

WELCHE ZUKUNFT?! (Which Future?!)

by Andres Veiel and Jutta Doberstein



Laboratory - 16 September 2017 (10 a.m. - 8 p.m)

at Deutsches Theater Berlin

(Registration to participate at welchezukunft.org)

Workshop

Agriculture: Coffee shortage and other inconveniences

How far off are we from a time when people go hungry in Europe?

(this workshop will be conducted in english)

Experts: Dr. Ariella Helfgott, Dr. George Garbutt & Patrick O'Reilly (University of Oxford)

The Scenario develops from existing trends in relation to food production and distribution with a particular focus on economic, climate and land use drivers.

Initial stages of the scenario are marked by "inconveniences," shortages in specific commodities caused by localised climate and economic effects. But what comes across as an inconvenience for „us“ - the industrialised nations - is a disaster for those in more vulnerable zones.

But also in Europe the unthinkable might be just around the corner: severe food shortages, a decline in the quality and nutritional value of our food - food becoming more than just a simple commodity flogged by discounter chains but a rare luxury article. The decisions to secure fair food for all are being made now.

Extremely intelligent robots, new pests and new pesticides as well as creative shell companies acquiring arable land based on climate change models are changing the world of food production as we know it.

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Hypothetical Futures

Cold Turkey for Coffee Lovers

Climate change results in the reduction in the area productivity of farming in equatorial and tropical areas. This leads to shortages in certain commodities coffee and cocoa production falls as does the production of fruit in water stressed areas. Coffee and Chocolate becomes more expensive, some tropical fruits become scarce. This leads to changes in consumer habits with a switch from imported to locally produced fruits. No clear coffee substitute exists so people are spending more on their coffee.

Olive oil prices rise

Water scarcity begins to affect Southern European this places further pressures on E.U. farm budgets and negatively impacts on the production of a number of commodities and products including wine, olive oil and rice.

Farm Numbers Crash Across Europe

Economic pressures within the E.U. leads to pressure on agricultural budgets and further rounds of Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) reform that result in reduced subsidies for production. This places a squeeze on smaller farmers, who rely on subsidies to maintain production. The numbers of farms across Europe falls particularly in Eastern Europe where there are larger numbers of small farmers. There is consolidation of remaining farmers into very large farms producing a highly concentrated farm sector producing commodity crops in input and capital intensive systems. There is more vertical integration with farming tied into large food production companies.

Crisis in rural Europe as unemployment rises

Small rural communities come under pressure as "green deserts" emerge, a landscape dominated by large scale farms and deserted rural villages. This increases the vulnerability of food sector to shocks the system is dependent on high levels of credit to fund production and capital investment.

Calls for Measures to Tackle Green Deserts

Land use changes result in changing ownership structures. Increasingly investment is dominated by larger multinational players who are able to buy up larger areas of land as long term investments. Some of this land is given over to forestry and other non-food uses this means that food production becomes concentrated on less land but production levels are maintained through greater intensification however this increases the vulnerability of the food system.

Land Grab Anger Grows in Central Europe

Changes in Land ownership breed resentment and there are calls for measures to control foreign land ownership. However, governments have largely stepped back from rural development and intervention in land ownership arguing that market forces are leading to changes in the food industry which are beyond their control and which they are powerless to stop. They are perceived to have failed to act in the interests of rural communities, this fuels the rise of extremist groups and land reform movements. Reduction in subsidy levels means that there is pressure on foods prices which are now fixed by the market rather than by government intervention. This is fine when the system is able to produce sufficient affordable food but makes food access for the poorest people in society vulnerable to changes in economic circumstances.

Small farms survives by focussing on niche local products

What small farms and food production remains survives by focussing on niche local products and there is a blossoming of local food movements in many parts of Europe. While this sees more diverse local food available it is more expensive and is limited to outlets such as food fairs and farmers markets.

Nutritional inequality reduces life expectancy

There is a growing divide between on the one hand those who can afford the money and time to buy more expensive local and imported foods and those on the other hand who depend on cheaper food produced from intensively produced commodity crops. This food is less nutritious and there is a growth in nutritional inequality with poorer consumers reliant on less nutritious carbohydrate rich diets. There is a concentration of non-communicable diseases in the less affluent parts of society while at the same time there is a decline in sympathy for the victims who are seen to be responsible for their own health problems because of poor food choices.

Heavy Metal Contaminants entering the food chain

Costs of farm inputs rise leading to general pressure on food prices, fertilisers become more expensive and scarce and those that are available are of poorer quality leading to heavy metal contamination in staples and creating food safety concerns.

When the financial crisis peaks in 2026

When the financial crisis peaks in 2026, its effects are to increase levels of unemployment and reduce credit available to large scale farms. The large input intensive food system is not resilient to these type of shocks this leads to a reduction in the quantity of food produced and increased prices.

Credit Squeeze raises fears for food production

The price of staples is particularly badly impacted and this has a disproportionately negative impact on the food security of the poorest. Food banks are overwhelmed and there is political disagreement between those who claim the crisis requires government intervention and those who claim that the market should be left alone. The latter group tends to blame food shortages on the victims. Strategic reserves and welfare systems have been rundown and there is limited scope for government intervention to address the problem. Charities try to make up the gap but they are overwhelmed.

30% of children go to school hungry

The scale of the problem is not understood as no-one believes there is food poverty in Europe. Some malnutrition deaths are reported but the main effects are an increase in begging petty theft and undernutrition. Resentment boils over and there are food riots in poor areas of major urban centres.

Europe turns back the clock to solve food crisis

Riots prompt governments to step in with basic food security programme. Land is taken into public ownership and brought back into food production. Some larger companies go out of business and are replaced with co-operative arrangements.

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Experts:

Dr. Ariella Helfgott is a Senior Research Fellow in the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford and an Assistant Professor in the Copernicus Institute for Sustainable Development at Utrecht University. She is a member of the University of Oxford's Food Systems Research Group. She is the principal investigator of the CGIAR Climate Change Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) Systemic Integrated Adaptation Research Program. Ariella's research spans conceptual and mathematical modeling of system resilience and adaptability, through to participatory approaches to building resilience and adaptive capacity on-the-ground. Whilst formally trained as a mathematician and engineer, her current work focuses on integrating technical-analytical, philosophical-hermeneutic and management-administrative disciplines to achieve just and sustainable development.

George Garbutt is a researcher at the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, and a member of the University of Oxford's Food Systems Research Group. Formally trained as a mechanical engineer and techno-anthropologist, George's work draws together experiences focused on unpacking the socio-technical assemblages of water and sanitation interventions in rural communities in Sierra Leone, on-the-ground participatory water-governance and planning, organisational capacity development, and accessibility and controversies in architecture.

Patrick O'Reilly has almost 25 years of practical experience in designing public and stakeholder engagement projects employing a wide range of strategies and methods. He is currently a postdoctoral research assistant in participatory nexus mapping at the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford. He has a Master's Degree in Community Development and a PhD in Sociology and Politics specializing in development studies. In addition he is also a theatre professional having worked as a technician, production manager and lighting designer.

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