

Respected nominees of the Farmer of the Year award.

My ladies and gentlemen.

Good friends.

The time for counting chickens has arrived with this traditional and solemn moment, when a highly respected committee shall announce the Farmer of the Year.

As you await this announcement, please allow me to share some of my observations related to the news that is broadcast by newspapers and radio.

As you are probably aware, I am referring here to the prices of foodstuff, but more specifically, the cash flow within and next to agriculture.

Prices have gone through quite a steep rise and this is certainly not good news for those whose income has fallen, to a small or large extent, in the years of the credit crunch. And these people make up the majority in Estonia.

Why have prices rocketed – this is a complicated issue and virtually no one is the full truth. If there is anyone, then it is maybe the representative of a large chain store, who, with childlike sincerity, blurted out about a month ago: everyone else is raising prices, so we will too.

This, my good friends, regrettably serves as an assessment of the free market economy in Estonia in 2010. A situation where an increase in prices generates a further increase in prices all by itself.

But this is a completely different and rather complicated issue, which we won't be focusing upon

today.

However, I am very pleased that the issue of raising prices that has formed the populist discussion, rather than analytical, has not been turned against farmers.

I do hope this is how it will remain. Otherwise, we would be demonstrating envy, one of the main characteristics attributed to us as a population.

I ask – who else should we be proud of than the entrepreneurial people who live among us? Of work done in Estonia. Of profit generated in Estonia and remaining in Estonia. And what is most important – agricultural produce that is grown and processed in Estonia reaching the tables of Estonian consumers.

Additionally, as we all know only too well, an almost two-year low preceded an increase in the prices of raw materials.

Successful farmers should be treated as endangered species in Estonia and this is why we must cherish them. Any country that is to be taken seriously supports its haute culture and education in its mother tongue.

Without his language and cultural fulcrum, an individual may survive, physically, yet this is no longer a full life. His mind may wither away.

In the very same way, we can eat food, that is produced and processed anywhere in the world, but this will no longer be the food our bodies have grown used to. This is what a philosopher, Feuerbach, said one hundred and fifty years ago and this is what nutritionists, biologists, and anthropologists confirm.

Global trends and changes in policies are vouching in favour of Estonia and Estonian farmers.

First of all, the number of mouths that are asking to be fed keeps growing in the world, while the area of land, soil, air, and water that is required to produce food is falling. We have sufficient quantities of all of this in Estonia, with incredible reserves, as we can see when looking at our fields and see them overgrown with brush; and we even get sunshine in Estonia during the good years.

Secondly, according to the experts, should it be necessary, Estonian farmers can easily increase their production volumes without facing major additional expenses and therefore generate some extra profit. Let us hope that the time for generating extra profit will arrive earlier than the time when meeting the loan obligations, that have been taken to make investments, will become too burdensome.

And thirdly, the changing preferences of consumers and the resultant segmentation of the food market will offer additional opportunities for the producers of niche products.

Even the smallest niche in the world is immensely larger than Estonia's capacity to fill it. We are surrounded, both west and east, by millions of demanding clients with sufficient purchase power. Let us regard their wishes, let us focus on new market demands, and let us learn to market our products.

And finally, the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU is inevitably facing some changes and a fairer direct aid system alone would be enough to make it favourable to Estonian producers.

With these words, I am not trying to paint you a picture of a brilliant future. I am only saying that the situation of an entrepreneurial farmer is not as bad as it may seem after listening to some public presentation or participating in some event.

But this is not a message to be conveyed to you here in this hall. You are not complaining. One will not succeed to make it amongst the best by moaning and groaning.

All the recognition and fame that accompanies the title of Farmer of the Year will be inevitably accompanied by a social burden – being a role model and provider of experiences. Therefore, I wish you both success and strength.