiliser use. However, the hotly debated technological topic at the Summit surrounded the use of GMO techniques to increase crop yields. The US stated that crop yields could not be increased without this technology, a viewpoint met by considerable European opposition.

### ***Humanitarian Aid***

Dr. Diouf appealed to world leaders for US\$30 billion a year in aid to increase crop production and provide long-term food security, using ‘partnership agreements...between countries that have financial resources, management capabilities and technologies, and countries that have land, water and human resources’<sup>9</sup>. Donations of food aid and contributions to farm projects were made, with the UK promising \$590m, the Netherlands \$75m, Spain \$773m over the next four years, and France \$1.5bn over the next five years<sup>10</sup>.

Participants stressed the importance of a number of factors, including: a focus on small-scale farmers; good governance; streamlined and accessible funding mechanisms; international trade reform; and the continued development of policies linking water, energy and food. Whilst it was recognised that aid was important to solve short-term crises in developing nations, the need to develop longer-term structural mechanisms to improve food security was seen as critical. This message is consistent with Mariann Fischer Boel’s speech in Ljubljana, where she announced that the European Commission is looking to contribute to humanitarian aid operations as a short-term response, but that long-term solutions must be developed based on a detailed analysis of the issues and drivers behind the crisis.

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Ian Fenn, Policy Analyst  
[ifenn@ieep.eu](mailto:ifenn@ieep.eu)

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