

A Stronger World
Bitesized Brief

A Stronger World Transforming Food Systems



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It's often said that we are what we eat. It's very true - and it is also true that we are what we grow. Food systems can nourish our bodies and our planet, or they can destroy them. Sadly, today, food systems are failing billions of us, and we are all losing.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Food systems have enormous potential to support healthy diets and nutrition, while also advancing livelihoods and protecting the planet.

Imagine if, rather than a value-destroying system, we had a value-creating system that we can all benefit from?

3.1bn

Over 3 billion people on our planet cannot afford a healthy diet¹

1/3

A third of greenhouse gases are created by food and agriculture²

What are food systems?

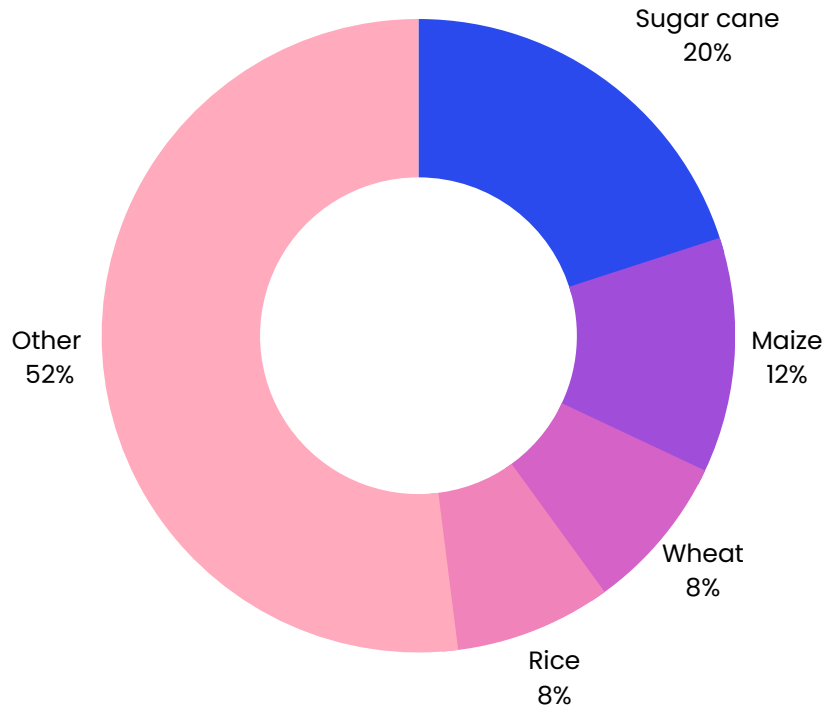
Food systems are the ways in which foods are produced, processed, transported, consumed and disposed of. They span every activity from farm to forklift to fork and involve everyone from smallholder farmers and fishermen, to market traders and multinational corporations, to all of us as consumers.

A "food systems approach" works holistically across this interconnected web, with the goal of optimizing the interdependencies between food, nutrition, health, the economy, the environment and society at large.

The burden on human health

Almost half of all the calories we produce come from from sugar cane, maize, wheat and rice, which are cheap and accessible but poor for human health

Source: FAO, 2022



4.5^{bn}

Over half the people in our world work in global food supply chains³

2 in 3

Two thirds of women live with micronutrient deficiencies⁴

Why do we need to transform our food systems?

Global food systems are a global crisis

Despite 4.5 billion of us working in global food supply chains,⁵ more than 3 billion people around the world cannot afford an adequate diet.⁶ So what are we eating? More than 40% of the world's calories come from just three crops - rice, wheat and maize - which, along with sugar cane, represent about half of global primary crop production.⁷ The result: while the food system's global market value is \$9 trillion, it is responsible for driving more than twice that in economic, environmental and healthcare costs.⁸

Food systems are damaging human health

The cheapest and most accessible calories also are those that are worst for human health. This has led to a staggeringly high burden of malnutrition: new findings estimate that 1 in 2 children and 2 in 3 women worldwide suffer from micronutrient deficiencies.⁹

At the same time, poor diets due to overconsumption of unhealthy foods and too little consumption of protective ones represent the number one cause of all death worldwide.¹⁰

Food systems are destroying our planet

Food and land use represent one of the largest contributors to climate change in the world, accounting for as much as a third of greenhouse gas emissions.¹¹ They are also leading culprits for unsustainable water use, air pollution, deforestation and land degradation.¹² Agricultural expansion alone accounts for almost 90% of global deforestation.¹³

Food systems are becoming increasingly unstable

Our already fragile food systems have been made all the worse by the rocketing food prices brought on by conflicts and the climate crisis. This is further exacerbated by our over-reliance on a small number of crops, which makes our systems vulnerable to the stresses of climate change and economic and political shocks. We are at a breaking point.

\$6 trn

The global economy could save \$5.7 trillion by 2030 if we transition to more sustainable and nutritious food systems¹⁴

How do we transform our food systems?

It is possible to design food systems that are truly good for people and planet, but it will require substantial shifts to how they currently operate.

Growing healthier food

Increasing production of healthy and nutrient-rich foods (like fruit, vegetables, legumes, fish and nut production) and decreasing unhealthy foods (like red meat and sugar) is essential for improving human and planetary health. However, to meet the need for nutritious diets around the world, it is estimated we will need to increase fruit, vegetable, fish and nut production from anywhere between 50% - 150%.¹⁵

Growing more sustainably

Shifts in how we produce food are also key to building more sustainable and resilient food systems. We must enable growers - particularly smallholder farmers whose very lives depend on successful harvests - to be part of the transition to more sustainable models of production, like regenerative agriculture, which nurture soils and nourish bodies.

Unlocking innovation

Solutions have already been uncovered that would dramatically change the face of agriculture while also supporting the incomes of an ever growing number of people. For example, work is being done to develop more sustainable forms of protein, such as plant-based proteins, but these must be further accelerated so they are globally accessible, affordable, and as healthy as possible. And innovation is needed into the storage and transport of these foods: though they are more

nutritious, they are also more perishable.

Changing consumer culture

For full food system transformation, we must increase demand for healthier and more sustainable diets, enabling consumers to make the best choices for themselves, their families and their planet. This will require a deep understanding of what drives consumer choices and support for the development of strategies and campaigns to change behaviours and norms around diets.

Changing policy

Government policies - from health to agriculture to water - heavily influence how easy or difficult it is for food producers and consumers to make healthy, planet-friendly choices. Subsidies can, for instance, be used to incentivise the shift towards more sustainable and nutritious agricultural production, and taxes on foods high in fat, salt and/or sugar are key to helping consumers to choose healthier diets. Governments must explore what effective regulation looks like in their context and scale up what works.



Nourishing our future

Transforming our food systems is essential to survive the crises we are faced with today, and even more critical to ensure the health of our planet and the people on it tomorrow. When we strengthen the foundations of good food, we build bridges to a stronger world.

Fortunately, we know what we need to do and there is growing commitment – from philanthropists to policymakers, the private sector to the public – to enabling this transition. In recent years, a number of important new initiatives and investments have been launched recognising the critical intersections of climate, food and nutrition.

One such initiative is [I-CAN: the Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition](#). Launched during the COP27 conference in 2022 by the Government of Egypt, this new initiative committed to embed the critical nexus of climate change and nutrition in strategies charting a more sustainable future for people and planet. It has since been supported by actors including WHO, FAO, UNICEF, WFP, UN Nutrition, IFAD and GAIN and is inviting new actors to take collective action.

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