

**Message of Monique Barbut  
Executive Secretary  
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

**WORLD FOOD DAY  
16 OCTOBER 2013**

**“Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition”**

A food system is made up of the environment, people, institutions and processes for food production. Global food security has improved dramatically since the mid-1950s, but at a heavy cost on the environment for pursuing mass food production through unsustainable agricultural practices. The chief drivers of desertification and land degradation everywhere are overgrazing, salinization, erosion, water logging, deforestation and depletion of ground water systems. Most are the result of unsustainable agricultural practices designed to meet global food demand.

The first step towards sustainable food systems begins with the choice of farming methods. The failure then, to set up policy incentives that boost the dissemination of sustainable agricultural practices is morally indefensible.

An experiment conducted in Israel is particularly revealing in this regard. No farmer has sought compensation from a trust fund that was created five years ago to cover the losses arising from the switch to sustainable farming practices. The study also revealed that the land where sustainable agricultural practices are in use are less vulnerable to soil erosion during adverse weather conditions.

The renewed political will as part of the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve global food security is laudable and welcome. But the call for sustainable agriculture in this pursuit by UN's Third Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals was unequivocal.

The good news, as we observe World Food Day today, is that the potential for change exists among the emerging food markets, which are also projected to be in the developing countries. Increasingly, the small scale farmers in the developing countries are using sustainable farming practices as a result of appropriate policy incentives.

Sustainably produced food is smart politics. It is the pathway to human security, to climate change adaptation, to water security and to poverty eradication. But, it is more than that. It is perhaps the most important ecological decision that this generation will ever make, given the multiple ecological benefits that accompany sustainable land management.

I congratulate the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for shining the light on sustainable food production, which is determined first and foremost with the selection of a land use approach.

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