

Brussels, Belgium

17 January 2011

Letter to The Editor, *The Times of London*

Dear Sir,

I agree with elements of Matt Ridley's thesis on "feeding the world" in the Times of Friday January 14th in that we are capable of providing sufficient food to feed the world although we should perhaps ask ourselves why the world isn't already being fed adequately, and what to do about it. The former is easier to answer than the latter.

There are some serious blocks and barriers to doing better at feeding the world's population. Some examples related to Mr Ridley's observations: The effect of the rising price of oil and energy on costs of crop production and transformation to food products; the subsidies provided to divert crops to produce bio-fuels; the shortage of credit in many places for the agricultural community as it plans its planting season and harvest; "land grabbing" by states in short supply to cover their own needs for places to produce food; the opposition and ban on the use of GMO crops by the European Union which shows no sign of change any time soon and which has a follow-on effect in preventing third countries employing these techniques and supplying agricultural commodities to the EU; the promotion of organics and acceptance by many including swathes of politicians, as a realistic way of feeding the world while diverting resources from more productive means; the banning of commodity exports as has recently occurred in Russia and other Asian nations; the effect of weather systems such as La Nina which cause flooding and drought and massive losses in crop production areas; rampant corruption, including political corruption in many economies; and as the situation in Tunisia reminds us, the turmoil and uncertainty created by the combined effects of repressive politics, commodity shortages and high prices for food products especially basic agricultural commodities such as cooking oil and cereals.

What to do? Many of these blocks and barriers are natural effects and our power to alter them is limited. A large number however are created and approved by politicians. At the same time in most of the western world, Ministers of Agriculture are low in prominence and importance in government pecking order. A first step would be to raise the profile and recognition of those politically responsible for agriculture and food security and to get them together to devise new approaches.

Secondly, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation held a Conference late last year from which little action has emanated. The G20 under the leadership of the French this year has promised to act. If only the attention which was paid to the financial crisis could be extended to food security, we would all be better off.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Kenneth M. Baker
Vice-Chairman Advisory Board
World Agricultural Forum