The major challenge facing humankind today is not economic growth but the reduction of inequality (unequal distribution of wealth, rights, and access) and inequity (social injustice, poverty, and hunger). While efficiency in resource allocation and use must continue to be pursued, it should be pursued as a means of reducing inequality and inequity rather than a goal in itself. On this background, the major future challenges related to agriculture, food, and trade are:

1. Eradication of hunger, malnutrition, and related health problems,
2. Improved access to productive resources and markets by the poor,
3. Sustainable use of natural resources,
4. Reduction of conflict and instability at national and international levels,
5. Guidance of globalization, science and technology, and national policies towards equality and equity goals.

Enough food is being produced to meet energy and protein requirements of the current world population, if the food were distributed according to needs. However, surplus production and widespread hunger coexist both at the global level and in several countries worldwide. About 800 million people do not get enough to eat – they are food insecure – while about 1 billion people get too much – they are overweight or obese.

The number of overweight and obese people, on the other hand, is increasing rapidly in both developing and industrialized countries. Obesity and the resulting heart diseases, stroke, diabetes, and cancer are becoming serious public health problems. The primary causes of this impending epidemic are dietary changes towards more refined sugar and fat and reduced physical activity. A number of other public health problems interact with hunger and malnutrition, first and foremost HIV/AIDS and TB.

Inequality in access to productive resources, income earning opportunities, and wealth has led to widespread inequity. While attempts to redistribute existing wealth have been unsuccessful in most cases, land reforms in some countries, most notably in South Korea, have been successful. One of the key questions related to efforts to eliminate food insecurity is whether growth should be pursued independent of its immediate distributional effects or whether pro-poor growth, which may imply a lower overall rate of growth, should be pursued. What is clear is that attempts to redistribute wealth without growth are unlikely to be politically feasible.

There is no reason to believe that the world cannot continue to increase food production to meet future demands without reducing the productive capacity for the future. The challenge is not to maintain natural resources in their current state at all cost but to gradually increase the productive capacity of the combined set of resources – natural and human-made - taking into account society’s desires for all eco-services including but not limited to agricultural output.

Efforts to achieve food security for all will require action on two fronts. First, the poor developing countries need to refocus public policies and investment priorities towards agriculture and rural areas. Heavy investment in rural infrastructure and market structure and performance, agricultural research, primary education, and health care are likely to be needed in most of these countries. Second, OECD countries should decouple domestic agricultural subsidies from quantity produced and area used in production, and eliminate tariffs and other import restrictions on agricultural commodities, processed foods, and textiles from developing countries. Subsidized exports, including dumping and non-emergency food aid, should also be discontinued.

In addition to the lack of international accountability and the perceived social injustice associated with globalization as it currently takes place, an increasing gap between food and agriculture related goals and attitudes in high-and low-income countries are likely to dampen the progress towards trade liberalization for food and agriculture.

Improvements in equality and equity are of critical importance not only to improve food security but also to maintain international stability. The main driving forces, such as globalization and technological change, must be guided by new international institutions and agreements and national policies towards the achievement of equality and equity goals. Existing trade-distorting policies in both OECD and developing countries should be replaced by true trade liberalization and the temptation to replace tariffs with non-tariff barriers should be resisted. For the food insecure to benefit from the removal of trade distortions, low-income countries must expand investments in public goods such as rural infrastructure, research, primary education, and health care for low-income people. Without such additional investments, the benefits from trade liberalization may bypass the poor and food insecure.