

Dear allotment gardeners!

I have the great honour of addressing you for the first time in my function as Secretary General at the end of the year.

After our dear Malou Weirich stepped down in the middle of the year after more than three decades in this position, I was appointed new Secretary General by the General Assembly of the International Federation. A task that fills me with a great deal of pride, but also with a great deal of awe and respect, as the shoes I have to fill are truly big.

Nevertheless, I am very much looking forward to taking up this challenge for the benefit of the international allotment garden family.



We allotment gardeners have always played an important role in the cities, even if this has been forgotten at times. In times of war and after the war, we were the guarantors for the supply of the population and allotment plots could be found everywhere in the cities. After the great hardship of the wars had been overcome, the allotment gardens also changed and over the decades became more recreational and leisure gardens in many countries. But this form is also changing more and more.

Today our allotment gardens are so much more and cannot be pigeonholed:

They are refuges for many different species of animals and plants that would have a much harder time without allotments in the cities.

They are the green lungs of cities, and their very existence helps to reduce urban warming.

They are classrooms that bring our children closer to nature.

They are supermarkets where the best and healthiest fruit and vegetables can be grown.

They are fitness centres and life counsellors in one.

They are places of recreation for the entire urban population.

They are places where people meet.

Our allotment gardens are all this and much more and we must not forget this.

Allotment gardens provide a habitat for a large number of animals and plants because we allotment gardeners make sure that our gardens are managed in an environmentally friendly, pesticide-free and sustainable way. On the one hand, of course, for ourselves, but also for the generations after us in order to leave them an environment worth living in. It is no coincidence that the biodiversity in allotment gardens is far higher than in other publicly accessible areas of cities. We have been cultivating our allotment gardens for over 100 years and therefore have expertise in how to manage our gardens in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way.

By giving a variety of plants space to grow in our gardens, the allotment gardens contribute to a better climate in the cities. Especially in times of climate change and global warming, the contribution we allotment gardeners can make here is irreplaceable. This is one of the most valid arguments to prevent allotment gardens from being pushed out of the cities to the periphery. Because it is precisely in the cities, where greenery is often not so easy to find, that our allotment gardens can make their contribution against the warming of the cities.

Our allotment gardens give us the opportunity to grow our own fruit and vegetables and to pass this knowledge on to our children. Knowing exactly where the harvested produce comes from and what it has been treated with is a value that is almost priceless. Along with the harvest, we also know how to preserve this food, which is often referred to as "ancient" knowledge. But even in times of crisis, allotment garden yields can bring relief in difficult situations.

Not to mention the health benefits of allotment gardening. Exercise in itself is already healthy and doing this in the fresh air increases this value enormously. Numerous studies have shown that gardening not only has a positive effect on physical health, but also on mental health.

In the allotment garden, this effect is multiplied by the environment that the allotment garden association offers.

Because we must not forget one thing:

The allotment garden associations are part of a profoundly social movement. People meet in the association, come together to chat, exchange experiences and also to help each other. What many people lack in the anonymity of the big city can be found in allotment gardens. A neighbourhood where people take care of each other, where they help and support each other, a place to meet and live together.

We must not lose sight of this fact, even in times like these, when buzzwords such as climate change, global warming, but also price rises and inflation are spreading terror everywhere.

Co-operation is also one of the many positive aspects of the meetings of the international allotment gardeners within the framework of the International Federation. The international meetings are characterised by a positive drive to work together to advance the allotment garden movement.

As different as our allotment gardens may be in the various countries, we all work hard to make our allotment garden movement visible on a national and international level and to make its value obvious to non-allotment gardeners.

Together we can achieve so much more for our allotment garden family than alone.

In the spirit of this reflection on what we have in common, I wish you and your loved ones a Merry Christmas and all the best and health for the New Year 2024.

*Sylvia Wohatschek*

*Secretary General, Fédération Internationale des Jardins Familiaux*