

**Andrä Rupprechter**

**Statement by the Austrian Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management**

Director-General,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Heads of Delegation,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to seize this opportunity to **congratulate** Graziano da Silva on his **re-election**. I would like to express our appreciation to Mr Graziano da Silva for the FAO's Work in eradicating hunger and malnutrition.

Mr Director-General, you have sharpened the FAO's focus on **nutrition** and I am strongly convinced that **sustainable agricultural policies have to become increasingly nutrition-sensitive**.

Only by strengthening rural resilience, can we address challenges such as **climate change** and its devastating impact on the livelihood of people especially in developing countries.

It is therefore of utmost importance that **the climate change negotiations in Paris in December** have a successful outcome.

I would also like to thank FAO for **presenting the State of Food and Agriculture Report (SOFA 2015)**. SOFA recalls the persistence of poverty and food insecurity, and **puts the emphasis on rural areas**.

Our present focus on the **role of social protection** in fighting hunger and poverty is linked to agriculture in vital rural areas. **My country, Austria, is a country of rural areas**. One of my top priorities is making sure that **rural areas** are strong enough to face future challenges.

**Social protection systems** have to maximize the impact on resilience and food security and nutrition:

- We need an **intelligent management of our living environment** in the spirit of sustainability;
- We need the **necessary infrastructure** for rural areas
- We must ensure protection against **natural hazards**. Prevention is better than cure!

- We must **link sectors such as education, health and agriculture** to ensure employment and social welfare in rural areas. We have to enhance access, especially women's access, to markets and financial services;
- We need **social services, such as child care and care for the elderly and disabled people.**

For this last pillar, distinguished colleagues, let me present our programme on "**Green Care**". It comprises **a bridge between social protection and agriculture** and food system policies.

Austrian farmers' nutritional and environmental experience has been **broadened by a social component: Green Care.**

Green Care constitutes an **additional source of income for farmers** in the context of diversification, alongside tourism opportunities and direct marketing.

Green Care focuses on four pillars: **education, therapy, nursing & care and social work;**

"Courageous changes" are necessary. We must take responsibility for God's creation which has been entrusted to us and must pass it on – unharmed-

Let me point out **one more challenge, particularly close to my heart:**

In the light of global development and feeding more than 9 billion people in 2050 it is our moral duty to eradicate hunger and malnutrition.

Therefore, we must be guided by sound sustainable policies which focus on environmentally compatible production methods in order to protect the environment, landscapes, natural resources, soil and biodiversity.

Hard facts show us, that the **cultivation of genetic modified species** is already **stagnating in developed countries.** It is a fact that the cultivation of GMOs is increasing in developing countries. It seems that profits and political interests dominate the international agenda and trump other concerns. We must ensure that developing countries are not pressured or forced into dependencies which are not to their advantage.

**Genetically modified seeds benefit neither farmers nor consumers.**

The long term effects of their cultivation are completely unknown!

**Austria is and will continue to remain GMO free.** As Minister of Agriculture, I will continue to speak out internationally – for **a fair chance for GMO freedom on the world market.**

**To conclude, 2015 is the International Year of Soils** – it is high time that we devote our full attention to the basis for all agricultural production. It can take a thousand years to create a layer of topsoil, but only a few days to seal this layer with concrete.

Five tonnes of animal life can live in one hectare of soil - A handful of soil can contain billions of soil microorganisms. But soil is a limited resource. We must treat our soils responsibly and allow future generations to make the same productive use of them as we have. To preserve our soils, scientific research is a key factor, and we in Austria are proud **to host the International Union of Soil Scientists** (which comprises more than 20.00 scientists from 70 countries) in Vienna.

We will be hosting a Conference on soil protection in Austria this autumn of this year and I would be proud to welcome you there.

**We need to put our planet, its resources and its precious raw materials, its soil, its water and its creatures in the focus of action.**

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, let me invite you to the **Austrian Pavilion „breathe.austria“** at the Expo in Milan which shows that

- planting is essential to resilience,
- trees are essential to cut CO2 emissions and
- planting is vital for biodiversity and mankind.

**DON'T MISS IT. VISIT IT!**

Thank you for your attention.