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OCTober  
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## HRH The Prince of Wales' closing speech

### *Agriculture The Most Important Of Humanity's Productive Activities*

Ladies and Gentlemen, I can't tell you how pleased I am to be with you today and to share in this vitally important discussion about the future of small scale agriculture and of artisan food producers throughout the world. The fact that no fewer than 5,000 food producers have gathered here today, under the "Slow Food" banner, is a small but significant challenge to the massed forces of globalization, the industrialization of agriculture and the homogenization of food - which seem somehow to have invaded almost all areas of our life today.

I have always believed that agriculture is not only the oldest, but also the most important of humanity's productive activities. It is the engine of rural employment and the foundation stone of culture, even of civilization itself. And this is not just some romantic vision of the past: today some 60 per cent of the four billion people living in developing countries are still working on the land.

So when I read "visions", such as that for the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, for instance, which are based on transforming traditional, local agricultural economies into "powerhouses" of technological agriculture, based around monoculture, artificial fertilisers, pesticides and GM, my heart sinks. The missing ingredient in these great plans is always sustainable livelihoods and its absence increases the existing, awful drift towards degraded, dysfunctional and unmanageable cities.

The one resource the developing world has in abundance is people, so why are we promoting systems of agriculture that negate this advantage and seem bound to contribute directly to further human misery and indignity?

It is a sobering thought, ladies and gentlemen, that almost all of the next one billion of net global population growth (over the next twelve to fifteen years) will take place in urban slums. In one slum alone - which I'm not going to name because it is in a country for which I have great affection - more than 800,000 people, half of them under the age of fifteen, already live illegally in less than four square kilometres of the city. Even more sobering is the thought: what will these conditions breed for the future? Hopelessness, crime, extremism, terrorism? Who will deal with these chickens when they come home to roost on a globalized perch?

Despite the best intentions of many, we have to face up to the fact that often, the consequence of globalization is greater unsustainability. It is all very well talking meaningfully of the need for "globalization with a human face", but the reality is frequently somewhat different. Left to its own devices, I fear that globalization will - ironically - sow seeds of ever-greater poverty, disease and hunger in the cities and the loss of viable, self-sufficient rural populations. I don't think anyone would claim to have many answers, technological or otherwise, about what could possibly be done to reverse this process. The 800,000 people in the slum I mentioned earlier are not simply going to head back to the land overnight. But, surely, the first step to finding solutions is being willing to face up to both the

  
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causes and the scale of the problem -and this requires the globalization of responsibility.

I have a feeling that by now it may be quite well known that I am inclined to doubt whether GM food, for instance, will be – on balance - a contribution to the greater good of humanity. In doing so, I am not simply being dogmatic. I believe it is both legitimate and important to ask whether some people's faith in the potential of this and other new technologies is a product of wishful thinking, or of the hype generated by vested interests. In the long-term, are these methods really going to solve mankind's problems, or just create new ones? And how will we regulate them effectively? There are a great many examples of earlier, well-meaning attempts to control pests or improve the environment which have gone drastically wrong. And I'm simply not convinced that we have absorbed the lesson, which is that manipulating Nature is, at best, an uncertain business.

Even if we discount the potential for disaster, there is still the question of whether this is the right direction to take. If all the money invested in agricultural biotechnology over the last fifteen years had been invested in developing and disseminating genuinely sustainable techniques – those that work with, rather than against, the grain of Nature - I believe that we would have seen extraordinary, and genuinely sustainable, progress. The problem, perhaps, is that techniques such as inter-cropping, agroforestry, green manuring, composting and biological pest control offer less prospect of commercial gain to those who have money to invest. The hundreds of millions of people who would gain are the much-derided practitioners of so-called "peasant agriculture", who have very little money, but who are the long-term guardians of biodiversity.

One of the arguments used by the "agricultural industrialists" is that it is only through intensification that we will be able to feed an expanded world population. But even without significant investment, and often in the face of official disapproval, improved organic practices have increased yields and outputs dramatically. A recent UN-FAO study revealed that in Bolivia potato yields went up from four to fifteen tonnes per hectare. In Cuba, the vegetable yields of organic urban gardens almost doubled. In Ethiopia, which twenty years ago suffered appalling famine, sweet potato yields went up from six to thirty tonnes per hectare. In Kenya, maize yields increased from two-and-a-quarter to nine tonnes per hectare. And in Pakistan, mango yields have gone up from seven-and-a-half to twenty-two tonnes per hectare.

Imposing industrial farming systems on traditional agricultural economies is actively destroying both biological and social capital and eliminating the cultural identity which has its roots in working on the land. It is also fuelling the frightening acceleration of urbanization throughout the world and removing large parts of humanity from meaningful contact with Nature and the food that they eat.

So this "flight from the land" is happening in both developed and developing countries. Unfortunately, these trends towards urbanization are almost inevitable while societies throughout the world continue to put a low valuation on their food, denigrate food to the status of fuel and abandon any loyalty to their local and indigenous farmers.



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But there is another consequence too. There is now a growing body of evidence that suggests that in the so-called developed world we are in the process of creating a nutritionally impoverished underclass – a generation which has grown up on highly processed fast food from intensive agriculture and for whom the future looks particularly bleak, both from a social and a health standpoint.

As Eric Schlosser has pointed out in his brilliant book "Fast Food Nation", fast food is a recent phenomenon. The extraordinary centralization and industrialization of our food system has occurred over as little as twenty years. Fast food may appear to be cheap food, and in the literal sense it often is. But that is because huge social and environmental costs are being excluded from the calculations. Any analysis of the real costs would have to look at such things as the rise in food-borne illnesses, the advent of new pathogens such as E. coli 0157, antibiotic resistance from the overuse of drugs in animal feed, extensive water pollution from intensive agricultural systems, and many other factors. These costs are not reflected in the price of fast food, but that doesn't mean that our society isn't paying them. So perhaps, having said all this, you can begin to see why I am such an admirer of the Slow Food Movement and of all the hard-working, indomitably independent people like yourselves, all over the world, who are part of it.

Only a few years ago it would have been impossible to imagine that so many people across the world who are either directly involved in small-scale artisan food production, or are interested in consuming the fruits of such labours, should gather together in this way. This, of course, is a great tribute to the unceasing energy of Dr. Carlo Petrini.

Slow food is traditional food. It is also local - and local cuisine is one of the most important ways we identify with the place and region where we live. It is the same with the buildings in our towns, cities and villages. Well-designed places and buildings that relate to locality and landscape and that put people before cars enhance a sense of community and rootedness. All these things are connected. We no more want to live in anonymous concrete blocks that are just like anywhere else in the world than we want to eat anonymous junk food which can be bought anywhere. At the end of the day, values such as sustainability, community, health and taste are more important than pure convenience. We need to have distinctive and varied places and distinctive and varied food in order to retain our sanity, if nothing else.

The Slow Food Movement is about celebrating the culture of food, and about sharing the extraordinary knowledge - developed over millennia - of the traditions involved with quality food production. So it is important to ask how this gathering can promote those ideals more widely, particularly when we are faced with remorseless pressure to operate on a larger and ever more impersonal scale.

I believe you are in a better position to answer that question than me, but for what it's worth, I do believe that simply coming together and sharing ideas, and above all joining the international Slow Food Movement and to create, by the extraordinary process of cross-fertilization and invigoration which takes place at gatherings like these, an ever more influential and powerful association that cannot be so easily ignored, the the answers will emerge organically. As the old saying goes, there is safety in numbers,

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and people tend to listen to organisations with a very large membership. They do!

On this theme it does seem to me that the other great food movement with which I am associated, the organic movement, has so much in common with the Slow Food Movement and this communality of purpose and direction ought to be a source of co-operation and, also of course, celebration! So I do hope that we may see ever-closer links between these two important movements.

And the importance of your Movement cannot be overstated. That is, after all, why I am here – to try and help draw attention to the fact that in certain circumstances “small will always be beautiful”, and to remind people, as John Ruskin in the 19th century did, back in England, that “industry without art is brutality”. After all, the food you produce is far more than just food, for it represents an entire culture – the culture of the family farm. It represents the ancient tapestry of rural life; the dedicated animal husbandry, the struggle with the natural elements, the love of landscape, the childhood memories, the knowledge and wisdom learnt from parents and grandparents, the intimate understanding of local climate and conditions, the hopes and fears of succeeding generations. Ladies and gentlemen, all of you represent genuinely sustainable agriculture and I salute you.



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