

Do You Want to Tackle Climate Change in Times of Pandemic? Roll Up Your Sleeves and Put Your Fingers in the Soil!

by Theo de Jager, President, World Farmers' Organisation

Once Shakespeare said, *"There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries"*. For almost one year, COVID-19 has struck the world like that flood and left nothing unchanged. It has disrupted the way we do business, the way we think about our jobs and families, the way we generate income, the way we think about health and, above all, our vision of food.

Before COVID-19 outbreak invested us, "protecting the Planet while ensuring Food Security" was priority number one in the international community. Now that the pandemic is here, it is in our duties to persist. It is key to leverage this moment to build back better and incorporate a reinvigorated approach to both mitigation and adaptation, without losing sight of the complex multiple challenges we must face, from ensuring food security for a growing global population to enhancing biodiversity.

In fact, we have realized that climate change is one fundamental piece of a very complex balance to be found in the framework of Sustainable Food Systems. Global challenges, like climate change and COVID-19, show that a radical shift towards a systemic approach is necessary if we want to be successful. And the key ingredient is a coordinated, mutually beneficial and trustworthy engagement of the different stakeholders in different sectors of the whole food value chain at multiple levels.

It is essential that as farmers, we take our commitment, our needs, expectations and answers into the global platforms where the difficult questions around sustainability are being asked because no one knows what can be done better than ourselves. No one knows what is feasible and sustainable on the farm, better than we do. And there is no better institution to hold us accountable than ourselves. It is time that the farmers in Oceania learn from the farmers in North America and those in India, and Asia learn from those in Latin America and Africans learn from the colleagues in Europe and vice versa. And that we come up with far made solutions to all these difficult questions.



Theo de Jager is the President of the World Farmers' Organisation (WFO) since June 2017 and former President of the Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU, 2013-2018) and the Pan African Farmers Union (PAFO, 2014-2017).

He has farmed in South Africa since 1997 (in the South African Lowveld region) with timber and subtropical fruits (avocados, mangoes and macadamia nuts).

“ No one knows what is feasible and sustainable on the farm, better than we do. And there is no better institution to hold us accountable than ourselves. ”

That is why in the World Farmers' Organisation, in 2018 we have launched [The Climakers](#), a global farmers driven initiative, which takes us into every corner of the globe. We get farmers together, and we ask them, "What do you think you can do on your farm to trade a little lighter across your pastures and to make a smaller footprint across your fields?". The Climakers are a multistakeholder alliance where farmers join hands with all other actors in the value chain, research, civil society, in order to promote better national commitments (the Nationally Determined Contributions, NDCs) and ensure long-term sustainability on a healthier planet.

Thinking about climate change in the perspective of Food Systems, there is one entry point to all the challenges we are meant to face that is particularly dear to every farmer of the world, being small or big, located in the global North or South: soil health. Healthy soils are the real capital of our farms and also the first asset of sustainable and climate-resilient food systems. Whether you farm livestock or vegetables, fruits or crops, at the bottom of that all it is healthy soils. We, as farmers, we are the ones who eke out a living with our fingers in the soil.

As a major carbon sink, soil health is an entry point to multiple benefits, from addressing climate change mitigation through sequestration to strengthening resilience, enhancing biodiversity, improving food security and nutrition, as well as improving the livelihood of farmers and rural communities.

We, the farmers, dream of the possibility of having a global program to capture enough carbon and put it back into the soils to take our atmosphere back to the condition it was before the Industrial revolution, proving to the world that agriculture is the solution to our challenges and that investing in agriculture is key to have a healthy planet for healthy people.

Farmers stand ready to do their part!

Dream with us, roll up your sleeves and put your fingers in the soil.

