



Innovation, Sustainability and Food Production
Speech by the
President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson

Dansk Industri, Copenhagen
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Your Royal Highness,
Mr. Karsten Dybvad, CEO of the Confederation of Danish Industry,
Dear guests,

I welcome this opportunity to meet with Danish business leaders during my State Visit to Denmark and to exchange views on a field of common interest: Sustainable and innovative food production.

At the same time, I am proud to bring to your attention a sample of cutting edge companies from Iceland. Some of these are very small in terms of human and capital resources; other are considerably bigger, but all share the vision of making good and sustainable use of our available natural resources.

For centuries, we Icelanders used the old Norse calendar and its names for the months. Five days ago, the month of Þorri began. Late last century, innovative entrepreneurs in Iceland invented the tradition of eating traditional Icelandic food during Þorri. We could have brought some of these dishes with us. Let me just give you a few examples:

Rams' testicles, pressed into blocks, boiled and pickled.
Sheep's heads, boiled whole and sometimes pickled.
Seal's flippers - pickled, of course.

Fermented shark, smelling of ammonia, as seen for instance on the Travel Channel's series, "Bizarre Foods", and described in a recent documentary on the Vikings as "blue cheese, but a hundred times stronger".

You can now either rejoice in, or deplore, the fact that these items are not on offer here today. The larger lesson, however, lies in the fact that in order to survive on a rugged island in ages past, you had to eat what was available and preserve it by the means available.

We have moved on. It is tempting to say that nowadays traditional Icelandic food is mostly consumed by unsuspecting tourists who think they are living the “Icelandic experience”.

During the greater part of the twentieth century, fishing was by far the largest economic sector in Iceland. We were heavily dependent on our fish stocks, which explains how far we were willing to go in our fishing disputes with our NATO allies during the so-called “cod wars”.

At one point, in the 1970s, it became clear that Icelanders were on the brink of depleting some of our fish stocks, so we had no choice but to adopt a quota system for commercial fishing a few years later. From that point onwards technical solutions in the fisheries inevitably became more important, as we had to increase the value of what the ocean yielded while reducing the effort involved in bringing the catches ashore.

Thus, we can say that the limitations we encountered in our natural resources triggered some strong technological advances.

Broadly speaking, this path from exploitation to sustainable use is of course the one that all humankind must travel. Natural resources are not unlimited but the desire for growth is. I hope you will be entertained and inspired by the achievements made by the companies you will soon be hearing more about.

Finally, I should like to thank you all for attending this event.