

Christophe Pelletier is a global food & agriculture strategist and futurist whose consulting company helps organisations anticipate, adapt, and thrive.

He is the author of two books: *Future Harvests* and *We Will Reap What We Sow*. Both tackle the major issues impacting the future of food and farming.

In addition, Pelletier also writes a popular blog: *The Food Futurist* - www.hfgfoodfuturist.com

What kinds of companies consult with you and what services do you offer?

Since I specialise in the future of food and farming, it is not surprising that the majority of my customers are agri-business companies. Some of them are among the largest in the world and some are small and mid-size. I have also provided services to non-profit organisations as well.

My services can be divided in four main categories:

Futures Scenarios to envision different possibilities and situations by looking at the future from different angles and perspectives. Lots of 'what if?' and 'why not?'

Strategic Foresight, which goes a step further and initiates possible solutions to different scenarios - strategic Foresight is the beginning of action.

Speaking Engagements have become my main activity. Audiences range from conferences to in-house groups within my customers' organisations or with their customers or media as well.

Advisory Services on request, depending on specific topics. This category is entirely to the customers to define and shape. There is no standard format.

Can you talk to us about your books?

I published the first book, *Future Harvests*, in 2010, about a year after I started a blog that I called "The Food Futurist". The purpose of the blog was just for me to write my views about the topic of feeding a growing population. I started it because I was not really satisfied by what I was reading or hearing about the subject.

To my surprise, the blog gained more and more traffic and I decided to expand on the articles I had written and merge it all in a book. *Future Harvests* is a rather factual book with lots of information. I structured it around six "principles" that I combined into the acronym of SIMPLE, for Sustainability, Innovation, Market orientation, Pragmatism, Leadership and Efficiency.

My second book, *We Will Reap What We Sow*, published in 2012, is a follow-up on *Future Harvests*. For as much as *Future Harvests* was focusing on factual and rational information.

This book is more of a philosophical nature. The subtitle, "Reflections on Human Nature, Leadership and Feeding a Growing Population", gives a good indication of the content, but it is not intellectual or pedantic, it is all written in plain English.

In the book, I look at the good and less good habits of humans and how they can influence their future. The book explores scenarios and strategies from both the points of views of a likely future and of a desirable future and how to shape things to come.

With the world's population projected to hit 9.5 billion by 2050, do you think the flour and rice milling industries can meet the likely demand?

I do not see why not.

Of course, there will be challenges on the way, with climate and water on top of the list. There also will be solutions. 10 years ago, there were many doomsday thinkers. Since then, the world population has increased by roughly 900 million people, and agricultural commodity prices today are lower than they were by then. This tells me there is hope.

That said, it is important to look at which parts of the world are expecting to grow (Africa and Asia) and how they are equipped to deal with population increase. In my opinion,

investing heavily in infrastructure, education, and knowledge transfer is of the utmost importance. We need better farmers; we need to be able to transport and store agricultural products; we need to eliminate waste of all sorts—food, water, energy, inputs, etc.—if we want to succeed.

Such investments are not minor, and returns will not always be quick, but the alternatives will be much worse. It illustrates my human nature and leadership topic. Money talks and if it did talk ten years ago, it will again. With sky-high agricultural commodity prices, farmers became "hungry" for more and production increased strongly and quickly, resulting now in tough markets for farmers, as supply increased more than demand.

How can we promote diversity in grain farming?

The best way is through attractive profits. As I just said, money talks. Market price is one of the components, but it is not all. Subsidies or any measure to soften the cost part of the equation can work. Market prices are the result of supply and demand. If you want to increase supply and market prices at the same time, you need some serious marketing effort to increase demand. Money enters the value chain only from one end: the end consumer. Then how that money is distributed between the links of the chain is a different story. Consumers need to know about what more choices they have. They need to know what other grains are good for them and why they should buy them.

One word sums it up: value. Consumers will buy different sorts of grains if they have value to them.

Should governments be legislating changes in food production, or is it better left to the marketplace/producers?

Earlier, I mentioned that I hoped for more collaboration and altruism. This is an example of it. Governments should govern. Some do. Some a bit less. Sometimes, governments seem more preoccupied with ongoing campaigning than governing, and that is not good. Opposite to that, businesses should run their businesses, but in a number of occurrences they seem as much preoccupied with being involved in governing.

My opinion is that producing better food and, at least as importantly, better nutrition is everybody's responsibility: governments, businesses, non-profits, producers, consumers, children, parents, teachers, you name it.

Why is it important? For a simple reason: a society of unhealthy people will inevitably decline, and the social cost to society is a heavy financial burden that weakens society and its members. A prosperous society that wants a future takes good care of its members.

Do you believe that some leaders are perhaps not focussing on issues threatening the food supply? What can the industry do to combat this?

I don't think that for many it is a deliberate choice. I think that they probably do not even realise what they neglect.

A few governments and businesses do indeed choose to do nothing, but they are a minority et we know who they are as they boast about it. Most just take a prudent (probably too prudent) approach and we lose precious time.

Then there is the third group of those who are ahead and deliberately choose to change their ways, but unfortunately, they are a minority and do not have enough traction yet.

