

## To prepare the future

Dear allotment gardeners

Success is a sum of well considered decisions taken at the appropriate moment.

Therefore, the national federations and the International Office are discussing the subject concerning the future of the allotment gardens.

Three facts cannot be denied.

Since its foundation the allotment garden movement has changed and has adapted itself to the new requirements. New aspects have been added over the years to the aim to preserve the family unity and the function of food security, like for example a meaningful leisure time occupation, the contribution to physical and mental health, nature and environment protection as well as the contribution to a sustainable development.

Similarly to many other benevolent movements the allotment garden movement is confronted with unsolved problems. One can mention the aging of its members, the image of the movement, the difficulty to make members participate in associative works, the competition of numerous other leisure activities, the professional burden and stress.

Finally, one has to mention that the authorities often underline the beneficial effect of the allotment gardens for the whole society and nature, but are hesitant to transpose these words into deeds. They retire more and more from their responsibilities and one has to acknowledge the loss of allotment gardens in favour of more profitable projects.

Therefore, the allotment gardeners are not allowed to hesitate and to lose time. They have to continue to evolve and to offer future perspectives to the citizens and society. Following facts should be considered:

1) The allotment gardens must be, or have to remain legally protected. The establishment of allotment garden development plans are absolutely necessary in order to take the needs of urban development into consideration and to protect the allotments as an element of a social and urban environment with a high living quality.

2) The voluntary work is confronted with great challenges because of the new professional conditions and family burdens. One has to be flexible and the participation of the members in associative work has possibly to be planned differently. Short/limited participation (project oriented participation) could possibly replace long term participation.

3) The authorities are withdrawing more and more from many areas and the financial support is reduced. These facts have to be seriously considered. The cooperation with the authorities and their reciprocal obligations might possibly have to be redefined. Our aim is a structured and regulated support.

4) The contact with the garden, with the earth, with nature is no more evident today. The experienced members should pass their values on the new and/or young allotment gardeners, involve them and help them. The latter should possibly get a formation so that gardening will be enjoyable for them and that they will not abandon due to disappointments. The exchange of experience and the maintenance of an important know-how remain significant advantages of our movement.

5) The usefulness of the allotment gardens for the citizens, society and nature have to be more and more publically demonstrated. By the conclusion of partnerships the sites should for example on one hand be opened to infants, schoolchildren, elderly people, disabled persons and on the other hand beekeepers and bird protection associations.

6) The allotment gardeners must create attractive allotment garden sites taking into consideration the expectations of young allotment gardeners without, however, renouncing to the fundamental values of the movement. The gardens must become a place of great creativity, so that the site becomes an area of discovery for the people walking through it. Flexibility and open minds are required. Our offer must be as wide as possible.

7) The opening of the allotment garden sites for people living in the neighbourhood is a "Must". So all the neighbours can profit of their benefits and this will create a feeling that allotments are an integral part of the residential area. This contributes in an important way to the protection of allotments.

8) Positive public relations are essential. The allotment gardeners must underline the services they provide society with: i.e. integration, health, quality of life, nature protection. They have to sensitize the population to the numerous innovative projects realized within the movement.

At the occasion of the international congress, all these problems will continue to be discussed. Interesting lectures, discussions and an exchange of experiences and thus learning, seeing and understanding in an agreeable fellowship are only some of the advantages of an international congress. During this congress the successes of the past will certainly be considered, but above all will the delegates try to build on these successes and to plan a successful future.

Join us, your ideas are welcome too!

Already now I wish you and your family a happy New Year 2011, a good health and much pleasure in your garden. Malou

WEIRICH Secretary general