

UN Food Systems Summit
Summit: September 26 (TBC), New York
Pre-Summit ministerial: July 19-21, Rome

Background

The United Nations Secretary-General has convened a heads-of-state level [Food Systems Summit](#) (FSS) planned for September 2021 in New York, which he has described as an opportunity for “radical reform” of global food systems to achieve the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The FSS and a critical [pre-Summit ministerial meeting](#) in July in Rome present timely opportunities for like-minded countries to share successes and lessons learned and to build support for proven efforts to innovate, reduce waste and continuously improve food systems’ contributions to all dimensions of sustainability - social, economic, and environmental.

The FSS will likely have wide ranging consequences extending well beyond its immediate impact. In addition to influencing UN Climate Summit (COP26) in November, and the interpretation of agriculture in the context of countries’ Paris Climate Agreement commitments, FSS outcomes are expected to drive workstreams and reporting within the UN systems for the remainder of the “Decade of Action on Nutrition” and at least through 2030.

Urgent need for stakeholder and government engagement

Efficiency, productivity, and innovation in agriculture and food supply chains support safe, affordable food for people around the world and, if championed, can contribute even further to global food security and be a driver for the three components of sustainability as defined by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) - social, economic, and environmental.

Yet, some current FSS preparatory materials¹ and statements from key Summit leaders:

- Denigrate the role of efficiency, innovation, and technology in modern agriculture and food production;
- Recommend taxes, warning labels, marketing bans/limits, and other restrictions to drastically reduce production and consumption of specific foods and/or nutrients (including “processed” food; nutrient-dense foods like meat, poultry, dairy, and eggs; and nutrients like fat, sugar, sodium); and
- Question or undermine the value of rules-based international trade.

While some Member States and stakeholders have participated in FSS processes where possible, current recommendations and documents appear largely driven by FSS action track leaders, anchor agencies, and a small group of advisors. There does not appear to be sufficient Member State oversight or direction, transparency, consistency, or rigorous approach to scientific evidence.

Without strong government leadership and active participation in driving the direction of the FSS by a variety of UN Member States, these approaches could worsen food insecurity and damage environmental outcomes by encouraging shifts to less efficient practices.

Top 5 principles for Food Systems Summit outcomes

Leaders across the U.S. agriculture and food supply chain have come together to demonstrate our proven track record of practices that produce more food more sustainably than ever before, share

¹ For example, see the Action Track 2 discussion paper at <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks> and synthesis paper at https://foodsystems.community/?attachment=2287&document_type=document&download_document_file=1&document_file=144.

our ambitious commitments for the future, and activate our international counterparts in support of FSS outcomes that:

The FSS' process and outcomes should:

- 1. Focus on ensuring all foods optimize their environmental and diet quality impacts:** Substantial progress has been made in many countries' agriculture and food supply chains to reduce environmental impact in recent decades, while increasing production to meet the needs of a growing population and reducing waste. The FSS should take into account trade-offs and synergies associated with producing all foods that make up a diverse, nutritious diet and not seek to denigrate or discourage the production or consumption of specific products or categories of products.
- 2. Support food systems that are inclusive of science, innovation, and technology:** Modern agricultural and food production/manufacturing practices advance sustainable food systems while efficiently meeting nutritional needs. The FSS should promote rather than discourage scientific and technological advancements in food systems in order to help deliver affordable access to nutrition and support food security.
- 3. Allow flexibility and adaptation to diverse circumstances and contexts:** There is no single, universal diet, set of farming or production practices, or group of policies that can or should be applied in all contexts. The FSS' recommendations should avoid overly prescriptive or "one-size-fits-all" approaches and should allow adaptation as needed to suit myriad production and manufacturing systems; development circumstances; historical, cultural, and personal contexts; and other factors.
- 4. Reflect international consensus, respect all domestic and international obligations and commitments, and uphold good regulatory practices:** The FSS process and outcomes must reflect previous international consensus (e.g., the recently endorsed UN Committee on Food Security Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition) and must be consistent with domestic and international trade commitments and other legal obligations, including World Trade Organization commitments. FSS recommendations should also reflect approaches consistent with good regulatory practices, such as principles developed and endorsed by organizations like the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- 5. Support and expand the positive role of rules-based international trade:** Rules-based international trade is a major contributor to food security and food safety around the world, as it increases access, availability, and affordability of food. Member states should ensure the FSS' outcomes promote rules-based international trade and support access to international markets for agricultural and food products.