

## **Family Farming: Feeding the world and caring for the earth**

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this important seminar.....

My name is Mikaela Johnsson. I am a farmer near a village called Hamneda in the province of Småland, in the southern part of Sweden. I and my husband run a farm together since 2006. We produce pigs, crops and forest. Presently we do about 150 hectares of arable land. The crops are used for fodder to the pigs. Our forest production we do on about 500 hectares. The basis for our farm is our 250 pure bred breeding sows. This makes the development of the pig meat market, with all its ups and downs, fundamental to the prosperity of my farm.

To me family farming is the best job in the world! It is intellectually challenging. It demands knowledge in a whole array of fields – everything from the basis of life and nature to high tech. It is a lot about planning – the farming business, the family, the personnel – all very delicate acts of planning individually. Think of them all together!

As a farmer in today's Swedish society there is a lot of legislation to follow and interpret. Like elsewhere you need to keep up with economic development, have entrepreneurial insight and develop the right strategy for my farming business.

It is a privilege to work the land and care of the animals along with given conditions, your skills, your access to technology and ever changing external circumstances.

The weather can be your best friend or your worst enemy. A good harvest is only rarely the result of external circumstances more often it is a result of your own knowledge and ability to adapt. As Ingemar Stenmark, a famous, very modest Swedish alpine skier once said: "I don't know about luck, but the more I practice, the more luck I get."

Swedish agriculture has had an enormous development the last generations. It has gone from being highly labour intensive to become modern and capital intensive with more efficient machinery and production systems. And in the meantime it has also decreased its environmental impact.

With this development agriculture has become a business activity for

- both women and men;
- the one who likes to work alone

- those who like collaborate and work together
- all those who loves to work with animals and nature and also
- for those who enjoys business administration and all the work that comes with having a business, small or big.

## Challenges

However there are also a lot of challenges to a young farmer – perhaps even more so for a farmer raising pigs. During my eight years as a farm entrepreneur the winds that have blown have been harsh. You have to hold on tight and widen your root system not to give in.

- We have felt increasing competition from other European producers. We many times have very different rules and regulations to respect me and my European colleagues but we compete on one and the same market. Market forces rule and there is no mercy for differences in legislation and corresponding production costs. Many times different rules punish those that are at the forefront of animal welfare and environmental sustainability. Or at least this is the case on the Swedish market where we like low prices.

- I as most other Swedish pig producers, have struggled with profitability during many years. This brings the challenge of a heavier work load for me as a farmer when I have less many to spend on salaries. This becomes a negative spiral where it becomes more and more difficult to develop and improve the business.

- Poor profitability also has an impact on the access to skilled labour and extension services. In the end economic uncertainty has a negative impact on investment and development. And this we have seen lately in Swedish pig meat production.

- We also have a gender challenge in agriculture. It is no secret that gender equality in agriculture lies behind gender equality in the rest of society. I do not think this is about tradition and that people in agriculture are retrograde. It is as a lot of other things a question of profitability. The workload it is to be a farmer is such that there needs to be somebody taking care of what needs to be done at home and in the family. And in many cases there is also a need of one on the family farm working outside farming to stabilise income.

- In Europe, perhaps also in other parts of the world, very many farmers are old and about to reach retirement. And we stand in front of a big challenge attracting people to the sector – both women and young people.

**The key for attractiveness is profitability.** Profitability is needed to make people dare and want to invest. Profitability is needed for agriculture to be able to compete with other employment in the city. A life without a good and stable income and possibilities for vacation is nothing that attracts young people nor in the cities, nor farm children in rural areas.

-For family farms to continue, develop and get younger, access to good service like schools, medical care and so forth in rural areas is also vital. And so are attractive employment opportunities for family members and employees and their families outside agriculture.

-An important challenge, but more for society, when it come family farming for the future is the attitude towards farming in Sweden. Sweden is one of the world's most urbanised countries. This is reflected also in the political life. I feel that questions important for rural areas are left behind what is important for urban areas. People live far away from agriculture and more and more often people in the cities do not have a relation or connection to farming not even through grand-parents.

For a long time we have felt a lack of interest amongst politicians towards agriculture and rural questions in general. Agriculture in Sweden is seen as something picturesque in the periphery of business life. We come in focus when it is about animal welfare legislation and environmental protection and then to often in a negative sense. It does not matter that Swedish farmers work with the strictest animal welfare legislation in the world and farming in general actually is part of the solution to climate change.

We are not asking for money but rather moral support. Just a tiny bit of what our French colleagues heard from their previous president "Agriculture is not something that belong to the past, it is very much the future. It is as much the future as is nanotechnology and space industry. "

To be fair to our politicians there has been movement the last year. During the election campaign several political parties talked about a national strategy for food production. I hope we hear more of this.

This is vital for the attractiveness of the sector.

**There are also opportunities....**

-We all need to show and realise what agriculture means to global food security and how important it is in the process of changing to renewable green energy.

We have an important role to play in the battle against climate change. The forest is an important as a carbon-sink and in replacing fossil fuels. We must preserve the biological diversity and produce sustainable foods for a growing population. In doing this we must be able to use the full potential of land in a sustainable way. Sustainability also need to include profitability and competitiveness. There is in this respect an obvious big need for the world to invest in research and development, knowledge and information.

-I see potential to produce a lot more food in Sweden. We are have the resources for producing more. When many countries have problem with deforestation farmers in Sweden have let agricultural land become forest. We have both land and water where we can produce more in a sustainable way.

-We work together me and my husband with strong focus on what we have decided to achieve. This is a strength that also brings self-confidence in what we do. And I think our company has a strong basis to continue to develop from.

Cooperation, not only in the family but also with other farmers, present opportunities for the future. We are for example both engaged in the Federation of Swedish Farmers and share the view that “the power of one “ is all but true. Farmers voices are better heard and listened to if they come in stereo.

”Feeding the world and caring for the earth.” This is really something we farmers do - every day, year after year and all round the world. The title of this years’ World Food Day is good at describing family farming.

There are many challenges but also opportunities. As I see it, the worlds’ young farmers in many respects hold the solution of many of the challenges of futures’ society. In this respect we have opportunities where ever we farm – in the Philippines, in Sweden .... And we have reason to look positively on the future.

As Brenda Shoepf wrote ”My grand- father used to say that once in life you need a doctor, a lawyer, a police man or a priest, but every day, three times a day, you need a farmer.

Thank you

