

Good morning. My name is Maria Letizia Gardoni and I am the president of Coldiretti young farmers. It's the biggest organization in Europe and it represents Italian agricultural entrepreneurs between 18 and 30 years old. We are almost 60 thousand and still growing! As a matter of fact, Italy has the highest number of young people employed in agriculture in the whole Europe.

It's a great honour for me to be here.

Today, I 'd like to talk to you about why and how, nowadays, the young Italian farmers are building new social and economic prospects, using food and the rural areas as their starting point. Innovation and sustainability are the two aspects fundamental to the new Italian farming experience, led by the new generation.

INNOVATION

Talking about innovation, we seem to often confuse this topic with highly developed technology – something virtual and almost intangible. Therefore, there is a tendency to believe that it is a privilege for a limited audience. Innovation is also, but not limited to, technology.

We have been observing very closely the perpetual innovation of Italian agricultural model and we realised that the innovation comes from vital elements that can be found in any community and place – making it a potential collective experience.

First of all, it originates from the ability to perceive the most pressing needs of the society. Secondly, it is essential to respond to those needs in the right way. In fact, the agricultural reality is extremely sensitive to the changes in the demands of the society, reaching the point of not being able to determine where the process starts – I mean, are people influencing the entrepreneurial choices or is it the other way round?

We have new life styles, new places to hang out, a new pace of life, new food requirements, and new climate conditions. All these factors are closely connected to each other and determine the way we look at farming.

Nowadays, we are more and more aware of how farming can really affect the most varied dynamics and balances. Therefore, innovation in agriculture also means looking after other people aiming at improving everyone's life. This goal can be achieved by: protecting the environment, safeguarding our traditions, ensuring safe food, and creating new models of welfare. In addition to that, it is also important to revitalise internal or marginal and often "forgotten" areas, guarantee the transparency of the food production chain, look after the vegetal and animal biodiversity and address the unemployment issue. These are just few examples of innovation that make the primary sector essential for the well-being of a country.

Moreover, innovation is also a great cultural process. Indeed, the great return to the countryside by the Italian youth makes us the pioneers, in Europe, of the most important cultural revolution of our era.

In our society, the image of the farmer was strictly connected with marginalisation, low education level, and of economical and moral poverty. Nowadays, it's the first form of employment young people – and not only them – are investing in again. This choice provides them with an income, contributes to their fulfilment, and gives them the opportunity to play a strategic role during this transformation. Being a farmer today means to worry and nurture not only your own well being but that of a whole country. That's how we knocked down one of the highest and more solid walls, the one of prejudice and ignorance. This IS innovation.

Innovation starts from the bottom: it's made by ideas, competences and people, and it is sharable. This is the reason why it can be reproduced anywhere and in any sort of context. However, innovation also needs areas to develop

which is not just related to business but especially all those areas in which courage is stimulated and talent is fed by comparison.

I have talked about place to facilitate innovation

Coldiretti young farmers has created a school But not a school for farmers

A school for the best young post graduated in economy, political science, marketing, high tech etc

It is a school on a sustainable model of agriculture

Experienced, actual and innovative

A school were teachers, young farmers, and participants build up together their lessons

Agriculture needs to influence institutions, universities, policy makers, society ..

Farmers need to show everybody what feeding the planet means today

If the question is how to change global approach to agriculture The question is education

SUSTENAILTY

Let me cross to the second issue I want to rise today

Nowadays, the sustainability of production is an act of great accountability. Being connected with the management of renewable resources, we must act in an intelligent way and consciously in order to guarantee the future generations the same opportunities of growth and well being.

However, sustainability doesn't imply the concept of decrease. In fact, it is a synonym of development as long as this happens in harmony with not only the environment but also with economic and social growth.

The right farming model – which is the one that Italians have been working on for several years now – is the one that enables us to generate income and employment for the citizens. This model focuses on people's well being – which

involves wholesomeness and food safeness, the responsible management of the natural heritage and the safeguard of biodiversity. It is also important to mention the equity, justice and legality of the production processes, the distribution of value within the production process, in the relationship between producers and consumers.

When farming models are not balanced they focus on the quantity of production, on the profit of the farming process, and on the industrialization of food. All these factors led to disastrous phenomena like the desertification process, water and land grabbing, waste of food, and the false myth of GMOs.

Changing wrong farming models requires time and we need an inversion in tendency that cannot be achieved with small corrections on the way. It takes the courage to point at new paths, initiative and sub sequential developments. Coldiretti has been working for several years on achieving this goal with the creation of economic projects – such as Campagna Amica the biggest direct selling network of Europe – with farmers market, farms, agritourism, restaurants who use our farmers products - with a surplus in 2015 of 5 billion Euro – which are based on economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Eventually, from the combination of these two essential ingredients – innovation and sustainability – arises the ability to build new farming models based on the ability to see food from a different point of view. Indeed, food would no longer be a consumable good and therefore object of a business/profit but an unquestioned pillar to sustain the fortress of the human well-being. This is how we can nurture our most important heritage, which is made of environmental biodiversity, promotion of the equity among the people all over the world and the bond between cultures and countries.

Let me give you some examples about what italian young farmers are doing putting together innovation and sustainability

The first experience talk about innovation for transparency

Italian quality products are very much effected by counterfeit with a huge pressure on farmers revenue. I-olive is an application created by two young olive oil producers that use big data in order to give transparent information to the consumers about real extra virgin olive oil.

The application allows consumers to know if the extra virgin olive oil they bought to the super market, that they paid as extra virgin olive oil is **really** extra virgin and not virgin sold as extra virgin.

The second is focused on innovation for welfare

This is an amazing experience for weak children helped by a young women in her social farm

Pet therapy for children affected by autism

Thanks to horses sensibility and the feeling established with autistic children, many of them started to sing and to have incredible happiness moments with their families, friends and those children with same problems.

Animals don't make differences they just feel

Another experience is about contemporary needs

Many people decided to stop eat meat ...

It is not up to me to say if they are wrong or not

I want to introduce you another young italian women who took this need as an opportunity

You don't want meat? I give you wheat ...

A recipe elaborated with her father with a mix of ancient and different wheat and mais that has the same flavor of meat

that you can cook as hamburger, fiorentina steak, filet or like you prefer

Last but not the least

Innovation in the institutions

They want to be free

A team of prisoners lead by the director of Perugia prison who cultivates a 20 hectares of field inside the prison

Products they produce are used for feeding all the people who stay in the prison – both prisoners and workers

But three times a week they go out from the prison to sell their products in the farmers market network of Campagna Amica

Which is the result? One of them is finally a free person but he decided to remain with his team to continue their agriculture production in the prison

From here we have started, with this model we will continue to not leave anyone behind