



Dupont Summit 2017

Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy

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Presentation

“Good Food Policy: Feeding a Growing World”

In food policy, there are two big questions. First, how do we feed 9.7 billion people by 2050? Second, how do we ensure that food production does not further endanger human life and the health of our planet by significantly contributing to climate change?

Sustainable protein is the answer. Food policy must focus on producing and promoting more efficient and less wasteful sources of protein.

United Nations scientists state that raising and killing animals for food is “one of the major causes of the world’s most pressing environmental problems, including global warming, land degradation, air and water pollution, and loss of biodiversity.” Conventional animal agriculture contributes more to climate change than the entire transportation sector combined. Meanwhile, the world’s appetite for meat is growing.

Food is a deeply personal and cultural matter. That is why our society should focus on developing and promoting new ways of producing meat. Just as people now use automobiles rather than horses and buggies, and smartphones empower farmers to move out of desperate poverty, the next fifty years will see a dramatic shift away from conventional meat to clean and plant-based meats.

Clean meat is real meat produced from animal cells outside the animal itself. In 1931, Winston Churchill declared, “We shall escape the absurdity of growing a whole chicken in order to eat the breast or wing, by growing these parts separately under a suitable medium.” This year, Bill Gates and Richard Branson invested in one of the companies working to do just that. Clean meat is already a reality in food labs: all that is needed now is innovation to bring the price down and regulatory approval.

Plant-based meat, on the other hand, is already widely available in supermarkets and restaurants across the country. And today’s burgers made from plants are much more similar to burgers from beef than those you could buy five years ago. Further innovation aims to reduce any remaining differences until they are infinitesimal. As one CEO of a plant-based meat company put it, “Why do you need an animal to create meat? Why can't you build meat directly from plants? It turns out you can.” There is nothing in meat that cannot be found in the plant kingdom.

Policy must be laser-focused on speeding the transition from conventional meat to these more sustainable and efficient sources of protein. Good food policy requires that we invest in public research, ensure a clear and efficient regulatory approval pathway for clean meat, and create a level playing field that lets plant-based meat compete with conventional meat.

Food systems and agricultural development are affected by the policies made here in Washington DC and around the world. The choices we make today in the halls of Congress, federal regulatory agencies, and university and nonprofit institutions affect the world we are passing down to our children. Together, we can feed a growing world by producing and promoting more efficient and sustainable sources of protein.

Speaker

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