



Bundesamt für Landwirtschaft
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Sino-Swiss Scientific Seminar on Sustainable Agricultural Production Systems in Switzerland

Swiss Federal Research Station for Agroecology and Agriculture,
Zürich Reckenholz, Switzerland, 15 July 2002

Statement by Mr Manfred Bötsch, Director of the Federal Office For Agriculture

delivered by Mr. Thomas Maier, senior economist, Main Division of Direct Payments and Structural Improvements, Federal Office for Agriculture, Berne

Welcome to Switzerland! It is a honour to welcome you here at the Swiss Federal Research Station for Agroecology and Agriculture.

On behalf of the director of the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture I extend to all participants the best regards and best wishes for this Scientific Workshop on Sustainable Agricultural Production.

This meeting is a follow-up in our Sino - Swiss contacts in the field of agriculture research and it will hopefully strengthen the friendship and co-operation in further research and in existing scientific program.

Switzerland is a small open economy. It is strongly linked to the world market. The international exchange of goods and services made Switzerland a prosperous country. In a global economy, where borders should not hinder the exchange of goods and services, there must be a lively interest in an exchange of information. And beyond the economic benefits, the exchange of information will establish a better fundament for mutual understanding. In this sense we see the added value of this workshop here in Switzerland.

In the coming days you will get an insight into Swiss agriculture. Compared to some countries of the European Union you will find a small scaled agriculture. A typical Swiss farm is managed as a family business with approximately 18 hectares of land. Around 4% of the population work in the agricultural sector. Agriculture maintains and cares for approximately 40% of our territory. Less then 2/3 of our food is domestically produced. Milk, cheese and meat production dominate the production pattern.

Besides the production of healthy, high quality food our agriculture has other tasks to fulfil. According to our Federal constitution the main functions of agriculture are as follows: Secure food supply for the population, conserve natural resources, maintain the cultural landscape and contribute to a decentralised settlement of the country. This is what we call a multifunctional agriculture. For such an agriculture a well targeted agriculture policy is required. We have developed over the last decade a coherent set of instruments. An important one are direct payments. They are vital in terms of farmers income, in terms of protecting the environment and also in terms of international commitments such as the WTO agreement on agriculture. Direct payments are compensations for the public services which the farmers provide to society.



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The United Nations proclaimed the year 2002 as the International Year of Mountains. Switzerland as a mountainous country took this opportunity and organized, with the support of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), an international conference on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions. The conference was held two weeks ago in Adelboden which is in the mountains of the canton of Berne. Over 200 participants attended the meeting, including government ministers and other senior officials, as well as representatives of different local populations, academic and research institutions, intergovernmental organizations, business and industry, non-governmental organizations and the media. The conference aimed to promote mutual understanding, solidarity and information sharing regarding the challenges and possibilities of sustainable agriculture and rural development in mountain regions. It sought to enhance networking and the creation of strategic alliances between various stakeholders, as well as to provide a forum to articulate concerns, share ideas and make recommendations for the future. The Conference was a success. As a result of the conference, a formal "Declaration of Adelboden" was approved. It calls on governments, inter-governmental organizations, international organizations and major groups of civil society to develop and improve policies and actions in the fields of sustainable agriculture and rural development in mountain regions. The Declaration addresses disadvantages and potentials of mountain areas and their populations. It notes disadvantages such as poverty, hunger, marginalisation, conflicts, geographical isolation and lower productivity, and potentials such as certain comparative advantages offered by mountain areas in the provision of a wide range of goods and services.

One of such potential advantage for agriculture in mountain regions is organic farming. The experience we made in Switzerland confirms that fact. Approximately 6 000 farms are run as organic enterprises. About 80 Percent of them are located in the hill and mountain regions.

To become successful in organic farming we need not only the market force and the transparent accreditation and certification for organic food, we need special training, extension services and of course research. Here at the Swiss Federal Research Station for Agroecology and Agriculture we are in a centre of competence. In partnership with other institutes we develop a broad knowledge on agroecology and organic farming. We believe we can deepen and share that knowledge together with our partners of the Chinese research institutes. Therefore we are here today.

I thank all the members of the Sino-Swiss organization Committee, all the sponsors, the Chinese Embassy in Bern for its advice and all the persons involved who made possible this Sino - Swiss Scientific Workshop on Sustainable Agricultural Production Systems in Switzerland. I wish you on behalf of our Office a successful meeting.