Keynote Speech

Good morning, distinguished guests, partners, and colleagues.

It is an honor to address you this morning, as we embark together on a vital journey to transform global agrifood systems. Over the next three days, experts from all over the world will offer insights on policies, partnerships, and scalable innovations across multiple geographies and sectors – all reflecting a shared commitment to sustainable development.

We gather here with one common vision: to make agrifood systems more inclusive, equitable, climate-resilient, and sustainable, while protecting biodiversity and ensuring food and nutrition for all. This mission is made all the more urgent by the profound global challenges we face, such as major demographic shifts and a changing climate that is increasing water scarcity, soil degradation and biodiversity loss all around our planet.

Equally clear is the path we need to take to realize this vision. Given the scale and complexity of the challenges we face, no single organization – regardless of reach or expertise – can tackle them alone. We need to leverage on international cooperation and strategic partnerships to turn groundbreaking research into sustainable solutions for smallholder farmers. International collaboration scales innovation, while strategic partnerships ensure that the solutions deployed are multifaceted, tailored to the local context and deliver tangible results.

So, as we consider the best way to direct the EU's investments in agricultural R&D to maximize effectiveness and align with the needs of partner countries, we must also reflect on how agriculture is likely to evolve in the Global South. Additionally, we need to identify the types of research that offer the most effective solutions for both current and future contexts, as well as the models of strategic cooperation that have proven most successful in scaling the impact of agricultural R&I.

Let me first share some thoughts on the first question on how agriculture is likely to evolve in the Global South. Globally, agriculture, land-use change, and forestry are responsible for almost 30% of greenhouse gas emissions. If agricultural emissions are not reduced, agriculture will account for 70% of the total GHG emissions that can be released if temperature increases are to be limited to 2°C.

This means that agrifood systems today must do more than produce food. They must be regenerative and provide long-term environmental and social benefits.

Take, for example, livestock production. It is the largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the agricultural sector, and responsible for 30% of global warming. But work being developed in partnership with the Alliance of Biodiversity International show the promise of integrating agricultural, environmental, and public health perspectives to achieve win-win scenarios: science-based innovations to reduce GHG emissions in livestock production have simultaneously mitigated methane emissions, strengthened farmer resilience, and improved access to essential animal-source foods in Ethiopia and Lebanon.

Interventions such as these provide a roadmap for broader policy for integrated livestock production, and offer a glimpse into the future of agrifood systems, where new generations of farmers blend traditional knowledge with modern technologies. Our policies must evolve to support both, fostering an environment where smallholders thrive alongside larger agribusinesses while prioritizing sustainability and resilience.

Striking the right balance is essential. For Europe, this means that programs such as Global Gateway investments in agriculture must support private sector investments while prioritizing smallholder farmers—the backbone of our food systems. These farmers supply raw materials that drive industrial agriculture and sustain food security. Their inclusion is essential for building a resilient agrifood system.

As the EU refines its international strategy for agricultural R&I, it is essential to focus on strengthening frameworks that integrate research, innovation, and education within agrifood systems. Achieving scalable, real-world applications of scientific breakthroughs requires three key steps: first, strengthening agricultural innovation systems to bridge the gap between research institutions, farmers, policymakers, and the private sector; second, enhancing digital and data-driven solutions for improved decision-making and resource management; and third, mobilizing financial resources to support these efforts.

The EU already plays a significant role in global agricultural research, contributing one-third of CGIAR's funding, which demonstrates its strong commitment to science-driven solutions. Over 250 European partners—universities, NGOs, and private sector actors—actively contribute to CGIAR's research and impact.

Globally, EU-supported research has also influenced global policies on climate change, food safety, and sustainable development. Success stories like the Team Europe Initiative exemplify the power of united efforts between Europe and global partners and demonstrate the potential of coherent EU efforts in research, innovation, and education.

The challenge ahead for Europe is to build on these successes, better structuring its approach to research, innovation, and education, ensuring that investments flow

efficiently to where they are most needed. Agricultural R&D is a structural element of global, regional and national infrastructure that underpins global food security, climate action and economic development. Given its spillover effects, agricultural development should be lifted as one of the key pillars of the EU's foreign policy.

With over 3,000 partners – including governments, NARES, farmer groups, community organizations, and the private sector organizations – and 10,000 researchers in 80 LMICs, CGIAR is well-positioned to help scale the impact of European agricultural R&I around the world – by connecting global, regional, and national efforts that foster vital cross-sector collaboration and scale innovative solutions where they are needed most.

Several successful models of international cooperation already demonstrate what is possible. For example, the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) program, led by the African Development Bank, scaled climate-smart seeds to 12 million farmers across 27 countries in just three years. CGIAR's program for accelerating the impact of climate research in Africa (AICCRA) has provided millions of smallholder farmers with access to climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies.

This same focus on innovation and collaboration should guide Europe's investments in R&D. By uniting the strengths of CGIAR, Europe, and CGIAR-EU initiatives, we can leverage innovation to create science-based, scalable solutions that are applicable to diverse agricultural and community contexts.

I invite all stakeholders—governments, the private sector, civil society, and research institutions—to commit to this transformative journey and work together to create lasting impact by investing in R&I that produces tangible, scaled impact that improves lives, strengthens resilience, and sustains the planet.

By leveraging our collective expertise and resources, we can catalyze the changes needed to build resilient and equitable food systems for all.

Thank you for your attention.