

IFAJ Denmark 2022 Report

By Lindi Botha



Andermatt
Madumbi

The fact that the world is moving towards greener food production is undeniable, affecting almost every step in the food production value chain.

I was privileged to attend the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) congress in Denmark in June 2022, thanks to the generous sponsorship of Andermatt Madumbi. Here, it was very clear just how serious the European Union (EU) is about reducing their carbon footprint and improving the natural environment. Some of the legislation is quite draconian - Denmark is looking at taxing farmers R1400 per ton of carbon emissions, while other moves are based on consumer demands and preferences. This includes reducing the use of harsh chemicals and fertilisers. I believe there is so much potential for Andermatt Madumbi to expand both in that market and in the South African market to provide holistic and integrated approaches to pest management and yield improvements.

While the South African market is still catching up to the EU in terms of demand for, and legislation that supports reduced synthetic farming inputs, history shows us that sooner or later the EU legislation catches up with South Africa. This is especially the case for producers who export their produce to the EU, since the farming industry in Denmark was vocal about not allowing produce to be imported that was not produced according to the same standards as that which is produced locally.

Jane Craigie, one of the participants at the congress, reported in British newspapers, "Denmark is firmly on the path to green food and energy production and the country's farmers and food companies operate in one of the world's most stringent climate-conscious economies. Pesticide taxes have existed since 1996 – fungicides are charged at 25% and insecticides at 35% – and there are uncultivated, unfertilised and non-spray buffer margin restrictions on land of 10m for watercourses and 25m around drinking water wells.

"New Zealand has already made the same move, but their taxation level is far less punitive for farming at £2/ton. Denmark's countryside reflects this drive towards net zero, as does the research its universities and private sectors undertake."

This is certainly a glimpse of what is to come for South Africa. The race for carbon neutrality is speeding up in Europe as farmers fear draconian carbon taxes, and a



The Danes are very focused on consuming food that is good for the planet and people. How food is produced plays a big role in decision making when making food choices.



Buying local is an important marketing tool for farmers since consumers are focused on reducing their carbon footprints.

backlash from consumers wanting to reduce their own carbon footprints. But speakers at the IFAJ congress were all clear about one aspect:

"You can't be green if you are in the red"

Meaning that any attempts to 'clean' up agriculture still needs to make economic sense, or farmers would cease to continue production. This is where natural products have a massive role to play in boosting production and keeping damage from pests and environmental issues at bay.

Søren Søndergaard, chairperson of the Danish Agriculture and Food Council, noted that if the proposed tax of R1400/t of carbon emitted were to be imposed, many farmers would be paying more in tax than what they would be earning. He called for more time to allow farmers to implement green solutions before imposing taxes. "If the taxes are brought in now farmers will not have the funds to invest in greener technologies. The taxes need to be brought in gradually, but much further down the line."

The need for the industry to change was however uncontested by all stakeholders. Søndergaard stated that greener systems needed to be found and implemented by farmers themselves. "If they don't, someone else will do it for them and they might not like the solutions they are imposing."

Herein lies a big opportunity to introduce solutions that are good for production, income, and the environment, before further draconian measures are forced upon farmers.

The role of agricultural journalists in disseminating information to farmers about how to tackle climate challenges was underscored at the congress. Agriculture is an evolving industry and journalists are critical in disseminating all information as well as research results to farmers and all the necessary stakeholders. Addressing participants, Fredrick Thalbitzer, chairman of the Danish Association of Agricultural Journalists, stated that journalists have a major role to communicate about food and agriculture adding that,

"in a few years, the world's population will grow from almost 8 billion to 10 billion people and they will all need something to eat."

Imploring agricultural communicators and agricultural journalists to disseminate information timeously, Thalbitzer explained that farmers are learning new things every day, researchers are finding new and better ways whilst animal and plant breeders are constantly making progress. "As agricultural communicators, it is our task to disseminate new knowledge timely so that it can be applied in the field as quickly as possible," he added.



Denmark's countryside is dotted with wind turbines as the country increasingly seeks climate friendly solutions for energy production.



The IFAJ offered numerous farms tours to choose from each day, to get an up close look at Denmark's farming industry and understand issues on the ground. This was but one group out of four that spent the day touring vegetable, grain and pig farms.

South Africa might be at the very bottom of Africa, but our role in global food production is vital. It is therefore prudent that our agricultural and journalist community remains ahead of the curve to ensure continuous food production that serves planet and people. Working closely with companies that are at the forefront of producing natural solutions to farming's problems is vital to ensure adoption of the life saving technologies.



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