

Preface

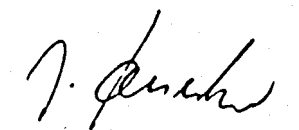
A large part of the world's population still invests the greater part of its energy in cultivating fields and pastures to cover its basic needs, namely acquiring and processing food. In contrast, inhabitants of industrial nations spend the greater part of their life gathering and managing information. Food in these countries is taken for granted with a large selection available 24 hours a day and at all times of the year. Acquiring food, this basic need of mankind, takes only several minutes of daily life. Due to the (mistaken?) assumption that food will also be unlimitedly available in the future, agriculture is losing its significance in the public eye, both in industrial countries and internationally.

Agriculture, including its affiliated sectors, is the world's biggest employer. At the moment, one billion farmers produce food for six billion people. Although the challenges to produce improved quality food in increasing quantities for an ever growing population without burdening the environment are obvious, the investment into international agricultural and ecological research is decreasing.

Through our activities, we push increasingly at the borders of the load carrying capacity of our planet. Often agrar-ecosystems are over-used due to maladjusted management systems, without the productivity of a particular area being really exhausted. As a result further areas are needed, with consequences in particular for the rain forest, mangrove and coral reef ecosystems. These three systems have a global buffer and regulating function and continually ensure our survival. With continued decimation of these systems a certain point is arrived at where they fall below the necessary critical mass. The systems could be thought of as a sponge which can only absorb a certain capacity. An increasing population competes not only for agricultural production area but also, for example, over habitation area, work places, water and recreation possibilities. This competition for resources will intensify already existent conflicts, so that future military conflicts can be increasingly expected on the grounds of securing resources.

Today the only threat to mankind is mankind itself. A continuously growing population should consider, whether it can procure the necessary resources to feed itself in the long run. Considering the physical supply only, many more people could probably be supported than predicted. But it is also a question of living quality. In industrial countries the term prosperity has gained importance and is connected to a certain living standard which has not much relevance to living quality in an environment worth living in. One thing is certain, the quickly growing population, at the moment about 1.5 % per annum, will continue to have an impact on the environment, probably much quicker and more lasting than it has already done till today.

We should not overlook the fact that our daily well-being is grounded on our ready access to food and water, an access in which we must clearly invest. Every day, every hour where we do not work on the improvement of the diverse agro-ecosystems world wide, rural migration intensifies, the flows of refugees increase, and military conflicts are promoted. Investments in the sustainable development of an international agriculture, which clearly acts as a motor for economic development, are an important contribution to crisis prevention.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Sauerborn', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'J'.

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