

Opening Remarks by René CARRON

Colloque Pluriagri/FARM/Notre Europe des 27-28--29 novembre 2006

« Quel cadre pour les politiques agricoles, demain, en Europe et dans les pays en développement ? »

I am pleased to welcome you this morning in the name of Credit Agricole and the Foundation for World Agriculture and Rural Life. It is not just a pleasure but an honor to address the international body of professionals and experts you compose. I would like to take a moment to recognize in particular you have come from abroad. Some 400 participants from 35 nationalities are registered for this event, and we are excited about what your presence means and hope that you will feel at home as you contribute to the work of the conference.

I would like as well to recognize the organizers of this event. This conference is the result of a unique collaboration among three organizations who conceived and planned it collaboratively: Pluriagri, the not-for-profit organization Notre Europe, and the foundation FARM. It is important also to note that members of the so-called Sologne group supported and encouraged the organization of this event. The Sologne group is an informal but very active group that brings together the professional organizations of three major agricultural products – oleoproteins, cereals, and sugar – along with Groupama Corporation and Credit Agricole and is presided by Xavier Beulin.

This conference is an important initiative, a reflection of a common desire to understand the world in global terms and of a sense of international solidarity. It also represents the desire to share information and experience among European and Southern hemisphere actors.

Behind the title of the conference, "What future framework for agricultural policy in Europe and developing countries?", lies the objective of presenting

analyses prepared by experts for discussion among professionals. This is all the more timely as agriculture is once again facing policy reformulation both at the European level and in a North/South context, against a backdrop of uncertainty concerning the restarting of World Trade Organization talks.

Agricultural issues are back at the center of the preoccupations of decision-makers as well as of economists and investors. The World Bank's Annual Report in 2008 will be dedicated to agriculture, a theme the Bank has not focused on in quite some time. Questions concerning agricultural supply and demand are once again on the forefront. Can world needs for agricultural products, both as food and energy, be met in an equitable way, and if so at what price? Is a sustained rise in the price of primary goods to be expected? What effect should this have upon agricultural policy? What investments should be made? Who will have access to them and how?

Credit Agricole is deeply interested in such questions concerning the future not only as a bank but especially as a bank that was founded in the agricultural milieu. The success of French and European agriculture depends upon a certain conception of agricultural policy and of relations among its component parts: professional organizations, firms, the public sector, and a mutualist approach to credit and insurance.

This conception has demonstrated its capacity to adapt as it has faced several reforms successfully, though not necessarily without difficulty. What bends in the road lie ahead? What long term responses should it bring to citizens' expectations especially in terms of food safety and the environment, while maintaining a fair price between consumers and producers?

European agricultural policy will undergo more changes in the future. Nonetheless, the principles which have spelled its success in the past remain viable, and we believe they can be of use to our friends in developing countries and particularly in Africa. Our agricultural policy, based on a

protected regional market, has given European producers the chance they needed while promoting a flourishing agrofood industry.

Investment and technological innovation have structured this domestic market. Agricultural modernization represented one of the growth components of the post-war miracle years, and professional organizations played a key role.

The Economic Partnership Agreements which will shape trade between the European Union and ACP countries as of 2008 present a historic opportunity to structure real regional agricultural markets. This supposes, however, the existence of agricultural policies that promote local production and encourage investment in agriculture.

The EPAs are above all an occasion to construct a perspective of hope in a decent livelihood for the farmers of these countries. I am certain that this is the goal of negotiators and decision makers in these countries. The EU shares with you a common history and a common future, based on geographical proximity, and has every interest in a successful outcome. ACP countries cannot hope for economic development without agricultural progress. 65% of their population is farm-based or some 450 out of 700 million inhabitants. This progress is easier said than done, however, and finding the way forward is the reason this conference is being held. Starting from an analysis of the current situation that we can all agree to, what is the best way to obtain regional integration, a modernized agriculture and economic growth?

The Foundation for World Agriculture and Rural Life was founded by a group of companies -- Casino, Suez, Limagrains-Vilmorin, the French Development Agency, Credit Agricole and Air France – as a way to put the know-how of agricultural firms and professionals at the disposal of developing countries. Behind this act of solidarity lies a pragmatic desire to put a certain professional experience to good use.

The ultimate goal is to help developing agricultural sectors benefit from experiences and methods that have proved effective, while at the same time making sure they have access to essential tools and services such as credit, water, innovation, or management training. FARM's goal is also to raise awareness among political leaders as to the stakes involved with agricultural development, using reliable studies and examples of success. FARM's idea is to get professional agricultural organizations from both North and South deeply involved, organizations such as many of you here today represent. These, you, are the real actors. In Africa, the food security seminar organized in early November in Niamey by professional organizations showed their capacity to mobilize both partners and decision makers. We are ready to help them carry such actions farther, as we have done in association with cotton producers.

The work to be done during these three days is very important. I have no doubt that it will prepare the way for future action by generating operating principals based on solidarity and equity.

I want to thank you for your commitment, grounded as it is in work, generosity, and responsibility.

Without work there is not much to share except wishes or regrets. Without work there is no advancement. Without work there is no merit.

Without the virtue of generosity, solidarity is simply a disguise for the chance of coinciding selfish interests.

And finally responsibility, without which there is no measure of our actions and their consequences on our environment in the widest sense possible of the term.

Georges Clemenceau, a French statesman in the early 20th century, had a habit of saying "you have to know what you want. When you know it, you

have to have the courage to state it. Once you've stated it, you have to have the will to make it happen."

This is what I wish for you. This is what I wish for us.