Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

16 October 2021

World Food Day

Our actions are our future.

Better production, better nutrition,
a better environment and a better life.

Let's fix the system

The contradictions could not be starker – millions of people are hungry or undernourished, while large numbers are chronically overweight due to a poor diet. Smallholder farmers produce more than one-third of the world's food, yet are some of the worst affected by poverty, as agriculture continues to be an unpredictable and often unsafe sector. An agri-food system that is a major contributor to climate change, which in turn threatens food production in some of the world's poorest areas. Rampant food loss and waste, side by side with people relying on food banks or emergency food aid. The evidence is there for all to see – our agri-food systems are broken, and there has never been a more urgent need to transform the way the world produces and consumes food.

A heavy toll

The planet will need to support 10 billion people by 2050, placing ever greater pressure on natural resources, the environment and the climate. Even at current levels, food production often comes at an unacceptably high price, degrading or destroying natural habitats, contributing to species extinction and costing trillions of dollars in lost and wasted resources.

Most importantly, today's agri-food systems are exposing profound inequalities and injustices. At least 2 billion people don't have regular access to sufficient amounts of safe, nutritious food, while 3 billion cannot afford healthy diets and obesity continues to increase worldwide.

Damaged ecosystems

We are dependent on healthy ecosystems for a plentiful and long-term supply of safe and nutritious food, but ours are in serious need of repair. In this, the opening year of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, intensified agriculture, compounded by global consumption of resource-intensive foods and the conversion of natural landscapes for crop production or pasture continue to degrade soils, destroy forests and drastically diminish biodiversity.

In some parts of the world, climate change is causing lower crop yields and livestock productivity, declines in fisheries, aquaculture and agroforestry production, and changes in the nutrient composition of major staples, with reductions in proteins, minerals and vitamins.

WHAT IS AN AGRI-FOOD SYSTEM?

The agri-food system covers the journey of food (for example, cereals, vegetables, fish, fruits and livestock) from farm to table – including when it is grown, harvested, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, traded, bought, prepared, eaten and disposed of. It also encompasses non-food products (for example forestry, animal rearing, use of feedstock, biomass to produce biofuels, and fibres) that constitute livelihoods, and all the people, as well as the activities, investments and choices that play a part in getting us these food and agricultural products.

Going to waste

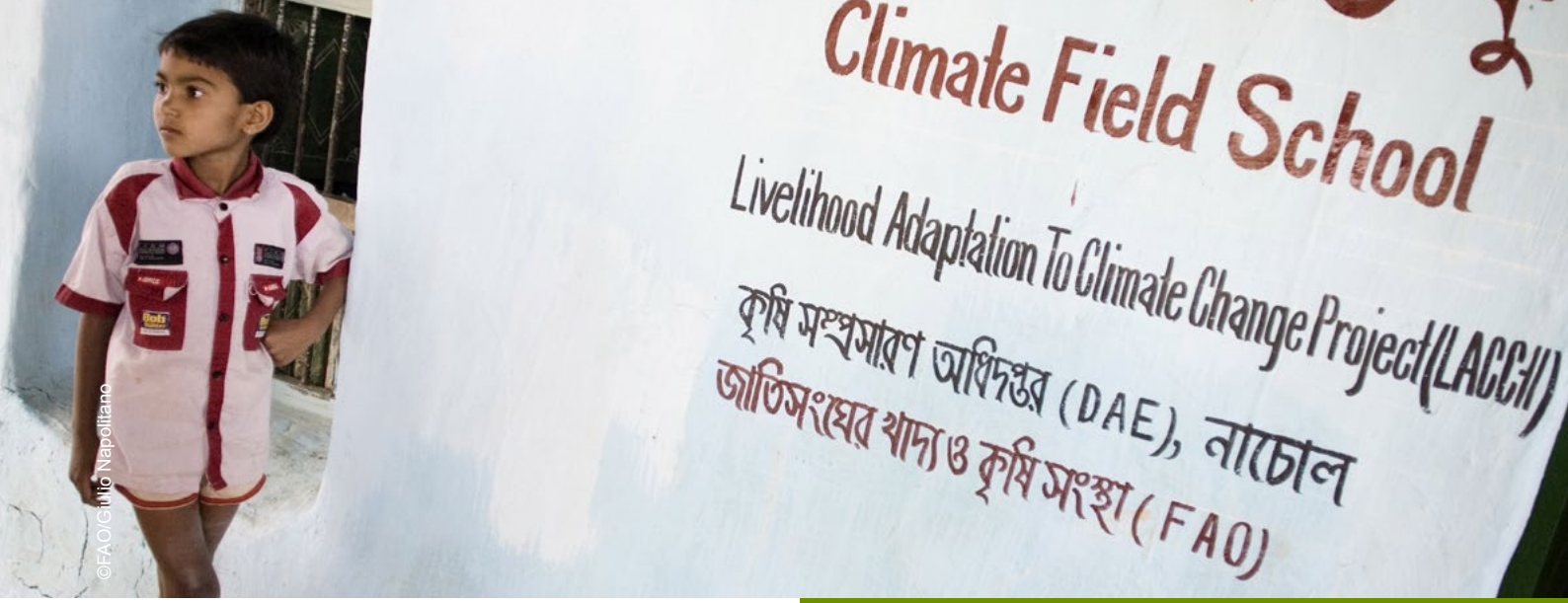
While millions of people go hungry, vast quantities of food are lost every day, either spoiled during production or transport or thrown into the waste bins of households, retailers or restaurants. Squandering food is also a waste of the precious resources used to produce it. Up to 10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions are associated with food that is not consumed. Food waste is filling up the world's landfills, where it decomposes and generates methane, a greenhouse gas that is more harmful than CO_2. In developing countries, there is a need for improved storage and infrastructure to avoid food loss, as well as access to technologies that can match agri-food supply and demand.

ARE HEALTHY DIETS MORE EXPENSIVE?

Good, safe nutritious food should be affordable, but often this is far from the case. Healthy foods, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, carry greater production risks than staple foods, such as wheat, rice or corn. They are also more difficult to transport, especially if road and storage conditions are poor, with higher costs for consumers. Tariffs and subsidies can make it more profitable to grow staples rather than fresh produce. On the other hand, healthy sources of protein, such as pulses, are generally more affordable than meat or dairy products.

THE COST OF COVID-19

This World Food Day is the second to be marked during COVID-19, which has had devastating repercussions for food security worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has induced an economic recession that could add up to 100 million or more to the 690 million people already suffering from hunger.



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What needs to change?

To fix our fractured agri-food systems, collective action is needed, so that everyone has enough safe and nutritious food to eat, and the entire food supply chain is more sustainable, resilient and inclusive, with decent conditions and social protection for those who work in it. For this shift to happen, everyone must play their part. That means governments changing policies, the private sector changing business models, and all of us changing our mindsets and behaviour.

FAO is working for change

The good news is that there is plenty that can be done to adjust the situation, and put us and the planet back on the right path. FAO's support for the transformation of agri-food systems is rooted in agro-ecology – focusing on sustainable natural resource management coupled with social aspects that must be addressed if the system is to be fair and inclusive. The more diverse an agricultural system, the greater its ability to adapt to climate change and other shocks. Different combinations of integrated crop-livestock-forestry-fishery systems can help farmers to produce a variety of products – food, energy, fibre, timber and non-timber forest products – in the same area, at the same time or in rotation.

A GLOBAL SUMMIT FOR STRONGER FOOD SYSTEMS

This year saw the launch of the first Food Systems Summit by the UN Secretary-General, aimed at drawing up a roadmap for a major shift in the way the world produces and consumes food. Spread over more than a year and across locations worldwide, the Summit's activities involve a broad range of actors in examining the most effective channels for making our food systems stronger and more equitable. Hundreds of events and activities taking place worldwide to mark World Food Day in October will explore key outcomes of the Summit and discuss the way forward.

UNITED NATIONS FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT 2021

GREENER CITIES FOR HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES

With more than half the world's population living in urban settings and consuming 70 percent of the world's food supply, cities need to be a focus for sustainable development.

The FAO Green Cities Initiative aims to improve the livelihoods and well-being of urban and peri-urban populations in at least 100 cities in the next three years. Activities include:

- **promoting urban agriculture to shorten supply chains;**
- **encouraging healthy diets to reduce nutrition-related disease;**
- **reducing and managing food waste;**
- **boosting green spaces for healthier environments; and**
- **reconnecting cities with rural areas for better food system planning.**

RESPONSIBLE AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS

Increasingly, governments are requiring private companies to adhere to responsible business conduct guidelines. In the agriculture sector, these involve identifying, mitigating and preventing negative social and environmental impacts in supply chains, particularly when sourcing products from developing economies, where social risks including child labour, and environmental impacts such as deforestation, can occur from production to processing and retail.

Sustainable and fair

A sustainable agri-food system is one in which a variety of sufficient, nutritious and safe foods is available at an affordable price to everyone, and nobody is hungry or suffers from malnutrition. The shelves are stocked at the local market or food store, but less food is wasted and the food supply chain is more resilient to shocks such as extreme weather, price spikes or pandemics, all while limiting, rather than worsening, environmental degradation or climate change.
Sustainable agri-food systems deliver food security and nutrition for all, without compromising the economic, social and environmental bases, for generations to come. They lead to **better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life**, leaving no one behind.

Consumer power

The food we choose and the way we prepare, cook, store and dispose of it make us an active part of the way in which an agri-food system works. Everyone is a consumer, and it is time to shift old patterns so as to transform agri-food systems for the better. We can influence the market by opting for nutritious and environmentally and socially responsible products. This will pressure governments to design more sustainable policies, promote improved agricultural methods and motivate greater investment in sustainable healthy diets.
At a practical level, we can start by adding new locally grown and seasonal foods to our diets, reducing food waste, refusing to buy foods with excessive packaging, and reading up on the environmental and social impact of the foods we eat.

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FAO IN ACTION

- Reversing the degradation of land, soil and forests is at the heart of an FAO project aimed at restoring the critical role of **Nepal**'s degraded Churia region in the country's food security. Work to maintain landscapes is benefiting 200 000 households and improving long-term food production prospects for many more.
- In **Angola, Honduras** and **Peru**, FAO is partnering with governments to introduce fish into school feeding programmes. This strategy is providing a rich source of protein, vitamins and micronutrients for children, and revenue for fishers, aquaculture producers and processors.
- In other countries, FAO is helping to foster food literacy in schools through hands-on education. In **Cambodia** and **Ghana**, FAO is teaming up with children to ensure that school food aligns with their right to a nutritious diet.
- A public-private initiative spearheaded by FAO is targeting food waste in **Turkey**'s hospitality sector. Working together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and wholesale company Metro Turkey, FAO is developing guidance on how to reduce food waste for people working in hotels, bars and restaurants. The guidelines include advice on using food surplus, such as making donations and recycling leftovers and non-edible food waste to produce animal feed, compost or bio-energy. Kitchen/service staff are receiving training from chefs in preparing 'zero waste menus', learning how to store products safely and to repurpose residual food.
- In **Kyrgyzstan**, FAO has launched the Cash+ programme, which provides agricultural inputs and assets, technical training for organic and climate-smart practices, extension services and nutrition education.
- On the terraces of the Pasil River Valley in the **Philippines**' Cordillera highlands, FAO's Mountain Partnership Products certification and labelling scheme is helping 500 women to preserve and market their traditional Ulikan red rice variety to conserve agrobiodiversity, while providing a sustainable source of income.
- As well as loss of life, a decade of conflict in **Syria** has brought financial hardship and food insecurity. An FAO initiative has set up food processing units fitted with equipment to process fresh seasonal products, together with facilities and training to enable women to launch small-scale agrifood enterprises and market their goods.

FOOD HEROES

Farmers working small plots of land – less than 2 hectares – supply more than one-third of all the food that is eaten in the world. Mostly concentrated in developing countries, such farms are generally operated by families who are poor and themselves food insecure. If these food heroes are to play a pivotal role in transforming food systems they will need better access to training, finance, incentives and marketing, as well as social protection to protect their health and livelihoods.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

In countries around the world, innovation is changing the way that food is produced, processed, traded and consumed, helping to build more resilient and robust agri-food systems. Digital technologies and innovative practices are being used to optimize supply chains, increase market access for farmers, improve water/soil management, fight pests and diseases and prepare for disasters. Predictive technology and analytics – combined with technologies to build climate resilience – can help growers to produce exactly what is needed, avoiding wasted resources.

FAO is in the forefront of using new technology to solve challenges and narrow the digital divide in agriculture. Its **1000 Digital Villages Initiative** aims to promote the digital transformation of villages and small towns across the world, while the cloud-based **Digital Services Portfolio** offers information and advisory messages to tens of thousands of farmers. **EarthMap**, an innovative, open-source Big Data tool developed by FAO in collaboration with Google, facilitates access to sophisticated geospatial data for land monitoring.

Alongside advances in technologies, it will be critical to strengthen existing national statistical and monitoring systems on agri-food systems, and the capacity to analyse data. Sound information is an essential prerequisite for designing and monitoring effective policies that can support the development of sustainable and inclusive food systems.

In West Africa, FAO is using drones to tackle desert locust outbreaks, while in Myanmar, drones are helping to monitor forests and land to ensure that they are used sustainably. On the ground, various smartphone apps are helping small-scale farmers to identify pests, fishers to record and sell their catch, and livestock keepers to care for their animals.

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What can countries do?

- Ensure that all people everywhere have access to enough affordable, nutritious and safe food by moving towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems.
- Adopt an evidence-based approach to policy-making, which considers diverse areas impacting food systems – agriculture, health, education, environment, water, sanitation, gender, social protection, trade, employment and finance.
- Acknowledge the importance of innovation, indigenous knowledge and the role of women and youth in transforming food systems.
- Help smallholder farmers to improve their livelihoods by increasing access to training, finance, digital technologies, extension services, social protection, early warning systems, and crop varieties or animal breeds that are resistant to climate change.
- Increase nutritional awareness and encourage the private sector to produce more nutritious and sustainably produced foods, manage food waste more responsibly and limit the marketing of unhealthy foods.
- Invest in infrastructure, affordable technologies and training to minimize post-harvest food loss.
- Promote food safety by developing and enforcing international standards and control systems and implementing a 'One Health Approach' to tackling health threats to animals, humans, plants and the environment.

What can farmers do?

- Engage in dialogue, participate in extension services, farmers' organizations, cooperatives or farmer field schools and learn about nutrition, biodiversity, digital technologies and farming techniques to build resilience.
- Adopt sustainable agricultural practices that respect biodiversity, are more environment-friendly and use natural resources more efficiently.
- Consider climate-smart agriculture approaches that use natural resources in a sustainable way and use seed varieties or livestock breeds that are more resistant to drought and disease.
- Minimize losses by harvesting at the right time, improving storage facilities, and learning about best practices and technologies.

What can the private sector do?

- Limit levels of saturated fats, transfats, sugars and salt in products and ensure clear labelling, while improving food safety and quality.
- Provide decent working conditions and ensure that staff have access to nutritious foods in the workplace.
- Choose packaging that offers a longer shelf-life and increased food safety, while including biodegradable or recyclable materials.
- The financial sector should put credit and savings tools in the hands of marginalized communities, including women and youth.

What can academia do?

- Generate evidence-based knowledge to demonstrate climate change strategies for sustainable food systems, and share this with governments.
- Universities, schools, technical and vocational education and training centres should provide nutrition education for students.

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What can civil society do?

- Garner support for change by launching campaigns and advocate for healthy and sustainable food choices.
- Give a voice to the world's poor, smallholder farmers, indigenous peoples, women and youth, since agri-food systems can only be transformed if everyone is involved.

What can we all do?

- Choose diverse nutritious foods over highly processed ones, building demand for healthy foods.
- 2021 marks the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables reminding us to eat more fresh produce and learn about indigenous varieties.
- Add plant-based protein such as nuts and legumes to our diets, which are cheaper than animal proteins and kinder on our planet.
- Plan and organize our shopping and food preparation, to avoid spoilage and food waste.
- Look out for FAO-supported and other labels that attest to sustainable production conditions for producers and the planet.
- Be an advocate for sustainable healthy diets! Speak up in your community and make sure healthy food is available at schools, care facilities and other public settings.

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FAST FACTS

More than 3 billion people (almost 40 percent of the world's population) cannot afford a healthy diet.

Smallholder farmers produce more than 33 percent of the world's food, despite challenges, including poverty and a lack of access to resources including finance, training and technology.

14 percent of the world's food is lost due to inadequate harvesting, handling, storage and transit and 17 percent is wasted at consumer level.

Almost 2 billion people are overweight or obese due to a poor diet and sedentary lifestyle. Related health-care costs could exceed USD 1.3 trillion per year by 2030.

Globally, 20 percent more women than men aged 25–34 live in extreme poverty, and more than 18 percent of indigenous women live on less than USD 1.90 a day.

55 percent of the world's population resides in cities and this will rise to 68 percent by 2050.

The world's agri-food systems currently employ 1 billion people, more than any other sector.

The world's food systems are currently responsible for more than 33 percent of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

10 percent of people are affected by unsafe food supplies contaminated by bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemical substances.

16 October 2021

World Food Day

Collective action across 150 countries is what makes World Food Day one of the most celebrated days of the United Nations' calendar. Hundreds of events and outreach activities bring together governments, businesses, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the media, and general public. They promote worldwide awareness and action for those who suffer from hunger and for the need to ensure healthy diets for all. #WorldFoodDay 2021 will be marked a second time while countries around the world deal with the widespread effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. It's a time to look into the future we need to build together.

FAO

#WorldFoodDay
#FoodHeroes
fao.org/world-food-day

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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