

## **Thematic Session on Sustainability and Responsibility in Food and Agriculture**

*Food is one of our basic needs. Food is culture and sometimes a luxury good. Often, food issues are emotional. They embrace farmers, businesses, consumers, policy and society that altogether share responsibility.*

Contemporary food supply and marketing encompasses the whole value chain from agriculture over food processing, including gastronomy, to the consumers. Along this chain, various challenges and concerns are involved, such as sustainable resource management (soil, water, energy, nutrient losses, food waste, etc.), responsibility and governance, and not to forget consumer behavior. On the business side, the UN Global Compact launched in May 2014 the Food and Agriculture Business (FAB) Principles. This is the first set of global voluntary business principles for the food and agriculture sector. Serving as umbrella principles, they complement existing initiatives on agriculture and food sustainability and aim at achieving a principle-based commitment and inclusion of farmers and agribusinesses. Moreover, they shall provide a common basis for corporate sustainability reporting.

Beyond this perspective of current businesses, the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) focus on the education of future leaders and their capabilities to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society, as well as a mutual exchange among educators, students, business and other stakeholders. Building on this understanding of the PRME community and the FAB challenge, the first Responsible Management Education Research Conference brought together representatives from the food industry and academia to exchange about the above issues.

*Max Peter*, Head Trade and Supply Chain Management, Emmi, Switzerland, explained the motivations and concrete measures of integrating sustainability issues in the supply chain management of a leading milk processor. He pointed on the various interrelated challenges and opportunities along the value chain and the need to change managerial and operational thinking that, in the end, meets the consumers. Focusing on the latter behavior and lifestyles, *Evelyn Markoni*, a researcher at the School of Agriculture, Forest and Food Sciences HAFL, Zollikofen, Switzerland, revealed contradictions in the so-called LOHAS (lifestyle of health and sustainability) behavior. Moreover, she emphasized the need of a fair sharing of responsibility which must include a better understanding of the consumers' behavior and their potential. *Peter Lutz*, CMO of the SV-Group, Switzerland, picked up these insights from the perspective of the catering and restaurants business. He underlined the importance of market orientation and the close relationship between sustainability and corporate social responsibility with the marketing mix, which ultimately relates to the skills of future marketing managers in the food and gastro industry. Finally, *Michael Ottenbacher*, professor at the Hochschule Heilbronn, Germany, presented several innovations in the restaurant sector and, being perfectly in line with the previous speakers, concluded that “Having an innovative idea is not the important aspect; rather, converting the idea into a service is critical.”

The discussions in this session revealed some of the complexities regarding the definition of responsibility in agri-food chains, and the need for further research and continued debates. Food and agriculture must be seen as an important topic in responsible management education, and vice versa.