



GLOBAL  
ALLIANCE  
FOR THE  
**FUTURE**  
OF **FOOD**

# HOW TO TRANSFORM FOOD SYSTEMS

7 Calls to Action

GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD

2021

## **DISCLAIMER**

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Suggestion for Referencing: Global Alliance for the Future of Food, *How to Transform Food Systems: 7 Calls to Action*. n.p.: Global Alliance for the Future of Food, June 2021.

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## FOREWORD

We are in a moment of reckoning. We need to fundamentally transform our food systems for the betterment of our collective health and the well-being of our shared planet. Fortunately, when imagining necessary transformations, we do not need to start from scratch.

For 8 years, the Global Alliance for the Future of Food has been advancing this message alongside our members, partners, and allies. We are a unique coalition of philanthropic foundations working together and with others to transform food systems and, collaboratively, we have developed 7 Calls to Action that are designed to further catalyze systems transformation.

The statements you'll find in the pages that follow have been shaped by our research and built on diverse evidence, the many convenings and international dialogues we've held, and our members' and partners' voices and perspectives since 2012. Over the last several months, they have been further adapted based on input from a wide array of sources in an effort to be inclusive and responsive to new ideas and information. When taken in full, this report provides a synthesis of what we heard, what we were told was important, and what we learned along the way.

These interconnected Calls to Action touch on all priority aspects of food systems transformation. The Global Alliance advocates for increased systems-based research into the future of food and positive food environments that are adapted to meet regional conditions and cultural contexts. We also call for transformed governance and decision-making, with additional investment and support for agroecology and regenerative approaches, and excluding harmful subsidies and incentives.

Crucially, each of the Calls to Action place significant focus on equity, inclusion, and social justice, and promotes participatory, rights-based approaches to governance as well as the recognition of the diverse world views and wisdom held by Indigenous Peoples, farmers, and other caretakers of our food systems. There is a clear and urgent need to put a diversity of voices, perspectives, evidence, and approaches at the heart of holistic efforts to transform food systems. Indeed, much more must be done to centre and elevate the voices of civil society, farmers' organizations, Indigenous leaders, women, and others traditionally marginalized and/or underrepresented.

Whether you approach your work on food systems from the lens of climate change or gender issues or sustainable development, it's our hope that these Calls to Action can be useful to you. We invite you to use these urgent calls to enhance, guide, inform, and/or shape your actions. Food systems transformation is a process — a continuing conversation, a shared cause, an urgent imperative to act.

For the remainder of 2021, acting on our mission to put food systems transformation on the global political, economic, and social agenda, the Global Alliance will continue to advocate for these Calls to Action in key international, national, and sub-national processes. These include, but are not limited to, the UN Food Systems Summit 2021, UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15), the UN Committee on World Food Security, and Nutrition for Growth.

Looking ahead to 2022 and beyond, the Global Alliance will assess how the landscape is shifting, consult with diverse partners and thought leaders, and determine how to continue to advocate for these imperatives for change. We are encouraged by the building consensus around these non-negotiable pathways and look forward to continuing to work with others to see them realized.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth Richardson". The signature is stylized and includes a small dot at the end.

**RUTH RICHARDSON**  
Executive Director, Global Alliance for the Future of Food

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## OVERVIEW

In June 2020, the Global Alliance for the Future of Food embarked on the rollout of a new, integrated organizational strategy. Intrinsic to this was the development of seven Calls to Action: 7 interconnected pathways for creating a better future of food. Elevated time and again by members, partners, allies, and others, in a variety of contexts and formats over the past 8 years, the Calls to Action address the critical underlying structures that hold back much-needed food systems transformation.

To shape these position statements, we drew on the outcomes of all of our international dialogues, large and small, that we've held since 2012 and in the following global reports: [Synthesis of Global Reports](#), [Beacons of Hope](#), [Seeds of Resilience](#), [Climate Change & Food Systems Report](#), [Food-Health Nexus Report](#), [TEEBAgriFood](#), the [Salzburg Process](#), among others. In turn, over the past 12 months, acting on our [7 guiding principles](#) and our [Theory of Transformation](#), we engaged in a process to understand if and how these global-facing Calls to Action also reflect those coming from local and regional food systems actors around the world. This involved convenings, speaking engagements, member meetings, interviews, an online survey, and the creation of a Discussion Document with potential pathways for action in the year 2021.

In the pages that follow, we share the next iteration of the Calls to Action. Each is supported by a short analysis of the respective challenge and provides insight into why urgent transformative action is needed. To understand how the Calls to Action can be acted upon, implemented, or manifested, we share an illustrative story of an initiative drawn from our [Beacons of Hope](#) program of work. The Beacons of Hope initiatives showcase the groundswell of people transforming our food systems in dynamic and creative ways. Each is an inspiring example and provides evidence that transformation is possible. The inclusion of these diverse stories is also a salient reminder that all transformation must be context specific.

We recognize and celebrate the growing number of movements and initiatives seeking transformative change, the diversity of approaches, and the different starting places for the transformation journey. We consider these Calls to Action to be complementary with these efforts, helping to shine a light on more opportunities to build strategic alignment around key issues, to galvanize networks, to catalyze collaboration, and to accelerate systems-wide action. Importantly, we encourage the Calls to Action to be viewed as a suite, especially as we continue to see the connections between them.

Now is the time to reach for visionary structural change — rather than piecemeal approaches — through a multisectoral approach and with a range of actors stepping up to the plate to connect, collaborate, and take shared ownership of the future of food. The status quo is not a viable path forward. We need transformative systems change, and these Calls to Action are the demands we need to make to boldly realize the change so critically needed for people and the planet.

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## **CALL TO ACTION #1: ENSURE INCLUSIVE, PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE**

**Ensure participatory, integrated, rights-based approaches to governance at all levels in order to address the structural inequities in food systems.** Build processes and policy platforms on principles of transparency, inclusive participation, and shared power. This will ensure policies are driven not only by evidence, but ethics and public interest.

With the industrialization of agricultural markets, consolidation, and diminished state roles, the governance of food systems has changed dramatically over the last 50 to 60 years. Across the world, food systems governance is marked by siloed and exclusionary processes that typically favour the participation, values, and interests of more powerful corporations, investors, big farmers, and large research institutes. The dominant position of larger agribusinesses and food corporations is such that these actors have acquired, in effect, a veto power in the political system, resulting in conflicting actions and a failure to address systemic drivers/barriers. At the same time, corruption and conflict further exacerbate poor governance, food insecurity, and other challenges.

This failure of governance means that the most marginalized voices and those most impacted by food systems decisions — Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, workers, and others — are excluded. A lack of funds to facilitate meaningful participation further undermines the opportunity for engagement and co-creation in governance processes. Despite this, many underrepresented groups at local and global levels are becoming increasingly engaged, mobilizing to both disrupt the status quo and drive systemic change.

This Call to Action addresses the most fundamental measures for tackling the food systems lock-ins that are preventing systemic change: opening up decision-making to include a plurality of voices, especially in the context of climate change. With 70% of the food in the world produced by small farmers, the call for participatory and rights-based governance reflects the demands for the democratization of food systems and for human rights-based approaches and the right to food as key pillars of good governance. Participatory governance processes should be designed to overcome structural inequities and power imbalances; that is, the processes themselves should be participatory, inclusive, and ensure engagement of structurally marginalized stakeholders on equal footing.

An opportunity exists to advance this Call to Action through the support of multilevel governance, at both national and local levels, including mechanisms such as food policy councils where deliberative dialogue can take place. Collaboration between citizens and government officials creates a forum for advocacy and policy development to co-create sustainable and just food systems. There are also opportunities to use language and narratives that do not reinforce systems inequities or act as a barrier for participation and to elevate local and traditional knowledge on par with mainstream science, which often privileges Western physical sciences and too often is used as the only reference for policymaking and science-based targets.



In 130 villages across India's northeastern Meghalaya state, North East Slow Food & Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) utilizes participatory approaches to elevate the voices of traditional knowledge keepers and community members in powerful, engaging ways.

NESFAS is a network of like-minded individuals, institutions, governments, and non-governmental agencies (NGOs). Established in 2012 as a collaboration between Slow Food and the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty, NESFAS affirms the importance of local food systems and the role of Indigenous Peoples as guardians of biodiversity and the land. Despite traditional Indigenous territory encompassing 80% of the planet's biodiversity, traditional knowledge holders are rarely offered a seat at the decision-making table, and Indigenous communities often face higher rates of food insecurity and dietary-related health risks.

Importantly, the organization's mission supports food sovereignty by safeguarding the right of farmers to produce and consume culturally relevant foods. At a community level, this means helping people recognize, share, and learn the value of the traditional knowledge they possess. To support this, NESFAS launched a participatory exercise to map local biodiversity and, together with the community, identified species that are micronutrient rich, climate resilient, or neglected and underutilized. In gathering this knowledge, NESFAS is working to strengthen local seed systems and promote healthy soil.

While the prevailing approach of many organizations is to prescribe solutions, NESFAS is intentional in its planning and is responsive to the desires and ideas of its communities. NESFAS's activities are also shaped by the knowledge and relationships of its team, nearly all of whom are from Meghalaya state.

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Participatory video — the act of meaningfully engaging a group of people to share their own story through film — is another medium that NESFAS uses to disseminate traditional ecological knowledge within communities and among a national and international audience. Mainstreaming the value of these practices is one way to begin addressing the structural inequities and power imbalances in food systems. The interviews showcase farming



practices refined over generations and feature a plurality of voices, male and female; the videos and have garnered nearly 130,000 views.

For other communities, participatory video training from NESFAS has provided an outlet to express concerns (e.g., the struggle of transporting crops to market when there's no road) and to rediscover traditional crops and the richness of their community's culture.

NESFAS is also mindful of intersectionality. In addition to their work elevating the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples at large, the organization also applies a gender lens to better understand how the role of Indigenous women has shifted over time and how environmental change and altered farming practices could affect the balance of power within communities.

Villages in Meghalaya state have inevitably been affected by contemporary food systems governance that focuses on the interests of multinational corporations and practices developed by large-scale research institutes. For this reason, NESFAS seeks opportunities for community members to defend and promote their traditional practices on a national and global stage. The organization has secured international speaking slots for custodian farmers and has connected millet growers from Meghalaya state with those in other parts of India and Southeast Asia.

Guided by values of community participation, dignity, and empowerment, NESFAS ensures the farmers of Meghalaya state are represented in — and leading — food systems transformation.

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## CALL TO ACTION #2: INCREASE RESEARCH FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

**Increase research in systems-based approaches, with an emphasis on indivisible ecological, health, social, and economic goals.** Recognize and learn from diverse knowledge systems and ways of knowing, including Indigenous Peoples and farmers who have long recognized the interconnectedness between our food systems, health, and the planet. This holistic, transdisciplinary, and inclusive understanding of food systems impact is essential for the public good.

Agricultural research and development are focused, almost singularly, on boosting production and productivity rather than on broader social and environmental food systems issues. Resources are being deployed according to the same paradigm that gave us the Green Revolution and the Borlaug hypothesis of linking agricultural technology to productivity gains on a given piece of land. While such a narrow focus may have contributed to averting hunger crises half a century ago, it has generated a significant proportion of the key negative externalities across global and local food systems, contributing to the global risks we face today (such as climate change, biodiversity loss, marine pollution, malnutrition in all its forms, and more), with unequal impacts on people and communities around the world.

There is growing consensus on the need for more integrated research with a food systems lens, analyzing and exploring agroecology, circular bioeconomy, regenerative practices, healthy diets, just livelihoods, etc., and the interlinkages between them. Funding for these research priorities lags far behind what is needed to understand and support food systems transformation.

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This Call to Action speaks to how research is too often co-opted by vested interests, and how data and results may not be appropriately divulged, raising major issues of transparency and accountability. By placing an emphasis on indivisible ecological, health, social, and economic goals, this Call to Action reflects how — and why — agronomic efficiency considerations must be nested within a broader landscape of issues, with an impact on national and international funding streams for food systems research.

To advance this Call to Action, public and private funders of food and agricultural research have a responsibility to encourage holistic and transdisciplinary approaches. Applying a

transdisciplinary food systems approach to research and policy would enable a deeper understanding of the relationships between the different components of food systems, as well as their outcomes and wider impacts. This would enhance and accelerate public accountability and enable the adoption of holistic metrics to support evaluation and decision-making.

An opportunity exists to catalyze new ways of bringing together scientific institutions, practitioners, Indigenous Peoples, smallholder farmers, women, and youth, as well as other traditionally excluded stakeholders, to create and uphold evidence, breaking from current top-down and north-south dominant models, for example, through participatory action research and other like-minded approaches. Similarly, building and supporting a scientific culture that is based on diverse data, evidence, perspectives, and ways of knowing across disciplines and siloes is a critical part of advancing this Call to Action. The resulting systemic knowledge base will provide an alternative to the current dominant paradigm, which prioritizes quantitative outcomes and reflects Western biases and siloed thinking.



**BEACON OF HOPE**

WORLD FOOD SYSTEM CENTER AT ETH ZÜRICH, SWITZERLAND

The World Food System Center (WFSC), based out of ETH Zürich, is a public research university consistently ranked as one of the best in the world. Through global and local partnerships with 40 research groups and external partners from different sectors, the Center focuses on systems-oriented research, education, and outreach.

Whereas the Green Revolution and Borlaug hypothesis to solve world hunger were fixated on agricultural productivism, WFSC takes a holistic, food-systems approach to the challenge of feeding the world's growing population. This entails accounting for the environmental, social, political, and economic boundary conditions within food systems. The Center also examines how global food systems contribute to or mitigate environmental change and its human health effects.

Research at the Center revolves around three interlinked thematic areas: Effective Food Value Chains, Appropriate Nutrition for Health, and Sustainable Food Production. Though housed within an academic institution, WFSC's core research activities have real-world applications and tackle some of the greatest challenges and opportunities currently being discussed within the food systems space.

The Center's flagship research projects include enhancing resilience and sustainability in food systems. Analysis of organic production systems supports research, education, and outreach to understand the potential of these systems to contribute to global food

security. Another program advances sustainability across value chains, working toward goals of quality and quantity that support human and environmental health and create value for all stakeholders.

Each of WFSC's research areas have significant potential outside the realm of academia. To ensure the dissemination and application of its research and food systems approach, WFSC forms strategic partnerships with industry, research institutions, policymakers, and international NGOs, among others. The Center also engages in public-private partnerships in order to mobilize funds toward research opportunities. By publicly outlining and sharing the work of its researchers on its website and on YouTube, WFSC is a go-to reference point for stakeholders looking to learn more about a transdisciplinary approach to food systems.

In addition to providing the institutional platform for research and critical conversation, WFSC also fosters the conditions for more students to engage in these discussions. The Center hosts an annual summer school that's attended by budding food systems researchers from around the world.

Rich in real-life context, summer schools have taken place in India, South Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, and on one of Switzerland's largest organic farms. By immersing students in an experiential, multicultural environment, the goal of the program is to help attendees see how food and agricultural systems fit into the big-picture social and environmental landscape of each place.

With its focus on inter- and transdisciplinary methods — and through the support of public funding — WFSC staff, students, and researchers are leading the way toward a new generation of agricultural research and development.

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## CALL TO ACTION #3: ACCOUNT FOR EXTERNALITIES

**Recognize the environmental, social, and health impacts of food systems policies and practices, and use this understanding to inform decision-making.** Mainstream and strengthen True Cost Accounting and other impact assessment tools and methodologies to mitigate risk and increase accountability. These approaches will provide transparent, consistent guidance for governments, investors, farmers, corporations, and other stakeholders.

In the food and agriculture sector, the overarching productivity metric is crop yield per hectare, regardless of environmental and social externalities, such as natural resource degradation, poverty wages for farm workers, and increasing rates of food insecurity and diet-related diseases. More significantly, the focus on yields disregards our dependency on natural resource stocks, allowing agriculture and fisheries to deplete assets to an irreversible point of no return, thus pre-empting future growth, while generating externalities that affect all of society.

Meanwhile, food insecurity is exacerbated by environmental and social concerns linked to prevailing production and consumption practices: the climate crisis, the energy crisis, the food price crisis, and the health crisis are all in plain view. These crises have an unequal impact on smallholders, Indigenous Peoples, women, workers, the food insecure, and others who are traditionally excluded. A number of studies suggest that cost society pays is at least three times as much as its shelf price. Focusing on the narrow metrics has generated substantial natural, social, and human externalities, among which (ironically) are hunger and malnutrition.

This Call to Action speaks to the movement of challenging traditional definitions of “value” in food systems by focusing on different capitals — natural, social, human, and produced — and making visible the interconnections, dependencies, and impact pathways between these capitals. Externalities, trade-offs, and co-benefits are revealed to provide insights on critical aspects of the future of food. TCA is an evolving holistic and systemic approach to measure and value the positive and negative environmental, social, health, and economic costs and benefits to facilitate business, consumer, investor, and/or policy decisions. Holistic TCA frameworks, like the [UN Environment Program’s TEEBAgriFood Evaluation Framework](#), guide systematic evaluations across the value chain and explain how to value the impacts

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of changes to natural, social, and human capital (in quantitative and qualitative, as well as monetary and non-monetary, terms). Such accounting brings transparency to food systems by unveiling invisible costs, helping us avoid unintended consequences and drive holistic decision-making.

An opportunity exists to leverage this Call to Action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis, as the outbreak is deeply connected to how the current economic model and industrial agri-food system is breaching planetary boundaries. TCA also allows for the realization of positive benefits of food systems when managed for health, sustainability, and equity, and calls for them to be identified, amplified, and upheld. By revealing risks and dependencies, as well as the long-term impacts and trade-offs of decisions and actions, TCA can enable the shift to sustainable and healthy food systems that are financially viable for all *and* environmentally and socially beneficial.



**BEACON OF HOPE**  
THE COMMON MARKET, UNITED STATES

The Common Market is an American non-profit regional food distributor that connects communities with good food from sustainable family farms. With food as its cornerstone, The Common Market approach has been thoughtfully structured around values of community, diversity, and social and environmental well-being.

Established in 2003, the organization currently operates chapters in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, and in the state of Texas. The organization essentially serves as an intermediary between rural farmers and urban eaters, ensuring the health and wealth of both interconnected groups.

By selling food to anchor institutions (i.e., schools, hospitals, correctional facilities), The Common Market is able to reach vulnerable individuals within those institutions. Profit generated from these sales, as well as philanthropic donations, subsidizes “food access partnerships.” These partnerships enable organizations — often working in areas with high rates of diet-related illness and poverty — to affordably purchase fresh, local food at cost. This in turn brings tangible health benefits to families who may otherwise be unable to access nutritious food and guarantees that farmers are paid fairly (at market price).

Through its chapters, The Common Market connects community members with nutritious, locally grown food. But the organization also looks beyond this “produced capital” to build social infrastructure and minimize negative environmental externalities — components not commonly factored into the cost of food.

The social infrastructure piece works in a few ways. First, The Common Market values its human capital (the staff and producers it works alongside). That translates to staff and farmers receiving a liveable wage. For small-scale producers, The Common Market procurement team also invests in-kind, providing advice about the products and packaging that would best resonate with institutional customers.

These trusting, mutually beneficial relationships between farmers, market-based partners, and the families who consume their food are key. Strengthening the social fabric of communities, these relationships also contribute to a culture of transparency, which ensures food safety, accountability, and the traceability of food.

From an environmental perspective, The Common Market works only with producers who use responsible farming methods. This includes those who practice responsible land stewardship, reduce or eliminate pesticide use, and provide humane care for livestock, among other criteria.

The Common Market provides further technical assistance to farmers in order to increase the sustainability of their operations. For example, they sit down with farmers each winter to plan their crops for the following season. These sessions assure farmers of market trends and projected demand, which facilitates informed planting decisions that reduce the likelihood of food loss or waste. The result is the ability for farmers to make choices that favour long-term growth over yields purely based on productivity and short-term profit.

While profit-driven customers will always exist, The Common Market is building a movement and a market that is more values-driven. The aim is for these eaters to understand the true social and environmental costs of conventional agriculture, and then actively select the local, sustainable, high-quality option instead.

Through its business model and relationships with farmers and consumers, The Common Market is increasing the ability for local food to compete with the unrealistically low cost of products sold via global supply chains — a new paradigm where food is seen as a right versus a commodity.

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## **CALL TO ACTION #4: DIRECT PUBLIC FINANCE & POLICY**

### **Direct public sector finance and fiscal policy toward regenerative and ecologically beneficial forms of farming, healthy food, and resilient livelihoods and communities.**

Break from harmful subsidy and incentive programs, initiating well-designed and durable reforms through collaborations between governments, farmers, banks and corporations, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Public finance impacts all food systems, from production to consumption, whether through subsidies and incentives, taxes, or other resources. Every year, governments provide a significant amount of support to their food and agriculture sectors. Between 2015 and 2017, for example, farmers in 51 key countries received a total of about US \$600 billion per year in the form of market price supports, production payments, and input subsidies. Historically, countries initiated such support programs to overcome food insecurity, promote economic growth, and alleviate rural poverty. However, because most agricultural policies were not designed to address environmental, climate, social, or health- and nutrition-related problems, they are now inadvertently exacerbating them. For instance, many people consider market price supports (such as tariffs) to be highly distortionary because the programs typically benefit larger producers, incentivizing farm consolidation and monocultures, and eroding the viability of smallholder farming. Public support for agriculture and aquatic foods can also have profound environmental costs; for example, support measures that are tied to specific crops or practices can discourage more environmentally beneficial production.

This Call to Action envisions food policy as a mechanism for stronger rural livelihoods and communities producing better, healthier food under ecologically beneficial forms of farming. It connects agriculture, health, and other policy domains by considering food as a public good enabled by government support and expenditures. Governments across the Global North and South must drive the process of repurposing and reinvesting their food systems–related policy, but they cannot be expected to do it alone.

An opportunity exists to support and accelerate the “just transitions” movement through this Call to Action, while also creating coherence amongst diverse stakeholders calling for change. At the same time, there is an opportunity to uphold initiatives and organizations that are advocating for alternative models that also deliver on human, animal, and ecological health goals. This includes public investment in building the social capital that is a prerequisite for systemic change.

Fiscal levers, including taxation, agricultural and health payments/subsidies, social policy and programs, and infrastructure investments, all need to align to support equity, biodiversity, climate change, and health. Coalitions leading public finance reform efforts must work to: 1) tackle the slow pace of policy change (i.e., establishing clear, agreed-upon timelines); 2) achieve small, near-term wins to sustain motivation (e.g., such as the adoption of official resolutions by politicians that reference the reform efforts or the advancement of other

more visionary commitments, such as integrating TCA into national budgets); and 3) maintain a willingness to reshape strategies ad hoc as opportunities emerge and the context changes.

An “ecosystem” approach that brings private and public finance together to support holistic food systems decision-making, upholds a precautionary approach, and links agricultural, environmental, and social policy is required. Repurposing public investments to catalyze food systems transformation is critical.

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**BEACON OF HOPE**  
FIJI'S MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

The Pacific Island nation of Fiji is undergoing a dietary transition. Despite the ability to harvest nutritious food from the land and sea, Fijians — particularly those living in urban areas — are increasingly dependent on imported processed goods. Though agriculture remains integral for the livelihoods, food security, and cultural identity of rural communities, public perception narrowly views farming as an activity that occurs only in the countryside. Climate change and the increased intensity of natural disasters further threaten the stability of the country's food systems.

COVID-19 exacerbated these challenges. When the pandemic began, officials from Fiji's Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) realized the sector was suffering from a severe lack of resources. This urgent and immediate concern affected not only farmers but all Fijians. Import disruptions and a decline in the purchasing power meant people turned to domestic produce as the backbone of the country's food supply.

Taking this issue to the national government, the MOA secured additional public funding to upscale existing policies. The resulting Agricultural Response Package for COVID-19 built on and accelerated the impact of two Ministry initiatives that promoted the increased production of local produce: 1) the MOA's Farm Support Program channelled FJ \$1 million (around US \$450,000) toward boosting the production of short-term crops among small-holder farmers; and 2) the Home Gardening Program targeted people living in urban and peri-urban settings, and increased household food security by providing families with the means to grow their own nutritional foods.

The MOA's measures supplied a diversity of crops versus inadvertently promoting monoculture production. For example, the seeds and planting materials provided to smallholder farmers included nutritionally dense crops such as bitter gourds and squash as well as traditional staples like cassava, kumala (sweet potato), and duruka (a sugar cane-like plant typically prepared in coconut milk or curries).

The MOA also mobilized another government mechanism, the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA), to ensure the continued and orderly distribution of local produce from rural to urban markets. By being transparent about local demand, the AMA encouraged farmers not to overharvest their produce. This led to a reduction in food waste and stabilized prices by minimizing the panic buying and selling of goods. MOA officials also approached a number of commercial farmers who typically produced crops for export, convincing them to instead sell to the domestic market where demand was high.

Today, Ministry officials are looking at import substitution to promote the domestic production of rice. Extension officers have visited more than 1,000 villages to distribute free seeds of indigenous and improved varieties. By supplying these inputs, alongside machinery, storage, and financing, the MOA aspires to make communal rice growing more appealing and less labour intensive.

While the pandemic may have kickstarted a transition back to locally grown produce, experts say farmers need ongoing government incentive to continue increasing production for domestic food supply.



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## CALL TO ACTION #5: UNLOCK PRIVATE & MULTILATERAL INVESTMENT

**Unlock investment opportunities in sustainable food systems and align private, philanthropic, and multilateral funders with national actors for greater impact.**

Redirect financial flows of philanthropy, investors, banks, and donor agencies away from harmful practices and toward initiatives that are incentivizing, accelerating, and amplifying food systems transformations.

Important efforts have been underway to redirect financial flows toward more beneficial — and away from harmful — practices. Only a small proportion of public and private funds trickle down to small family farms, and even less to sustainable agriculture in the Global South. A [2020 study by Biovision, IPES-Food, and the Institute of Development Studies](#) shows that 63% of financial flows are focused on reinforcing and tweaking existing systems. Their analysis highlights that most investments reinforce industrial models, in effect locking out funding for more sustainable agriculture.

As efforts get underway to jumpstart the world's economy after the COVID-19 pandemic and to repair health and social care systems, food systems investments become even more crucial, and non-public financial flows — from philanthropic to corporate to multilateral organizations — could be much more strategic in leveraging public funds and addressing the needs of a fragmented market.

As efforts get underway to jumpstart the world's economy after the COVID-19 pandemic and to repair health and social care systems, food systems investments become even more crucial, and non-public financial flows — from philanthropic to corporate to multilateral organizations — could be much more strategic in leveraging public funds and addressing the needs of a fragmented market.

This Call to Action elevates the potential of philanthropic and other non-public financial flows to galvanize food systems transformation, especially as the global economy faces serious obstacles in the pandemic recovery period. Foundations, investors, funds, and banks are in a unique position to shift policy and practice toward desired actions that incentivize, accelerate, and amplify the adoption of agroecology and regenerative practices built on ambitious funding targets. This includes investment in principles-aligned, integrative food systems that generate positive non-financial and financial returns as well as mobilize integrated capital toward transforming food systems in partnership with farmers, entrepreneurs, investors, fund managers, and others.

An opportunity exists to co-design investments that apply a systems approach, with funders, investors, and partners working together to create an enabling environment for

initiatives to flourish. At the same time, an ecosystem approach allows for risks (perceived and potential) by funders to be addressed, mitigated, and managed accordingly.

With the adoption of systemic tools and the ensuing opportunity for diverse insights, cross-sector collaboration is more likely and siloed or single-focused interventions avoided. By calling for the redirection of finance toward measures that accelerate systems transformation, this Call to Action points to the need for farmers — the main recipients of today's broken subsidy model — to be supported in the transition to sustainable food systems and granted improved access to appropriate and adequate infrastructure, technologies, as well as pricing systems that are fair and just, while ensuring protected earnings.



### **BEACON OF HOPE**

COMMUNITY MARKETS FOR CONSERVATION (COMACO),  
ZAMBIA, EAST AFRICA

Community Markets for Conservation (COMACO) strategically channels financial flows to smallholder farmers through innovative market incentives.

Operating in Zambia's Luangwa Valley, COMACO was founded by wildlife biologist Dale Lewis, who had witnessed first-hand a cycle of poverty that was detrimentally affecting community members, wildlife, and the surrounding environment. Food insecurity was of particular concern, caused by a suite of challenges including depleted soils, low crop yields, pest infestations, and an overreliance on non-food crops that left farmers susceptible to fluctuations in the commodity market. These circumstances contributed to the poaching of endangered elephants and rhinos.

To address these interconnected pressures, COMACO trains farmers and former wildlife poachers in agroecological approaches and the diversification of their crops and livelihoods. These practices have improved yields, diversified farmer income, and led to a 78% increase in food security levels.

COMACO's market incentives are multifold and in a constant state of evolution. The first step, however, is a Conservation Pledge signed by farmers, who agree to hand over their poaching guns and snares and commit to adopting agroecological farming methods. Farmers utilizing sustainable agricultural practices receive a conservation dividend each year — a combination of farming tools, beehives, and other technology they can use to improve future yields.

A strength of COMACO is that it operates across the value chain, allowing for greater cost efficiency and more profit to be directed toward farmers. After purchasing crops grown by farmers, COMACO transports the harvest to one of its regional Conservation Trading

Centers. There, it processes crops into added-value, high-quality food products such as honey, peanut butter, and dried fruits and vegetables. These products are sold under the brand name *It's Wild!* to an international and domestic market who pay preferential prices to support the company's mission.

The business benefits of the *It's Wild!* brand go both ways: COMACO has access to sustainably grown crops, and smallholder farmers who have signed the Conservation Pledge receive a higher price than if they were attempting to sell independently (an activity that is commonly limited by a lack of transportation to local markets). Increased sales of *It's Wild!* products also lead to a higher conservation dividend for farmers. In this sense, COMACO is boosting the viability of sustainable agriculture rather than reinforcing industrial models.

Another way that COMACO directs financial flows to community members is through the establishment of Community Conservation Areas — forests that are safeguarded from environmentally degrading activities. Again, conservation is incentivized. Through a [Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation \(REDD+\)](#) carbon project with The World Bank, community members receive payment for the avoided carbon dioxide emissions caused by deforestation. The financial benefit is significant: after the first monitoring period, \$490,000 was distributed across nine chiefdoms.

Since its genesis, the social enterprise has also strived to be adaptive rather than prescriptive, to listen rather than lecture. It places the knowledge and interests of smallholder farmers at the fore and empowers them to lead. COMACO engages local leaders in the process of identifying vulnerable families and those who are most responsible for environmentally degrading activities. By respecting and meaningfully partnering with these groups, COMACO ensures the continued relevance and acceptance of its activities.

Farmers, too, are considered experts in their domain. More than 85 community cooperatives have been established to build local leadership capacity and provide mentorship to farmers on sustainable agriculture and alternative income-generating activities. The outcome is a grassroots exchange of knowledge through community seed banks, information meetings, and a weekly radio show where farmers learn new agricultural techniques from their peers.

COMACO's approach is leading food systems transformation in a way that benefits farmers and the land that sustains them.

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## CALL TO ACTION #6: ENABLE AGROECOLOGY & REGENERATIVE APPROACHES

**Create enabling environments for agroecology and regenerative approaches to flourish.** Ensure a systems approach centering on a strong role for local institutions, communities, smallholder farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and women; the protection and expansion of rights; policy coherence and coordinated governance; research mobilization; plus investment and funding for infrastructure (such as roads, schools, markets).

Agroecology is a vital science, practice, and movement that has the potential to help us break out of the many crises afflicting the planet. But there are barriers on many fronts. The greatest portion of financing for food and agriculture remains locked into dominant pathways that perpetuate productivist and technological solutions, export orientations, and serve to concentrate power in the food, seed, and agrochemical industry. Support for this kind of agriculture is premised on a mindset that commodifies food and externalizes its true environmental and social costs. Held up by short-term, unambitious, and fragmented policies, the current industrial system marginalizes the world's majority food producers: smallholder farmers, food provisioners, Indigenous Peoples, particularly those practising agroecology and experimenting with other innovative solutions. Their voices, rights, and participation remain far from the centre of decision-making, particularly at the national level. Policies to support and invest in agroecology and regenerative approaches are slow to advance, and investments in practice, enabling conditions, and supporting research are extremely low relative to the need.

This Call to Action speaks to the need to create an enabling environment that includes policy coherence, coordinated governance, and the adoption of innovative tools and approaches, such as TCA. It upholds the FAO's interlinked and interdependent 10 elements of agroecology: diversity; synergies; efficiency; resilience; recycling; co-creation and sharing of knowledge; human and social values; culture and food traditions; responsible governance; and circular and solidarity economy. Harmful policies and practices need to be reoriented to support, rather than block, the advancement of agroecology. This entails a strong role for local multiactor governance models, local institutions and communities, and the protection and expansion of rights — including collective, customary, and biocultural rights to land, territory, waters, seeds, and productive resources.

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A significant opportunity exists to aggregate data and present case studies that demonstrate the resilience in agroecology systems to stressors like COVID-19 or climate change. This growing evidence can shift narratives over time, linking the positive benefits of agroecology to broader systems changes that deliver on multiple ecological, human, and animal health and well-being outcomes.

As well, financial investments and holistic strategies are needed that do not have to reconcile productivity with other environmental, health, or social benefits but rather aim to achieve both. Investing in agroecology necessitates public and private investment in parallel infrastructure, and it relocates food systems through circular and solidarity economies, short-chain loops, and localized markets and food systems. Finally, while the *quality* of investment for agroecology and regenerative approaches is critical, greater *quantity* of investment is also needed to affect systems-wide change.



**BEACON OF HOPE**  
MASIPAG, PHILIPPINES

MASIPAG is a farmer-led network of civil society organizations, NGOs, and scientists in the Philippines that advocates to make agroecology the new normal. The organization works alongside 35,000 farmer members in 3 regional zones to sustainably manage biodiversity, with a focus on rice. It puts power into the hands of farmers to control their supply of seeds, select their system of agricultural production, and share their knowledge and skills.

The COVID-19 crisis escalated the urgency of MASIPAG's call for agroecology. The pandemic laid bare the weaknesses of the current agricultural system and opened the door for new models and ways of thinking. Agroecology, MASIPAG contends, would not only improve the sustainability and resilience of food and farming systems, but would place farmers and the right to food at the centre of policies.

MASIPAG acknowledges the holistic nature of the agroecology approach, and its work encapsulates environmental, economic, sociocultural, and political dimensions. In adopting agroecology methods, MASIPAG is not only helping farmers improve their agricultural yields using less-intensive processes but is also revitalizing cultural tradition and resisting corporate influence.

From an environmental perspective, MASIPAG supports its farmer members in developing sustainable agro-ecosystems. This includes encouraging them to breed and maintain their own local rice varieties through on-farm seedbanks. This action breaks farmer dependence on expensive inputs from multinational companies, which strengthens food sovereignty and protects traditional rice varieties. Locally adapted varieties of rice are of critical importance in the fight against climate change.



Additionally, MASIPAG runs training sessions to encourage the adoption of practices such as soil fertility management, alternative pest management, crop diversification, and the integration of livestock and fish into farming operations. Each of these activities improves biodiversity and builds long-term resilience.

In working toward the sociocultural dimension of agroecology, MASIPAG highlights the close connections between food, culture, and the protection of local and Indigenous knowledge. In embracing the agroecology movement, farmer members are not only cultivating rice, they're able to carry on culinary traditions and enjoy culturally appropriate dishes, nurture and share it with other farmers, and better recognize the role of women in advancing the practices of sustainable agriculture.

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MASIPAG is a local institution that advocates and protects the rights of its farmer members. Amplifying and uniting the voices of these farmers, the organization also conducts national and regional-level advocacy work — a testament to the political dimension of agroecology. It rejects the status quo: an industrial system that marginalizes smallholder farmers and Indigenous Peoples, and their innovative contributions to food systems. The organization is simply not willing to accept policies that perpetuate productivist-focused “solutions.”

To that end, MASIPAG is an active member of the Stop Golden Rice Network (SGRN) and other farmer-led initiatives that take a stand against the proliferation of genetically engineered, high-yield varieties of rice and the expansion of corporate agriculture in the Philippines and East Asia. As part of SGRN, MASIPAG has lobbied local governments to stop the use of genetically modified organisms, advocating instead for the adoption of farmer-bred rice varieties and an agroecological approach.

By investing in agroecology, MASIPAG sees the opportunity to champion a more holistic approach that ensures healthy food systems, healthy and resilient communities, and a healthy planet.

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## **CALL TO ACTION #7: PROMOTE NUTRITIOUS, SUSTAINABLE, WHOLE-FOOD DIETS**

**Promote nutritious, whole-food diets underpinned by sustainable, diversified food production adapted to local ecosystems and sociocultural contexts.** Create positive food environments that provide equitable access, dietary guidance, and controls on ultra-processed foods. These approaches will support dietary shifts toward whole foods and sustainable, minimally processed plant-based, animal and aquatic proteins, particularly where meat and saturated fat consumption is high or growing at levels that risk human and/or planetary health.

The coexistence of undernutrition and diet-related noncommunicable diseases — the so-called double burden of malnutrition — constitute contemporary challenges for almost all countries. The impact of these diet-related health crises has profound consequences on well-being, physical and cognitive development, and the ability to live a fully productive life, and spans generations. These crises also have a profound impact on countries' economic and social development. In many regions of the world, the increased consumption of ultra-processed foods and beverages with high levels of sugar, saturated fat, and salt are associated with an increased prevalence of diet-related non-communicable diseases.

Overconsumption of animal-based proteins is also associated with an increased prevalence of diet-related non-communicable diseases. Growing research demonstrates that the consumption of much less animal protein is healthier for all populations and demographics as long as a culturally appropriate, diverse, and balanced whole-foods diet is accessible. Particularly in light of climate change and biodiversity loss, dietary shifts are needed in contexts where meat and saturated fat consumption is leading to poor human health or breach planetary health boundaries. Industrial livestock production is associated with high greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, deforestation, zoonotic disease transmission, and antibiotic overuse and misuse. Mixed, integrated farming systems that include animals can contribute to ecological, animal, and human health.

Changes in dietary patterns are the result of several factors, including the urbanization, lifestyle changes, and different aspects of the industrial food system such as the globalization of production processes, concentration of trade and food supply, and relatively low prices for ultra-processed products. Narrowly focused research priorities focus on commodity crops, supplementation, fortification, and biofortification as opposed to improving access to nutritious, sustainable, and culturally respectful diets.

This Call to Action speaks to how food systems impact our health, which is, in turn, determined by complex interactions between social, economic, and ecological factors; the physical environment; and individual behaviours. Key decision-makers and thought leaders will need to adopt and adapt new health-focused visions and prioritize policies, practices, and business models that align multiple determinants of health concurrently, including

nutritious diets, ecological and animal health, safe food and water, safe places to live and work, and economic opportunity.

Key decision-makers and thought leaders will need to adopt and adapt new health-focused visions and prioritize policies, practices, and business models that align multiple determinants of health concurrently, including nutritious diets, ecological and animal health, safe food and water, safe places to live and work, and economic opportunity.

A significant opportunity exists to engage diverse health actors around the health benefits of food systems at various jurisdictional levels. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, awareness of the systemic linkages between human, ecological, and animal health has never been higher, but it must go further. Health actors can be strong voices for food systems transformation. Among the opportunities to advance this Call to Action, the promotion of sustainable food-based dietary guidelines that align procurement, investment, educational, and agricultural strategies while being holistic and nuanced (responding to different contexts, cultures, and choices) is a promising pathway that could have long-lasting health benefits for all. Work on shifting the role of international and fiscal policies, alongside wide adoption of the precautionary principles, has the power to have a positive impact, too.



**BEACON OF HOPE**  
GASTROMOTIVA, BRAZIL

Gatromotiva is leading a new kind of food revolution: the social gastronomy movement. Those at the helm of the social gastronomy movement believe that food and the tools of gastronomy can address some of the most complex issues faced by society: poor nutrition, food waste, poverty, and social inequality. It's inherently connected to the fight for food solidarity and recognizes that food systems need to change in order to provide more people around the world with equitable and universal access to food.

Since 2006, Gastromotiva has offered a free entry-level cooking course to marginalized youth from low-income neighbourhoods in the Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba, as well as in Mexico and El Salvador. Youth learn foundational culinary skills, enough to satisfy the job requirements for a kitchen assistant position.

Another of Gastromotiva's programs is targeted toward small-scale food entrepreneurs working in underprivileged communities. By providing business management and skills training, the goal is to cultivate a thriving network of locally owned businesses. This will improve access to nutritious food in areas with higher rates of malnutrition, food insecurity, and the associated risk factors.

The organization also offers a professional-level cooking course where soon-to-be chefs hone their skills in Gastromotiva's communal canteen, Refettorio Gastromotiva. The canteen provides a free and nutritious lunch and dinner service to all community members. In doing so, it brings together a cross-section of society to share not only a meal but different perspectives and lived experiences.

These training programs and the communal canteen connect vulnerable groups with employment opportunities — and, more significantly, the social and economic inclusion that come alongside a job. By equipping people with culinary skills and knowledge of nutritious food, Gastromotiva is broadening who gets to learn about and benefit from nutritious diets.

In response to COVID-19, Gastromotiva launched Solidary Kitchens as a decentralized, place-based project with diversified food production adapted to fit Rio de Janeiro's unique context. The project engaged Gastromotiva's network of culinary alumni and students, calling on them to transform their home kitchens into communal canteens.

Cooks distributed their meals — an average of 300 every week — in areas where they identified the most need. Oftentimes that was a *favela* or another underprivileged neighbourhood where people have a difficult time accessing or utilizing nutritious food. Recognizing the ability and agency of its alumni cooks to make distribution decisions, Gastromotiva contributed logistical support and nutritional guidance to help the project succeed. This included working with a nutritionist to develop healthy recipes for home cooks, covering the costs of ingredients, providing tips on how to reduce food waste, and more. The organization's supporting role offers a lesson in how groups can lead food systems change using a flat hierarchy.

Gastromotiva's approach demonstrates that food and cooking can be a tool to improve one's city and the social determinants of health and well-being. The economic opportunities, relationships, and sense of confidence and dignity built by its training programs and communal canteen have a ripple effect beyond individual trainees, improving the well-being of families and communities.

Gastromotiva satisfies the need for healthy and nutritious meals every day *and* in crisis. But it also fosters a sense of caring and compassion — two essential ingredients in any positive food environment.



NORTH EAST SLOW FOOD & AGROBIO-DIVERSITY SOCIETY (NESFAS), INDIA



WORLD FOOD SYSTEM CENTRE AT ETH ZÜRICH, SWITZERLAND



THE COMMON MARKET, UNITED STATES



FIJI'S MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE



COMMUNITY MARKETS FOR CONSERVATION (COMACO), ZAMBIA, EAST AFRICA



MASIPAG, PHILIPPINES



GASTROMOTIVA, BRAZIL

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Global Alliance for the Future of Food would like to gratefully acknowledge the many people involved in the preparation of this material. In particular, the Global Alliance would like to thank: Krystyna Świdarska, Ravi Prabhu, Nadia El-Hage Scialabba, Ann Tutwiler, Marta Echavarria, Rex Raimond, Faris Ahmed, Dr. Elisabetta Recine, and Samara Brock, who helped to craft the background materials that helped to inform this work.

We extend deep gratitude to the Global Alliance Secretariat Team involved in this work: Ruth Richardson, Executive Director; Lauren Baker, Senior Director of Programs; Rachel Gray, Operations Director; Meena Nallainathan, Program Coordinator; Pablo Vidueira, Blue Marble Evaluator; Kasia Murphy, Communications Director; Amanda Jekums, Program Coordinator; Matheus Alves Zanella, Program Coordinator; Patty Fong, Program Director, Climate and Health & Well-being; and Melanie Moran, Communications Coordinator.



# ABOUT THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD



The Global Alliance for the Future of Food is a strategic alliance of philanthropic foundations working together and with others to transform global food systems now and for future generations.

We believe in the urgency of transforming global food systems, and in the power of working together and with others to effect positive change. Food systems reform requires that we craft new and better solutions at all scales through a systems-level approach and deep collaboration among philanthropy, researchers, grassroots movements, the private sector, farmers and food systems workers, Indigenous Peoples, government, and policymakers.

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