



*A Message from the WFO President to
all the farmers, friends of farmers, and
other stakeholders in the food systems
who are in Rome now or taking part
digitally*

I wish I was there in Rome this week. I wish I could have listened to the wisdom of global leaders in our food systems in this most important event in the history of mankind, where we spare a moment to reflect on how we produce, procure, process, distribute, trade, store, buy and sell, and eat our food. What a brave step it is to join hands across continents, cities, and the planet's rural spaces, and across so many professions to take a bird's eye view on our food systems and to say: "Hey, we can do better! We MUST do better!"

We can't have 900 million people in families who don't know what they will eat today while 35% of the food we produce is lost or wasted. Not in the magical digital world of 2021.

You can't but notice the brokenness of our food systems if you measure the distribution of risk and reward in the value chains, and the centralisation of power in the flow from the farm gate to the consumer's plate, especially in the processing of fast foods or "food of mass destruction". Yes, food is big business in our cities, but every farmer, no matter how small his or her operation is, is a business too, providing a livelihood to a family. There must be fairness and a liveable income to be earned for all the stakeholders in our food systems.

We must decrease our footprint on nature, biodiversity, and climate. We are probably the last generation who can still do something about it, for the next one might for ever be too late. In a joint venture between farmers, fisherfolk, scientists and agribusiness we must find a way to produce more on less with less. Well, actually the technology is there, it's just not properly matched up with policies and investment conditions conducive to growth in the agricultural sector. In that sense the future is already here; it's just poorly distributed.

I think the time has come to say loud and clear that much of the poverty and hunger which mess up our food systems, drive deforestation, biodiversity loss and fires, and keep small producers unbankable, uninsurable, unfeasible, uncompetitive, and unsustainable in their businesses is the corruption, human rights abuses and looting of resources by policy makers who refuse to be held accountable.



WORLD FARMERS' ORGANISATION

It's not rocket science to match the relationship between food, water, climate- and nature problems, lack of access to energy, and poverty and need, with the new generation of gangster states in whose interest it is to keep their people uneducated and poor.

Even before we reaffirm our joint commitment in many words to the Sustainable Development Goals, let's dust off the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and start keeping governments responsible and accountable to that.

Their conduct impacts on all of us too and obstructs the very essence of what we need to accomplish in the Food Systems Summit.

Those are the discussions I will miss this week in Rome! There are enough strong farmers leaders who will articulate our dreams and aspirations, and who have mandates to commit nearly all farmers in the world to launch the biggest soil health revolution this planet has ever seen. You will hear their commitments to each leave the small patch of the globe for which they are temporary care takers in a better condition to the next generation than which they found it in. You will hear it from women leaders of national and continental farmers organisations and from young farmers who already do what my generation of farmers only dream of.

The challenges we need to tackle don't recognize international boundaries. Our responses should also not.

I'm not in Rome because I'm in a grey hospital ward in Pretoria with many other patients who never thought that a global pandemic could run across the globe so fast, so unforeseen, and unpredictable, and so out of control.

The old man who didn't make it through the night said yesterday he couldn't believe that the human race is so vulnerable, even though we are so smart. I answered him that the whole planet is so vulnerable, but that there are enough influential smart people who took it upon themselves to roll up their sleeves to dig for the solutions. He listened intensely, nodded his head and then said in Sepedi, the local language of the area of Limpopo where I farm: "May God bless them with the wisdom and insight to find the best solutions, and grant them the power and will to take it to action. You promise to pass it on to them!"

So, I pass on the message of the old Malome to all of you, my friends, and colleagues in Rome and across the world who take part in the Pre-Summit.

Spare me a pizza!

The President
Theo de Jager