

Food and Agribusiness Principles

Rabobank Group

1. Aiming for sufficient and safe food production

The first priority of food & agri chains is to feed the world with healthy and safe products at reasonable prices. This production should not endanger the food supply of future generations. Experts predict it will be necessary to double global food production by around 2050 in order to feed the growing world population. The challenge linked to meeting this growing demand and safeguarding food safety worldwide is to increase crop yields and improve distribution in a sustainable manner. Biodiversity and forest areas should be preserved in regions in which available agricultural lands are put into production. Businesses in the food industry are presented with the challenge of encouraging consumers to adopt healthy eating habits.

2. Using natural resources responsibly

A responsible and prudent approach should be taken to the use of natural resources with a view to ensuring the continuity of food production. The natural resources that are vitally important within the food and agricultural sectors are soil, water, air, biodiversity and climate (influenced by greenhouse gas emissions). The challenges facing businesses in the food & agri chains include preventing soil degradation and erosion, preventing soil and surface water pollution as much as possible, carefully using available water, avoiding overfishing and protecting valuable nature reserves (the so-called high conservation value areas, such as forests and wetlands). Further challenges include preserving genetic starting materials, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, limiting waste and safeguarding biodiversity.

3. Promoting social welfare

Safeguarding the social welfare and living environment of people is important with a view to attaining sustainable production in food & agri chains. Promoting social welfare also means that businesses should refrain from committing corruption and bribery, discriminating against employees and abolishing the right to freedom of association and assembly. They should likewise renounce forced labour, harmful child labour, poor working conditions, the irresponsible use of poisonous substances and violations of the rights of indigenous, local and other vulnerable sections of the population. The fact that many food & agri companies have an integral connection with the rural countryside means that they can fulfil a key role in improving socio-economic conditions in rural communities. The related challenge is to limit the negative external effects on local communities and to promote positive effects.

4. Keeping and caring for animals responsibly

The applicable ethical standards should be leading for livestock farmers, (including fish farmers), livestock dealers and livestock transporters with respect to keeping and caring for animals. The so-called 'licence to produce' is derived from these standards. The treatment of animals concerns both the health of the animals (and in this context also the appropriate use of medications) and their well-being. The challenge for livestock farmers, livestock dealers and transporters is to base continual adjustments to changing circumstances on these ethical standards. Improving animal welfare and preventing and monitoring (infectious) animal diseases pose key challenges for the years ahead.

5. Helping promote well-considered consumer and citizen choices

Many consumers make only semi-conscious choices concerning the foods they eat. Customs and habits play a key role in this regard. In order to achieve these Food & Agribusiness Principles, it is important that consumers and citizens are made aware of how they can contribute to making food & agri chains more sustainable. Educating consumers and increasing citizen involvement are key contributory factors towards achieving this aim. The challenge will be to attain a situation in which consumers are willing and able to change their consumption patterns in a more sustainable direction. Food & agri companies can provide consumers with more information about the origins of products in order to enable them to make well-considered choices based on sufficient information.