

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Thursday, 27 May 2021 11:00 GMT -04:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Innovating for positive impact in a polarized world
CONVENED BY	Dr. Mark Lyons (President & CEO, Alltech) with support from Christine Gould (Founder & CEO, Thought For Food)
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/11395/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	No borders

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

27

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

19-30

20 31-50

5 51-65

2 66-80

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

17 Male

10 Female

Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

5 Agriculture/crops

Fish and aquaculture

4 Livestock

Agro-forestry

Environment and ecology

Trade and commerce

Education

3 Communication

5 Food processing

Food retail, markets

2 Food industry

Financial Services

Health care

Nutrition

National or local government

Utilities

8 Industrial

Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

2 Small/medium enterprise/artisan

Large national business

23 Multi-national corporation

Small-scale farmer

Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

Local Non-Governmental Organization

International Non-Governmental Organization

Indigenous People

Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

Local authority

Government and national institution

Regional economic community

United Nations

International financial institution

2 Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

The Principles were communicated to the Dialogue participants through both the work of the Dialogue Facilitators to manage the discussion flow as well as the keynote speakers who shared insights clearly outlining the relevance of the Principles in their talks before and after the Dialogue. As well, participants invited into the Dialogue were familiar with each other, establishing a baseline of trust and respect among all Dialogue participants. The plenary format also allowed Dialogue participants to have their video on throughout the Dialogue, which acted to bring the group together and mimic as close as possible in-person conversations. This factor influenced conversation flow - participants were increasingly more engaged in conversation as they became more comfortable with the Dialogue format and its goals.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

Through keynote speeches and pre-discussion conversation, Dialogue participants recognized the relevance of the Food Systems Summit and sought ways to improve the experience for all stakeholders involved. Respect was shown through "raised hands" reactions on Zoom, which was greatly adhered to during the plenary conversation. Each participant involved in the Dialogue had in-depth experience in the food industry and with food systems, so fully understood the complexity and systemic approach. Facilitators helped craft each conversational point to include an inclusive approach to other food systems stakeholders, making key takeaways collaborative among all food systems actors versus antagonistic against specific stakeholder groups. Finally, everyone at all levels of the Dialogue recognized the importance to act sooner rather than later, vocalizing this throughout the Dialogue.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

Ensuring the Dialogue environment feels comfortable for participants, enough to turn on video, express views openly, and leave the Dialogue feeling that it was a positive experience is a challenge. That said, this can be achieved through creating a positive environment and framing the Dialogue with engaging keynote presentations that outline the Dialogue principles as well as the importance of such conversations to transform food systems.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

Yes

No

The format of this Dialogue was planned as one larger plenary session including all participants, with two facilitators introducing the discussion questions, exploring key insights further, and monitoring conversation flow. This format was chosen to fit better with the number of participants and act as an open conversation format for everyone to hear and contribute insights. Participants seemed to react well to this format, as they were very engaged in discussion, either through voice or through the Zoom chat. Points of divergence and convergence were easily elucidated, and through the “raised hands” Zoom feature, anyone who wanted to speak had the chance to contribute. This format also worked as most participants were familiar with each other. Rather than unexpected challenges that a conversation among strangers may create, there was some level of confidence that individual views would be respected.

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

This Dialogue explored innovating for positive impact in a polarized world, through the private sector perspective. In today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world, new ways of thinking, (re-)acting, and communicating are urgently needed to deliver on the potential benefits of innovation. Behaviors such as openness, collaboration, entrepreneurial mindset, and community engagement are more necessary than ever before, but how do we get there? This Dialogue brought together global private sector stakeholders to discuss the role of innovation in revolutionizing our world's food systems, navigating ambiguity, building trust, and responding to the unprecedented challenges present in today's world. Four discussion questions were proposed to structure the conversation:

1. What are the main topics that cause polarization when it comes to food systems?
2. How can we deliver science-based solutions in a polarized world? How should our approach to innovation adapt to this environment?
3. What is the role of communication in securing a social license to operate? With whom and where do we need to engage?
4. Who needs to be at the table and what are the ways to help (re)build trust and combat misinformation?

ACTION TRACKS

- ✓ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- ✓ Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- ✓ Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- ✓ Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- ✓ Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- ✓ Finance
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Human rights
- ✓ Women & Youth Empowerment
- ✓ Policy
- ✓ Data & Evidence
- ✓ Governance
- ✓ Trade-offs
- Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

Findings from this Dialogue included:

- Reputation is what is limiting full private sector involvement in food systems conversations. There is great interest in the private sector to be more closely involved with the Food Systems Summit and food systems sustainability. Participants agreed that the industry needed to be more collaborative and integrate more stakeholder perspectives in its food systems work. Participants also recognized that the private sector is seen as too involved in public sector conversations by some food system stakeholders but the private sector itself does not feel involved - many are just now getting to the table and having holistic food systems conversations. Predictions were made that 2050 sustainability goals will focus heavily on actions needed to be taken by the private sector, so involvement and qualitative engagement now are important.
- Communicating information has never been more difficult. There was frustration around false or incomplete facts or facts that are not scientifically proven creating an increasingly polarized world. There is a diversity of perspectives that become increasingly more dangerous through factors such as filter bubbles and echo chambers, where individuals encounter only information and opinions that conform to and reinforce their own beliefs, as well as oversimplification driven by social media, hysteria, hyper-connectivity, and large distances (in both geographic distance and use of digital technology) between food producers and consumers. Oversimplification is especially harmful as it is easily shareable on social media, makes logical sense, and breaks down complex points into one that is very simple to understand, removing any nuance. In this way, information consumers are not receiving complete information and will in turn not make optimal decisions, which harms food systems even further.
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships support sustainability and food systems transformation. Many global organizations face difficulties that multinational private sector actors can help solve, including sharing best-in-class models, facilitating better governance, reducing waste at multiple areas of the food supply chain, ensuring adherence to hygiene and other health-related factors, and helping prevent negative externalities. There are asymmetric challenges that exist and many stakeholders feel like they are pulled in different ways. Especially with more controversial food systems actors, having a seat at the table (through investing or other financial commitments) is important to ensure that the conversation is open instead of behind closed doors. Exclusionary investing will have broad negative unintended consequences, eliminating key parts of our food systems without leaving sustainable products to fill their place. The private sector, therefore, needs to be intentional about multi-stakeholder engagement - it needs to listen to stakeholders, including critical civil society organizations. As well, the sector needs to view these engagements as serious, bringing stakeholders to the table in intentional and recurring ways with planned long-term commitment. In this way, there is a chance to find a shared food systems purpose. Everyone wants to make the food system work - it does not help anyone if our food systems struggle.
- Diets are perceived to be changing dramatically towards the consumption of plant-based foods. This also means, however, that increasingly food is being produced in factories versus the land-based supply chains of animal proteins. We need a variety of proteins to feed the world, and consuming only plant-based solutions will not be sustainable in the near future, as more work needs to be put into research for other opportunities. Animal agriculture has a myriad of benefits and industry players are open to evolving their business models and engaging in dialogue with plant-based sectors.
- The role of youth and the next generation in food systems conversations is not to be underestimated. Youth can influence and change perspectives in innovative ways unheard of by many other stakeholders. As digital natives, their understanding of the internet provides them with the tools to examine all information with a critical lens. In this VUCA world, youth are thinking & acting differently than different generations. They are purpose-driven, idealistic, not loyal to brands, want to see change, and put value systems at the forefront, global citizens, open-minded, and changemakers. Youth see challenges as opportunities and can be trained to seek nuance in today's information overload through equipping themselves with the skills to be mindful of media & information consumption. As more youth are taking leadership roles in food systems, it is important to build bridges, listen, ask them questions, and help them establish a shared purpose behind their work, to substantively shift food systems to be more positive for future generations. There is a strong need to connect with youth and listen to their perspectives through humble and open attitudes. Everyone has a role to play in food systems conversations.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/3

1. Communicating information to the general public

A point was raised that the general public does not understand where their food comes from, catalyzed by increased distances between consumers and food producers. When the general public engages with misinformation, especially in the ways that their food is produced, they have no avenues to verify information validity. And changing their ingrained perceptions with truthful information is very difficult. Food has become a way for anyone, anywhere, to express their values. This has many benefits when it comes to learning about diverse cultures but can also lead to food becoming a new form of identity politics, promoting exclusionary, versus inclusionary, perspectives. This has the potential to be very dangerous as it could lead people to disengage from anything from diverse foods to alternate points of view. The lens of food understanding has also shifted towards a more individually-focused lens - "what is best for my family" - that is based on deeply held beliefs, versus a more scientific, unbiased lens. A great example is the global fear of pesticides and their effects on children and overall health, as well as the complex (and sometimes inconsistent) mechanism of public and private food labeling and certification schemes like "organic" without any global unified definition.

At the same time, it was discussed that influential stakeholders are not explaining to consumers what is happening in agriculture, from the issues such as monocultures to the opportunities offered by agtech and genetic engineering. More needs to be done to explain the potential benefits of agricultural innovation to consumers and not engaging with new and innovative food systems ideas is a missed opportunity. There is a need to start explaining general food systems trends, the "big picture", to consumers and engage with them more on the topic of sustainability to reduce information asymmetry and polarization. There is also a will to motivate this communication. Retailers, food distributors, and the hospitality industry have a voice and want to get their messaging right as they have a financial stake in consumer trust - loyal consumers make sure these industries are resilient to current and future food systems shocks such as COVID-19.

A final point was made that it is important to address conflict and combat misinformation. Acknowledging concerns and the people who are concerned about food systems topics is vital and creates dialogue, even if the concern is not shared. This empathetic approach can also move beyond bilateral dialogue to collaboration and inviting more people and views into food systems conversations. Collaborating with those outside the private sector and agriculture industry can provide fresh thinking and not burden food systems with visions of what has been done in the past. Digital tools were predicted to be key in this process, allowing unprecedented access to increasing diversity and inclusivity, as well as more accurate measurement and evaluation systems. A proposal was made to develop global assessment guidelines to enhance greenhouse gas emission inventories and to improve carbon footprint assessments and strategies for low-carbon livestock and food security. Such suggestions could minimize misinformation with easily understandable data (CO2 emission numbers) of interest to consumers and further the global push for greater environmental sustainability.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/3

2. Communicating complexity

Food systems are complex and this complexity is confusing. This confusion is further exacerbated by a lack of effective communication in the private sector - science communication is difficult and less attractive than sensational headlines and can be perceived as inauthentic. Identifying and debunking false information does not work as the motivation behind these fact-checking efforts is deemed to be suspicious by the general public. The most accurate voice is often not the loudest, especially in the context of sensationalized Netflix documentaries on food systems or celebrity culture.

A significant question was raised on how science and scientific theory can be delivered in a palatable way, communicating directly with consumers on the key issues that matter to them versus just displaying science in difficult-to-access and cost-prohibitive avenues such as scientific journals. A point was raised that science can be sold, but needs to be sold in what is important to the consumer, not what is important to the scientist. There is a tension around making science fully accessible, as there is power in nuance and very clear drawbacks on oversimplification. A memorable quote was mentioned by Jack Bobo, the CEO of Futurity, a food foresight company, "If you lead with the science, you lose with the science."

There was a collective agreement that science needs to be championed in education, especially children learning about key food systems topics in school. Experiences like science labs and experimentation need to be leveraged and science education needs to start as early as possible. Misinformation at this early developmental stage can be detrimental - if children are exposed to messaging that leads them to reject certain ideas, the industry loses them as consumers forever as well as lose the potential for innovation and change these future consumers could bring.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/3

3. Food Systems Messaging

It is important to find the right people to deliver private sector food systems messages. Identifying the voices people want to hear - farmers from local communities, markets, etc. - and amplifying their messages will ensure that the messages are being heard by the general public, as trust in these food systems actors is high. There was also a call for producers to get more involved in consumer-facing communication to combat misinformation and promote transparency along the food supply chain.

Additionally, the content of food systems messages to the general public needs to interest consumers. For example, rather than championing agtech as a private sector innovation, the messaging needs to pivot to show how agtech has benefitted farmer livelihoods. Or instead of focusing on sensational headlines on the dangers of animal protein, the focus could shift to the ingenuity and scientific progress made in the sector increasing its sustainability. As well, messaging needs to be tailored to each geography to accommodate national and regional markets and key areas of interest, as these may vary greatly. There is potential to use the digitally savvy next generation to elevate better food systems messaging, utilizing digital tools to meet future consumers "where they are" on digital platforms. A counterpoint was raised that complexity, which is often required in food systems messaging, does not fit into a world run by Twitter and TikTok conversations. This does open the opportunity though for scientific content creators to try and fit components of complex messaging into these platforms.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

Areas of divergence mainly existed to promote further discussion on topical areas, with most discussions coming to some form of consensus by the end of the dialogue. Some key areas of divergence included how to leverage digital tools to communicate complex food systems topics - should popular digital tools such as social media be used or would this further encourage oversimplification and misinformation. Dialogue participants agreed on the need to communicate to the next generation of food systems leaders and in general, consumers, but the avenue of communication could not be elucidated from the conversation. Diverse views were also present in examining the role of the plant-based industry and how the animal protein industry can engage with it. Points were raised that many plant-based private sector companies spend increasingly more financial resources on exclusionary marketing instead of research to improve their products or deliver product innovation, which hurts the food system, as there exists inefficiency and wasted potential for innovation.

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