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Feeding an ever-growing population

Klaus Heinzlbecker

With an increasing world population and trends that cut down the amount of arable land, the best-case scenario is that by 2030 500 million people will be undernourished. Food will become a serious issue in the next years and decades. That is why Klaus Heinzlbecker, former strategy director of BASF, calls for action.

At the moment, 10 million people die because of undernutrition. While 15 million people die because of overnutrition. Something is clearly wrong with how food is distributed and things will continue to get worse.

To begin with, Klaus Heinzlbecker summed up a few trends that are worrying when it comes to the nutrition of the world population. By 2025, two thirds of the people will live in megacities, which means that 6,000 tons of food will have to be imported every day. By 2030, meat consumption will have doubled because of the increase of meat consumption in countries like China. This will also have an impact on energy and water use, and cropland will become less and less available. Food will become scarcer and thus food prices will rise.

► Solving food scarcity

Fortunately this scarcity has already led to creativity. Solutions like urban farming, precision agriculture, aquaculture, synthetic meat, Africa as the future greenhouse of the world and genetically modified foods show that there are in fact innovative possibilities. And hopefully they will lead to new sustainable technologies for the 'Green Value Chain', that will also consider the consumer perspective in matter of safety and health. New business models, for example in pharma, will shape the future of this value chain.

► Chemical industry as part of the solution

"To overcome these food challenges", Heinzlbecker said, "holistic thinking is needed, an integrated view. Businesses need to create an open dialogue to reduce innovation barriers. They need to invest in education and skills to be able to produce healthy and sustainable foods at a reasonable price. Also trade barriers have to be opened up, so that fair trade also gets a fair chance."

"The chemical industry has the ability to contribute to all these steps. Crop protection, fertilisers, feed and food additives, more efficient use of water, they will all play a crucial role in overcoming the food challenges in front of us", Heinzlbecker concluded.
