

Opening speech at the Inpact conference 24th September 2010

By Audun Tron (Chairman of County Council – Mayor of Oppland County)

Dear conference participants.

I am very happy to welcome you to the Inpact conference here in Lena today, a special welcome to all foreign guests from the whole Europe. The conference is organized by Valle upper secondary school as a part of the Oppland County Authority. Our authority is very much concerned about the issues that this conference covers like the future of our young citizens and the future for our agriculture and agriculture related businesses.

To meet the future, we need education. It means that we have to prepare the coming generations to be able to handle today's and the future's challenges. We are already facing different challenges. These are of global, national and local character. The challenges I am thinking about are the global warming, the shortage of food and the raise of food prices, unemployment and people's everyday struggles for their daily living. The recent years nature catastrophes tell us that we need preparedness when it comes to food production.

Here we are in northern Europe with cold climate and several kilometres from the European continent. That reflects the challenges of people and agriculture in Norway and Oppland. Only three percent (%) of Norway's area is arable land, in our county it is four percent. This county is mountainous, with 80 % of its area lying above 600 metres above sea level. In addition there are valleys, forests and lakes in between. Our 185000 inhabitants are living in 26 municipalities. The two largest are the cities Gjøvik and Lillehammer. Due to Norway's economy we are also dependent on food production and modern agriculture knowhow.

Historically Oppland is an agricultural county. As being far away from the European continent we had to manage without much supply from outside. During the last decades the numbers of farms and farmers have decreased. That is a common challenge across Europe. The agriculture has been more and more efficient. However, in Norway there is an important political aim among mostly all political parties of making people live more or less all over the country. In that context there have been many strategies of preventing people from moving from the rural districts to the urban areas.

In earlier days agriculture was the foundation for most communities in Oppland. This has changed quite a lot. Less than 10% of working people have their daily income from agriculture in Oppland. Agriculture is still an important business for Oppland, due to people working on farms or in processing industries and companies relying on agriculture. Both timber-processing industry and the food industry are important here. Oppland is contributing with approximately 10% of Norway's agricultural production.

Tourism is also an important business for Oppland. In northern part of Oppland there are several national parks, highest mountains of Norway and attractive areas for tourists. The valleys of Oppland are also popular among domestic and international tourists. Even if there are several advantages with beautiful sceneries we still have to work hard to make young people settle and develop their farms and additional businesses connected to it. Oppland's tourist businesses are also dependent on active farmers that maintain the cultural landscape.

One of the challenges of farming in Europe is making young people succeed their parents as farmers and to keep the farm business profitable. There are so many possibilities for young

people today to educate and to choose any profession. It seems as agriculture is losing in the competition of attracting young people.

It is therefore important that we make young people understand that biological competences are needed, not only to be recruited for agriculture, but also to work on solutions for our time's most important environmental problems.

International project like Inpact makes it more interesting for young people to study agriculture. Through international exchange programs and project they get new knowledge, they do improve their English, they learn new cultures to know, meet other people, enlarge their network and broaden their perspectives. This is a wise way to be more professional. Agriculture in Norway and other regions of Europe need skilful, engaged and professional young people. They are needed to take over their parents' farms and to develop the agriculture to meet the needs of global, national and local interests.

I believe that teachers and schools taking part of projects like Inpact will evolve themselves when they exchange ideas and experiences. The Inpact project is using new methods as a part of its strategy. To develop a modern agriculture it is required to find new ways to mobilize people to solve profound challenges of our time. All together there are many reasons to give you credit for your participation in the project and in the conference.

I wish you good luck with this conference and hopefully you will succeed in educating a new generation of professional agriculturists.