

The world's leading fresh produce conference and networking events

FPJ

By FPJ Staff

Monday 10th February 2020, 13:41 GMT

CFL speaker looks to future of food

Professor Louise O Fresco, who will deliver the City Food Lecture on 20 February, says global population growth and climate change mean we must fundamentally rethink what food we eat and how we produce it



Professor Louise O Fresco

The vista is an appropriate metaphor of the professor's far-sighted views of the future of the food system, which faces the unprecedented challenges of feeding the nine billion people that will inhabit the planet by 2050, whilst limiting or even reducing the carbon emissions of the global food chain.

Professor Fresco is the president of the executive board of Wageningen University & Research, Europe's leading academic agri-food organisation and research and development centre, and one of the foremost global thought leaders in the food industry.

She says that to meet these twin challenges, we not only need to fundamentally rethink what food we eat and how we produce it, but also rebuild urban societies' relationship with how their food is produced. However, she argues that food is a source of great

confusion and individuals and societies are struggling to work out what's best to eat in times of climate change, obesity and concerns about animal welfare. How we address these issues will have far-reaching effects on the environment and our ability to feed the booming world population.

She will address these questions and argue for an expansion of industrial food production to feed the world's growing population, when she delivers the 20th City Food Lecture on the evening of Thursday 20 February at London's Guildhall.

Professor Fresco says that today, more people live in urban than in rural areas and by 2050 two-thirds of the world population will reside in cities. Fewer and fewer people will be involved in growing the food we eat, and the process of urbanisation will also consume more land that was previously used for growing food.

Many people in developed Western societies see the development of traditional local food systems as the way to help achieve a more sustainable food system. The argument is that having more farmers growing more food closer to where it is consumed will mean markets can react to local demand, leading to a reduction in food waste. Plus, the carbon emissions associated with transporting food long distances will be significantly reduced.

Whilst Professor Fresco acknowledges that local food production has a key role to play in re-establishing the link between cities and farms, traditional local food systems cannot alone meet the challenge of feeding the world's growing population, especially as many of these farms in the developing world are focussed on producing commodities for export, or are primarily concerned with feeding the farmer's extended

family. She points out that rapid

growing, rapidly urbanising world, small

close to the cities where we live. These

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

© Copyright Market Intelligence Ltd - Fruitnet.com 2014. The copyright on this article and all content published on Market Intelligence Ltd - Fruitnet.com is held by Market Intelligence Ltd - Fruitnet.com Limited, a joint venture between Market Intelligence Limited and Dr Rolf M Wolf Media GmbH. All rights reserved. Neither this article nor any part of it may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, including print-outs, screen grabs and information retrieval systems, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

FRUITNET.COM

urbanisation and a growing middle class leads to big changes in dietary preferences and consumer behaviour and local food systems are not always able to adapt to these trends.

Whilst she understands our desire to eat carrots grown a few miles from our home, she says that for most people in the world, that's impossible. This is because they live in cities with tens of millions of people, and their food comes from far away. For these people, especially if they're poor, it is very important that food is produced at a decent price, at a scale that allows it to be shipped to the cities. So the dream to have your food from around the corner only applies to a few parts of the world, and only for a few products.

Instead, Fresco argues the industrialised farming that resulted from the Green Revolution - which increased agricultural production worldwide between the 1950s and late 1960s - has done a remarkable job of producing more food. She acknowledges that the system is far from perfect, with issues such as environmental damage, chemical usage and communities dependent on global commodity prices in need of reform. However, she contests that in a

farms can't feed billions more people. So, we need to make industrialised agriculture more sustainable, environmentally friendly, and morally acceptable.

These are all changes that can and are being made. Whilst progress needs to be more rapid, we are already seeing a move to more plant-based diets in many Western societies and more awareness of improved land management combined with a greater focus on reducing food waste throughout the food chain. Developments such as vertical farms are bringing agriculture back into cities and even some supermarkets.

But she argues much more needs to be done. Food systems need to be tightly integrated and co-ordinated to ensure they can react to the changing demands of urban societies. The food system needs to utilise more technology such as robotics to improve production; improve logistics and packaging to reduce food losses; and develop more added-value products in countries dependent on perishable commodities for export.

So, what's her vision for the food system of the future? Increasingly, we'll likely see centralised food production zones

highly industrialised food systems will produce the majority of the food we need, much of which will be plant-based.

There will be complex distribution systems, involving drones for dropping off shopping as well as pre-prepared meals produced in local community kitchens designed to reduce food waste. People may become more interested in growing their own food, with balcony gardens and neighbourhood allotments popping up in urban areas, helped along by new agricultural techniques and technologies.

Overall, it will be a diverse system with no single solution for everything. But what is very clear is that a declining rural population will need to feed a vastly increasing urban population. So, labour use and efficiency will be key themes of the future.

Quite how the landscape seen from the professor's office window will change in the coming decades is difficult to say, but one thing's for sure: it will look very different from what we see today.