

UN Food Systems Summit
Summit: September 26, 2021 (TBC) - New York
Pre-Summit ministerial: July 13-16, 2021 - 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 the United States to reignite global leadership and advance several key Biden administration priorities – including putting agriculture and food innovation at the center of climate action, as envisioned in the April 23 announcement of a new Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM for Climate) to be advanced at the FSS and formally launched at the UN Climate Summit (COP26) in November, where the United States will be seeking to deliver on and help shape the most ambitious climate commitments yet .

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

Urgent need for engagement

Americans today have access to one of the safest, most diverse, and most affordable food supplies in history, and American agricultural and food products feed millions of people around the world - thanks in large part to the efficiency, productivity, and innovation of the U.S. agriculture and food supply chain alongside the United States’ robust science- and risk-based regulatory system.

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

- Contradict U.S. dietary guidance
- Denigrate efficiency, innovation, and technology in modern agriculture and food production;
- Recommend taxes, warning labels, marketing bans/limits, and other restrictions on 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 the U.S. government 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 strengthened stakeholder engagement, political-level U.S. leadership, and a robust international coalition-building strategy, these approaches could worsen food insecurity and damage environmental outcomes by encouraging shifts to less efficient practices.²

Top 5 principles for Food Systems Summit outcomes

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.

² For example, a November 2020 study conducted by the USDA Economic Research Service found that rejecting modern agriculture in the European Union’s Farm to Fork strategy could increase the number of food-insecure people by 185 million if such policies were adopted globally. (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/99741/eb-30.pdf?v=926.6>)

Leaders across the U.S. agriculture and food supply chain have come together to engage broadly across the U.S. government, demonstrate our proven track record of practices that produce more food more sustainably than ever before, share our ambitious commitments for the future, and activate our international counterparts in support of FSS outcomes that:

- 1. Focus on ensuring all foods optimize their environmental and diet quality impacts:** The U.S. agriculture and food supply chain has significantly reduced its environmental impact in recent decades all while reducing waste and increasing production to meet the needs of a growing population. 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. The United States should ensure the FSS' outcomes promote rules-based international trade and support access to international markets for agricultural and food products.