ACF Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation

VOICES OF PROGRESS

NORWAY



IN CONVERSATION WITH

BODHILD FJELLTVEIT

Norwegian sheep farmer and Vice President of the Norwegian Farmers Union



Please could you tell us a bit about your farm?

I'm a fourth-generation small-scale family sheep farmer on the west coast of Norway. We produce grass on approximately 20 hectares, and lamb meat from 150 sheep that produce 250-300 lambs a year.

Norway's west coast is wet and cold, with heavy soil, making it ideally suited to grass production. Our mountains also suit sheep grazing between May-September. During our cold winters, where temperatures drop to -20°, we bring the sheep indoors in the barn.

Can you describe a typical day during your busiest season?

Right now, it's one of the busiest seasons on my farm. The last of the sheep actually had her lambs today, bringing to an end roughly 4-weeks of round-the-clock lambing during which 250 lambs took their first breaths. In the meantime, all of the usual work has to continue in the fields, with fertilizing, ploughing and preparing for the sheep to move outside.

What trade-offs do you currently face in producing healthy food in a way that is sustainable?

I want to start by saying that I think I already produce healthy and sustainable food. Sheep meat contains vitamins and nutrients that can be an important part of a healthy diet. The sheep graze outside all summer on grass and terrain that is otherwise not practical for agricultural cultivation or arable production. In fact, two-thirds of Norway's scarce agricultural land is only suitable for grass production, due to climatic and topographical factors.

> **"By using this land to graze sheep, my production contributes to important food security goals, whilst also maintaining open landscapes that benefit biodiversity."**

But of course there are trade-offs. Production has to be efficient and profitable enough to sustain me and my family living on the farm. In order to achieve this, we need to keep a certain number of animals and use some compound supplementary feed to reach a good slaughtering weight. Whilst this can have some impacts, it has to be considered against the fact that more efficient production through the use of compound feed ultimately results in lower emissions per kilo of meat. So everything has to be considered in the round.

How could government policy help you manage these trade-offs in a way that leads to better outcomes for you, your community and the environment?

Norway is unusual in that we – the farmers – negotiate the various subsidies each year with the government. In this way, we can play a part in influencing and shaping the levels of support that are offered.

As well as getting general income support, we also get support for specific environmental measures. The government also provides support to farmers who utilise Norway's 'outfields', keeping the landscape open for biodiversity whilst maximising food security. This is particularly the case for smaller farms and in areas where production is more challenging, like in the northern and western parts of the country where I live.

Tariffs on imported goods are also an extremely important part of the government's support to us, as they help ensure we are not outcompeted by farmers in areas where production is larger in scale and cheaper.

Finally, from a social and wellbeing perspective, I also get support for having a substitute on the farm if I get sick or go on holiday, making it easier to have a more 'normal' family life.



How do you feel about your future as a farmer?

I am quite optimistic. I feel lucky to be a farmer in Norway, where our agricultural model means farmers have an income that is fairly secure and predictable. We also have cooperatives that help regulate the market and obtain a fair price for farmers, with off-take obligations for every farm. Import regulations, combined with dedicated breeding programs which focus on animal health, help deliver high animal welfare standards.

And I think the recent geopolitical unrest has led to consumers becoming increasingly aware of why it is important for every country to have its own production and not be completely dependent on imports. That also makes me optimistic.



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IN CONVERSATION WITH

PAUL LARSEN

Special Envoy and Ambassador-at-large for international food and climate initiatives in the Norwegian Foreign Ministry

Please could you tell us a bit about yourself?

I am currently Special Envoy and Ambassador-at-large for international food and climate initiatives in the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, after having been a professional diplomat for more than 30 years.

Previous multilateral and development postings have included time at the UN Mission in New York as National Coordinator of Norway's Sustainable Development Goals and as Chief of Staff and Director at the UN World Food Program in Rome.

Which areas of policy do you oversee?

In addition to supporting Norway's co-chairing of the Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation, I am responsible for Norway's relationship with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome, which leads global efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security.

How do these interact with different parts of government?

All of my work with and through the FAO Council necessarily requires close working with other ministries - agriculture, fisheries and climate in particular, but also nature, finance, development and others. This is unavoidable if food security policy and co-operation on food systems transformation is to be coherent. This is one of the reasons the work of the ACF is so highly relevant in FAO's follow-up of the food systems initiatives from the Climate Conferences of Parties in Dubai and Baku, focusing on how to increase food production and nutrition access for a growing population without compromising climate and biodiversity goals.

How are competing agendas considered alongside each other? And what are the challenges in doing this?

Norway, like most nations and the world at large, has challenges in this regard. Indeed, the ACF's emphasis on recognising the importance of these trade-offs - and the need to tackle them head-on - was one of the factors that made membership so appealing. Our agriculture accounts for about 10% of Norway's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, a reduction of 10% since 1990. Globally, agrifood systems contribute almost 30% of total emissions. A significant share of this is linked to land use and deforestation. As well as taking bold action domestically to tackle this, as set out in our recent climate plan, Norway is also investing a large proportion of our official development assistance (ODA) – which remains at record levels, at more than $5bn USD, close to 1% of GDP – in rainforest protection, food security, climate finance and sustainable energy, including in Brazil and Africa.

What structures, institutions or processes has the government put in place to consider these in the round?

The Norwegian Government has a long tradition of including farmer unions in policy development. An annual 'Agricultural Agreement' stems from negotiations with the unions, covering everything from climate agreements to the economics of dairy production to welfare schemes for young farmers. This continues to be a hugely constructive way of forging consensus around difficult issues and improving, on a continual basis, the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the agricultural sector.



What, from the national perspective, is the prize of getting the transition right? And what are the costs of getting it wrong?

Ensuring a sustainable and secure transformation of food systems is, and must be, an international as well as a national priority task. Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, also a major global grain exporter, has shown the importance of keeping international trade and supply lines open while increasing efforts at national self-sufficiency and contingency planning for food security.

What are the government's aspirations for your country's food system in 2030? 2050?

The Government's recent climate plan confirms Norway's aim for a low-emissions society by 2050, with only 5-10% of greenhouse gas emissions remaining compared to 1990 levels, some of it unavoidably from food systems. We are working hard to reduce food waste, improve healthy diets and follow up on other relevant SDG targets as well as our climate and biodiversity commitments. Co-operation and support for developing nations through the UN and multilateral system will be central to our efforts.

> **"The impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss show the need for sustainable resource management of lands, forests, waters and oceans if we are to produce healthy and nutritious food sustainably for all."**

