

# Presentation Roberto Smeraldi

*As East Asia becomes the consumer centre of the world, Latin America is going to be the key area for biomass production, be it for food, feed, fibre or fuel. In his fifteen year outlook of dealing with limited natural resources in Brazil and other big food exporting countries, Roberto Smeraldi stated that Latin America could contribute to feed the growing global demand for a while, but actual costs might be high, if we include key externalities.*

## **Pressure on available land**

Growth in agricultural production in this decade, in Asia, was caused for eighty percent by increasing yields per hectare. The pattern of production growth in South America is for 67 percent based on the increase in hectares of farmland. This pattern of an expanding frontier greatly threatens South America's rich biodiversity and causes huge carbon emissions. Cattle ranching also makes a disproportionate claim on agricultural land as it currently occupies eighty percent of it, where it only contributes twenty percent to the agricultural GDP in the region. For the production of beef in Brazil, for instance, we need fifteen times more land than to produce the same amount of pork or chicken.

Looking at the availability of land one can establish that there is enough 'degraded' land that can be upgraded to farmland. However, freshly deforested land is four to six times cheaper: it is free to obtain, offers initial timber revenues and a fertile start.





*These are issues behind the façade of a 'Latin America that feeds the world' that need to be resolved in order to make this role a sustainable one. Comprehensive global certification systems for a sustainable agriculture are not to be regarded as a panacea, but are very much needed as a necessary condition for making improvements sustainable.*

If you want to make sourcing and trading transparent and sustainable, you will need an overall understanding of what sustainability is and an overall institution to certify the chain. Roundtables, that are already in place for a more sustainable production of palm oil and soy, are a good instrument to move towards a shared understanding, shared policies, shared choices and shared practices. But Brazil initiated such an agriculture-wide system for a more general approach and individual roundtables can be accredited to it. Brazil is one of the leading agricultural countries of the world, being first in production of e.g. sugar, orange, chicken, beef and coffee. From this position, Brazil can be a legitimate initial source of this system. Smeraldi points out, however, that certification instruments are important, but we should not expect them to solve the lack of governance or perverse subsidies.

### *The challenges ahead*

Smeraldi sees the role of Brazil within the context of a broad biomass based civilization, more than just economy. This implies an intensification of production as it includes besides food also the production of feed, fuel and fibre. It is a production system powered by solar energy.

On the other hand, food is much more than agriculture. Talking about the future of food requires thinking about the way we want to live and the way we want to preserve culture, diversity, health and quality of life across the planet. Smeraldi noted how obesity now comes even before hunger as a cause for diseases, also among the poor, in his own country. World consumption has shifted away from cereals, roots, tubers, beans and moved towards more fat, sugar, meat and dairy.

Disruption of terroir, of culinary tradition and cultural competitive advantages are fast-growing phenomena in the last couple of decades. It is time for a new physiology of taste, rooted in terroir and culturally diversity.

Producing more food does not alleviate hunger. Actually, according to Smeraldi, it sometimes contribute to it, by displacing rural people. The challenge ahead is not producing more food, but rather how to produce the right food, in the right place, at the right cost including the real externalities, and providing access to those who most need it. These are the lessons from the recent climate and financial crisis, showing that it is not sensible to anticipate the consumption of either the environmental space or the financial resources of the coming generations.