

FARMING FIRST

Speaking Notes for Tuesday, May 12th Dialogue with Major Groups

Madam Chair, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Dr. Sarala Gopalan, a farmer from India. I am speaking on behalf of a multi-disciplinary team: Farmers, Science and Technology, and Business who have joined together calling for a new model for agriculture based on knowledge and people - *Farming First*.

After too many years of neglect of agriculture in national policies, *Farming First* returns farmers to the centre of policy decisions. Governments, businesses, scientists, engineers, and civil society groups must focus their attention and prioritize the source of global food security in all development efforts.

Farming First is not just words; it is a real partnership to enhance complementarities to achieve sustainable agriculture and a better livelihood in rural areas.

The six pillars of Farming First are about the inter-linkages and **continuous cycle of resources, knowledge and tools** for farmers to use sustainable agricultural practices.

As CSD-17 discusses inter-linkages, we would like to stress that *Farming First* promotes an integrated approach which is more than agriculture. We truly believe that focusing on farming is a key mechanism to foster economic and social development for millions of individuals and food security for all.

1) **Safeguarding natural resources** is the first pillar of the *Farming First* concept. It emphasizes the importance of land and water management, which should be improved through the widespread adoption of sustainable practices of land use, including conservation tillage and other techniques. Our coalition agrees strongly with the need stated by the women's major group to ensure proper land tenure rights for women in particular.

2) The second pillar is **Sharing knowledge**. We need to put in place an improved mechanism for extension services - which are neither "top down" nor "bottom up" but truly collaborative. Demonstration projects can harmonize global research and best practices with existing local knowledge, including that of indigenous people.

3) **Building local access** to ensure that farmers have access to resources to manage their production more efficiently with emphasis on capacity building, with the support of appropriate infrastructure – particularly roads, ports, and existing technology - to make supplies available in rural communities and to allow access to markets as highlighted during the side event held by the engineers.

We also wish to join with our colleagues in the trade unions to stress the importance of decent work and training for farmers and agricultural workers.

4) **Protecting harvests** is the fourth pillar of Farming First. In many of the poorest countries, 20 to 40% of crop yields are lost because of inadequate pre- and post-harvest support. One of the most important ways to improve productivity is to minimise losses through local storage capacities and transportation mechanisms as well as provision of risk management tools to protect farmers in the face of climate variations and market failures. We are eager to explore with the Youth Major Group, the opportunities to change unsustainable consumption patterns. Food spoilage in the developing world and food waste in the developed world are equally problems.

5) *Farming First* aims at helping subsistence farmers to become small-scale entrepreneurs. Linking farmers to **markets** is essential, should we want to make them become real entrepreneurs. Farmers need to be able to get their produce on to the market and receive equitable price treatments for it. Both NGOs and local authorities have outlined the importance of developing fair markets.

6) Once products have been sold, we need to continually improve the cycle.

Prioritising research imperatives is Farming First's sixth and last pillar. Achieving sustainable agriculture requires applied research and available, appropriate technology, prioritising locally relevant crops and farmers' needs, stewardship techniques, and adaptation to climate change. This will ensure that farmers' needs are taken into account and that they benefit from continuously updated and improved tools and knowledge to enable them to successfully achieve all the other steps of the process.

Madam Chair, *Farming First* is about a process of continual improvement that applies to ALL forms of agricultural systems including organic, conventional and

others. Every system must be made more sustainable, today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come.

Please visit www.farmingfirst.org to lend your voice to our effort. In just a few weeks since we launched the site, 1300 individuals have already said they concur with the principles of Farming First.

Finally, Madam Chair, at the eve of the High Level Segment, we do not want the CSD to miss the opportunity to create a realistic, action-oriented text on agricultural and rural development. With this in mind, we would like to ask the Ministers and Official country representatives what the prospects may be to achieve that goal, and what expectations you may have from ***Farming First*** partners for implementation following the negotiations?