Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan at Expo Milan
International Agricultural Forum

“From EXPO 2015 and beyond: agriculture to feed the planet”

4th June 2015, Milan

- Check Against Delivery –

(Introduction)

- Minister Martina, Director-General Graziano, Ministers,
  Esteemed Guests,

- It is a great pleasure to be with you today. I see many familiar
  faces among the distinguished gathering here, and I look
  forward to meeting some of you for the first time.

- Ladies and gentlemen, I believe we are in the right place at the
  right time. The theme of the Expo - "Feeding the Planet, Energy
  for Life" - is at the very heart of an important global discussion
  that we need to develop in the coming months and years.
• As you are all aware, Expo Milan has been many years in the making, so let us challenge ourselves to have a purposeful and productive discussion worthy of this fine occasion. The Expo is a real window of opportunity to communicate with citizens, foster global research and stimulate a meaningful policy debate.

• Our shared challenge, ladies and gentlemen, is to reflect on the individual and collective roles we can play in order to design and steer a food strategy fit for the 21st Century.

(Background: Global Poverty and Hunger)

• I know you are all very familiar with the key data on present and future challenges, with some 795 million people worldwide still suffering from chronic hunger. And with global population growth continuing rapidly, the world will have to produce 60% more food by 2050.

• So how can we begin to confront these issues? How can we produce more, using less?
Today I wish to deliver the clear and decisive message that the European Union recognises its global responsibilities and is ready to act.

(*Sustainable Food Systems*)

Our shared challenge is to develop sustainable food systems and focus the international debate on increasing productivity, while maintaining the collective focus on climate change and the sustainable management of natural resources.

To achieve an agriculture fit for the challenges of the 21st Century, we must fully support a knowledge-based agriculture, strengthening research and innovation, and bridging the communication gap between farmers, researchers and agri-business.

We must harness the current "Agri-tech revolution" to address major global issues such as water shortages and the reduction in arable land. **We need to innovate more, and innovate faster, if we are to achieve our ambitions.**
But this necessary research and innovation will not always happen of its own accord. **It will happen because we create the right enabling environment for it to thrive.**

This means creating programmes and structures which encourage collaboration and targeted research. And it means **providing adequate funding for those programmes and structures.**

In the EU we try to align the interests of scientists and farmers by obliging researchers to include the wider sector in the design of projects.

Moreover, we support pilot projects by groups of farmers or other practitioners to test new ideas and new knowledge both "on the ground" and "in the ground". And when other farmers see a pilot project giving real results on a real farm, they will be motivated to innovate quicker themselves.
• And we are putting our money where our mouth is. We are serious about promoting and funding research and innovation, in our own territories and beyond, in order to allow the farm sector to adapt to new trends and become more resource efficient.

• We are notably funding synergies between Agriculture and Research, via the Horizon 2020 Research Programme and the European Innovation Partnership for "Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability", or "EIP-AGRI". Concrete innovation projects can be funded under the Rural Development Programmes also.

• We expect this enabling environment to enhance our understanding of plant and animal genomics, which when combined with the reduction in the cost of sequencing will allow for the development of better varieties and breeds.

• Improved agro-ecological approaches allow for the development of more cost effective pest and disease suppression methods.

• The development of precision farming will ensure far more efficient production methods which will be good for both farmers and the environment.
Examples abound of projects that can make a real difference. I recently observed an innovation which helps farmers measure grass quantity more accurately. The "Grass Hopper" project has developed a device which uses an ultra-sonic sensor to precisely measure compressed grass height. The information can be automatically transferred to a smart device and then the internet cloud. This technology is available for small money, and livestock farmers big and small can avail of this innovation.

(Global Cooperation)

Meanwhile, beyond our boundaries, the agricultural sector in the EU has an important role to play in sharing innovations, good farming techniques and sustainable practices with other regions of the world.

We have learned many lessons during our shared journey towards a modern agricultural policy. We are willing, and committed, to sharing this bank of knowledge with our global partners.

For this reason, we are currently strengthening cooperation and synergies worldwide.
• For example, our research programme is open to researchers and research institutions from all the world and strong efforts are made to encourage them to seize this opportunity. **I look forward to discussing this in greater detail with you today and on other occasions.**

• In addition, **we are serious about working with our partners:** in the last years alone we advanced scientific cooperation with countries in Africa and the Mediterranean area, as well as China.

*(Conclusion: Agriculture as a Driver of Development)*

• And we can do even more beyond our borders. The EU's commitment to the developing world is longstanding and multi-faceted. As well as having a dedicated development infrastructure throughout the globe, **we are the biggest importer of produce from developing countries.**

• And we know that agriculture and rural economic activity are crucial for reducing poverty and eradicating hunger in developing countries. **75% of the world's very poor are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods.**
• From a development point of view, it is therefore our firmly held belief that the principles I have mentioned - enhanced innovation and collaboration to make agri-food a driver of economic growth and job creation - are equally valid in our neighbouring regions and beyond.

• Achieving an intelligent and efficient policy mix at all levels is the key to confronting our shared challenges.

• But all this has to be assisted by sustainable and strategic investment – notably from the private sector. This will be a crucial step in transforming agriculture in developing countries, encouraging local entrepreneurship and incentivising investors.

(Conclusion)

• Ladies and gentlemen, we live in a world where a rapidly increasing number of families are achieving a better standard of living. This welcome change means that these same families will expect a higher standard of food and nutrition. We must adapt to this new reality with confidence and purpose.
• Investment in the wealth-creating potential of developing world farmers is one of the most direct ways to lift communities out of poverty, thus generating continuing economic growth.

• We have many things to discuss today, and I hope that during my analysis of global food security, I have given you some food for thought.

• I look forward to hearing your contributions and I wish you a successful day.

• Thank you very much for your attention.