

The 2001 World Food Prize Laureate said the world can produce enough food to feed its growing population, but global food policies and politics are major impediments.

Pinstrup-Andersen of Cornell University made his comments during his Heuermann lecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He focused on the world's capacity to feed a population expected to grow from 7 billion to 9 billion by 2050.

"We've got lots of food in the world," he said. "The problem is inappropriate policies, not food supply."

Since 2007, he noted, food prices have fluctuated dramatically. At one point, many experts predicted, incorrectly, the end of inexpensive food. India ended up with 80 million tons of grain in storage last year, half of it outside, rotting on the ground. Pinstrup-Andersen estimated 2.9 quadrillion (that's 12 zeros) pounds of food are lost every year through the distribution system. That amount would feed the two billion people expected to be added to the population.

He said he expects large fluctuations in food prices to continue and perhaps get worse. Climate change is one reason.

Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are of particular concern. By 2030, estimates are that two-thirds of the world's middle class will live in Asia, compared to just 28 percent in 2009. As their wealth grows, their diets will change—fewer grains, fruits and vegetables; more vegetable oil, meat, eggs and fish.

He said more money must be invested in research and technology, including genetic modification. He also called for more investment in rural infrastructures in developing countries; orderly trade policies; rules governing land acquisition; and antitrust legislation.

Pinstrup-Andersen served 10 years as the International Food Policy Research Institute's director general in Washington, D.C., and seven years as a department head. He also served seven years as an economist at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture in Colombia, and six years as a professor at Wageningen University.