OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Wednesday, 13 January 2021 13:00 GMT -05:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	U.S. National Food Systems Dialogues
CONVENED BY	United States Department of Agriculture
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/1871/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Member State
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	United States of America

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 76

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

	0-18		19-30		31-50		51-65		66-80		80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

	Male		Female		Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

18	Agriculture/crops	12	Education		Health care
	Fish and aquaculture	1	Communication		Nutrition
7	Livestock	3	Food processing	2	National or local government
1	Agro-forestry	3	Food retail, markets		Utilities
6	Environment and ecology	1	Food industry	2	Industrial
2	Trade and commerce		Financial Services	18	Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

2	Small/medium enterprise/artisan	2	Workers and trade union
6	Large national business		Member of Parliament
10	Multi-national corporation		Local authority
1	Small-scale farmer	2	Government and national institution
3	Medium-scale farmer		Regional economic community
	Large-scale farmer		United Nations
16	Local Non-Governmental Organization		International financial institution
6	International Non-Governmental Organization	3	Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance
1	Indigenous People		Consumer group
11	Science and academia	13	Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

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

In recognition of the urgency of organizing the Food Systems Dialogues as contributions to the Food Systems Summit, the United States acted expeditiously to host its first National Food Systems Dialogue on January 13, 2021. The United States was the first country in the world to host a National Food Systems Summit Dialogue. The event embraced the Summit principles of engagement: Act with Urgency, Commit to the Summit, Be Respectful, Recognize Complexity, Embrace Multi-Stakeholder Inclusivity, Complement the Work of Others, and Build Trust. See below for specifics.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

The U.S. National Food Systems Dialogues seek to empower U.S. domestic stakeholders to participate in the preparation of the UN Food Systems Summit. The first National Dialogue, which was held virtually, embraced multi-stakeholder inclusivity and included stakeholders from across the food system, ranging from U.S. producers, agricultural organizations, food industry, research and academic institutions, farm and food workers, and civil society groups. The second and third stages of dialogues will expand the number of participants while retaining the participation of those who participated in the first. Through multi-stakeholder inclusivity, the Dialogue provided a forum in which participants could share diverse perspectives, learn from each other, and collaborate to identify challenges and impactful solutions. Small group discussions at the Dialogue emphasized respect and building trust through facilitation guided by neutral U.S. government experts and researchers. The Chatham House Rule of non-attribution encouraged participants to engage in frank discussion and a collaborative approach. Dialogue discussion topics highlighted the complex challenges and tradeoffs of food systems policy interventions and solutions. To build trust, promote transparency, and accurately reflect the voices of U.S. food systems stakeholders, readout reports and summaries went through multiple levels of review and validation. Two notetakers sent their anonymized notes from the breakout rooms to facilitators, who developed anonymized reports that were shared and validated by participants before incorporation into the final official UN Dialogues Gateway feedback form. A complementary report highlighting high level outcomes is posted on the USDA Food Systems website.

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

The Chatham House Rule of non-attribution encouraged participants to engage in frank discussion with a collaborative approach. Only dialogue participants, a facilitator, expert researcher for consultation, and two note-takers were permitted in each dialogue breakout session. International and domestic observers were invited to observe the opening and closing plenary sessions but were not invited into the small breakout sessions.

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

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

This report represents the views of U.S. stakeholders, it does not represent the official views of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) or United States Government.

In following with the guidelines of the UN Dialogues Toolkit and ensure a systemic, comprehensive approach to assessing food systems, the first stage of the U.S. National Dialogue focused on identifying challenges to building more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable food systems in the United States. The discussions were broken into five main challenge areas aligned with the UN Food Systems Summit five "action tracks" and structured around four general question prompts outlined below.

Each breakout session focused on one of the five "action track" challenge areas. Participants were assigned to one of the five challenge areas:
1. Safe and nutritious food for all: What are the challenges in ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition and reducing the incidence of non-communicable disease, enabling all people to be nourished and healthy?
2. Increased consumer demand for healthy diets that are sustainably produced: What are the challenges in increasing consumer demand for healthy diets and foods that are sustainably produced? What are the challenges in reducing consumer food waste?
3. Environmentally sustainable production: What are the challenges in optimizing environmental resource use in food production, processing, and distribution, to reduce biodiversity loss, pollution, water use, soil degradation and greenhouse gas emissions?
4. Equitable livelihoods across the food system: What are the challenges in promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all actors along the food value chain and enabling entrepreneurship and addressing the inequitable access to resources and distribution of value?
5. Resilient food systems: What are the challenges in ensuring the continued functionality of sustainable food systems in case of natural disasters, pandemics, economic shocks, conflicts, and other sources of instability?

Discussion Questions: To encourage a systematic assessment of challenges, each breakout discussion considered four general questions:
1. What are the major challenges to advancing sustainable food systems in the United States related to your major challenge area?
2. What are the primary divers/causes of the major challenges?
3. What are the tradeoffs among social, economic, and environmental sustainability objectives? What are the distributional characteristics of the major challenges? If the group discusses potential solutions that target one dimension of sustainability (for example, social sustainability), what are the potential impacts on the other dimensions of sustainability?
4. What are the evidence gaps? What kind of evidence would be needed to motivate and support action to address these challenges, drivers and tradeoffs? Does the evidence exist or are there knowledge and evidence gaps?

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

MAIN FINDINGS

The focus of the first-stage U.S. National Food Systems Dialogue was to identify challenges to improving the sustainability of food systems. While the discussion topics were organized around the five UN Food Systems Summit Action Tracks as outlined above, the discussions did not fall neatly into these silos. Instead, participants broadened the discussions to holistically consider challenges and tradeoffs across food systems, and goals related to sustainability and resilience. Three overarching challenges emerged: 1) information gaps about healthy diets and sustainability produced food, 2) inequalities, and 3) environmental degradation and climate change.

• Overall Challenge #1: Information gaps about healthy diets and sustainably produced food

Dialogue participants identified divergent and confusing information about healthy diets and sustainably produced foods as a major challenge. Some participants expressed concern that information gaps hinder uptake of healthier diets and the promotion and adoption of more sustainable agricultural production practices.

• Overall Challenge #2: Inequalities

Dialogue participants identified inequalities in food systems as an overarching challenge. Some participants identified inequality as a primary driver of disparate access and uptake of healthy diets, and as a barrier to improving the livelihoods of farm and food systems workers and expanding business opportunities in agriculture and food supply chains. Some participants expressed the view that underlying, long-standing inequalities have had a negative impact on food systems' resilience.

• Overall Challenge #3: Environmental degradation and climate change

Dialogue participants identified environmental degradation and climate change as overarching challenges. Some participants expressed concerns about challenges to farmers and producers related to clear guidance on environmentally sustainable practices and barriers to international trade based on sustainability standards that are not based on science. Some participants highlighted challenges associated with the distribution of the costs of more environmentally sustainable production practices across the food system, raising concerns that farmers and low-income consumers could bear the brunt of potential cost increases.

In all the discussion groups, participants discussed where they thought research or scientific evidence is needed to better characterize challenges and possible solutions. On the topic of healthy diets, some participants expressed the view that more information is needed on the effectiveness of consumer education and food assistance programs, including national data on the needs of food banks and their effectiveness serving vulnerable communities. In addressing inequity, some participants noted a lack of data on and models for investing in communities, including land ownership. Some participants noted evidence gaps related to environmental and carbon footprints of food and the links between environmentally sustainable practices and productivity yields.

In each discussion group, participants discussed the tradeoffs that might arise in building more sustainable food systems – and the challenges of managing these tradeoffs. The types of tradeoffs discussed are well described in the discussion of food prices and whether they are too high or too low. Some participants pointed to the high cost of nutritious foods (perceived or actual) as a challenge to achieving healthy diets for all. On the other hand, some participants noted high rates of food waste and hypothesized that the low cost of food (some participants noted that food is like a "free good") leads to people throwing it away. When discussing environmental sustainability, some participants hypothesized that food is too cheap since the price does not factor in the true cost of environmental inputs or negative environmental externalities. Some participants noted that because environmental costs are not priced into agricultural production—especially in commodity agriculture—there are few immediate financial benefits to producers who improve their practices. Some participants noted a tradeoff between affordability and wages, noting that low farm and food worker wages may increase food affordability but could adversely impact the economic livelihoods of those workers.

Some participants highlighted the need to include diverse stakeholders, including environmental groups, more farmers, including more and BIPOC (black, indigenous, peoples of color) farmers, the financial sector, data scientists, land grant universities, food companies, anti-hunger groups, and media. Some participants agreed that knowledge gaps could be addressed by receiving input from different stakeholders.

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✓	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/3

Participants identified divergent and confusing information about healthy diets and sustainably produced foods as a major challenge to improving diet quality and the sustainability of food systems.

Some participants noted that U.S. food systems are extremely complex, and many consumers lack clear understanding of how to achieve healthy diets and shop for sustainably produced foods. Some participants felt that labeling can cause additional confusion since many labeling claims, such as “natural,” are difficult to understand. The discussion highlighted that confusion is exacerbated by conflicting information from industry, advocacy groups, and consumers themselves. Some participants felt that these information gaps make it difficult for consumers to make informed decisions and that uninformed consumer demand could lead to less sustainable outcomes. For example, one discussion group noted that in some cases, food fads or even “food bullying” by a group of usually affluent consumers can drive food consumption trends that do not improve nutrition or the sustainability of the food system and can sow distrust and confusion.

Some participants noted that misinformation about agriculture could discourage farmers from adopting new technologies that could improve nutrition and/or the sustainability of food systems, such as genetic engineering and genome editing. Some participants were of the view that misinformation about agriculture could also influence consumers’ acceptance of new technologies and that disagreement about sustainability goals could create challenges to coalition building to achieve shared goals.

Some participants suggested that the reasons for divergent and confusing information include the lack of clear guidance from government and scientific groups about what constitutes sustainably produced food. For consumers, some participants hypothesized that information gaps are also driven by insufficient consumer (and school-level) education, including lack of education on existing science research on healthy diets and sustainably produced food and lack of outreach on how people can shift to healthier diets. Anti-science attitudes, low public trust, and a proliferation of misinformation were also mentioned by discussants as reasons for confusion.

Evidence and research gaps identified by some participants included lack of information about best practices and opportunities for improved communication across sectors. One group noted that sustainability analysis is complicated by differing standards of evidence across environmental, economic, and nutrition and public health domains. At the same time, some participants highlighted that traditional impact analysis should incorporate a wider array of approaches, such as citizen science and traditional cultural practices, to inform policy and programs and engage actors across the food system. Some participants highlighted the gaps in dissemination of information that already exists, including on basic science, technology, and nutrition. Some participants noted need to collaborate across sectors to increase student nutrition knowledge and acceptance of healthy foods offered in school meals.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/3

A major overarching challenge identified by dialogue participants was inequalities and inequities in food systems. Participants raised the issue of underlying, long-standing inequalities in food systems and the effect of these inequalities on access to healthy diets, fair labor and business opportunities, and food systems' resilience.

Some participants discussed that inequities in access to healthy diets can manifest in food distribution and affordability. Some participants discussed that food access could be unequally distributed with some isolated groups such as tribal reservations having difficulty accessing fresh produce and other items. Similarly, in both urban and rural areas, some participants discussed access difficulties because of location of housing and proximity to the nearest grocery store, or lack of transportation. Some participants suggested that the financial ability to access foods for a healthful diet is part of the challenge.

Some participants noted that structural and systemic racism and gender-based discrimination are drivers of inequality. Some participants noted that dimensions of inequality that can detract from equal participation in food systems include unequal access to capital and credit, land and land tenure, infrastructure (roads, transportation, digital broadband), and healthcare. Some participants noted that inequity can create barriers to entry for new food producers and farmers. Some participants mentioned that public programs based on welfare models can perpetuate inequality and should instead strive for beneficiaries' empowerment.

Some participants raised concerns about the tradeoff between efficiency and resilience, citing how the closing of large meat processing facilities during the pandemic caused supply chain shocks. Some participants hypothesized that market concentration had led to a lack of resilience in food systems. Some participants were concerned about who should bear the costs of providing well-paying food systems jobs, and the tradeoffs with food affordability. Another tradeoff some participants discussed was between access to fresh food and food waste. An example some participants raised was that while the provision of fresh produce by food banks or in food boxes may increase access to nutritious, food, it may also be associated with increased food waste.

Some participants noted that evidence gaps related to the effect of inequalities on access to healthy diets include analysis of the costs and benefits of investing in diet-related health promotion and disease prevention versus treatment of diet-related health conditions. Some participants suggested that evidence gaps related to the effect of inequalities on fair labor and business opportunities included lack of information on economic mobility in the agriculture sector. Some participants recognized a lack of data on how models of investing in communities work, including land ownership.

Some participants stressed the importance of funding for research on innovation that increases agility within food systems and addresses distributional challenges revealed by the pandemic (some participants defined agility as ability of agricultural production infrastructure to meet the needs of farmers of all sizes). Some participants hypothesized that creative solutions from the COVID crisis include shortened farm-to-consumer chains, the increased ability of food assistance participants to shop online, and pandemic food assistance benefits for families whose children were unable to access school meals.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/3

Participants identified environmental degradation and climate change as overarching challenges to agricultural production and resilience across the food system.

Some participants emphasized that variability in growing conditions due to climate change poses challenges for agricultural productivity. Some participants also mentioned lack of harmonized rules, regulatory and trade burdens, and differing uses and approaches to technology as additional challenges for global market competition and resilience. Some participants discussed how racial inequality is exacerbated by divergent exposure to pesticides, water quality, and other environmental conditions.

Some participants hypothesized that a driver of environmental degradation is lack of access to infrastructure to bring diverse crops to market such as diverse marketing and processing outlets. Without diverse outlets, farmers may not be able to diversify production or redirect product to higher-valued market options.

Some participants were concerned about who bears the costs and who should bear the costs of implementing environmentally sustainable and climate adaptation and mitigation practices at scale, and the tradeoffs with food system livelihoods and food affordability. Some participants asked “Is “tradeoffs” always the right lens? Are there opportunities for economic and sustainability wins or synergies?” and noted that we should aim for solutions where foods are both nutritious and sustainably produced. Some participants highlighted that meeting the needs of producers and consumers is a tradeoff, with increased sustainability sometimes meaning higher prices for producers and consumers. Some participants emphasized that when food insecurity is an issue, sustainability it not a high priority. In addition, some participants noted that imports of less expensive products from countries with less stringent environmental production protections may result in a more affordable, but less sustainable food supply.

Evidence gaps identified by some participants included the environmental and carbon footprints of food and the scientific links between environmentally sustainable practices and productivity yields. Some participants discussed the need for research about productivity and sustainability to investigate the assumption that producing food sustainably inherently reduces yield. Some participants noted a lack of sophisticated modeling of the impacts of dietary shifts considering international trade and shifting demand elsewhere in the world. Some participants expressed the need for articulation of multi-stakeholder agreement around desired, quantifiable outcomes for a sustainable food system and for environmental costs to be included in agricultural production. Some participants noted the issue of evidence gaps to accelerate the rate of adoption and the diversity of applying conservation agriculture practices, as well as data to assess downstream effects of increased production and processing costs.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

A notable area of divergence that emerged in one of the discussion groups was disagreement about the sustainability of U.S. agriculture. One participant felt strongly that "U.S. producers are the best of the best" and do not get enough recognition on the global stage for their sustainable production practices, while some participants said that we need to recognize sustainability problems "right here in our home." The group's discussion started and ended with a recognition that there are no silver bullet solutions, although it is tempting to try to create silver bullets by pushing for changes that help one aspect of sustainability but not all aspects, and there was consensus on the need for integrated approaches and representation from the entire value chain.

Some participants expressed divergent views and disagreement about whether the price of food is too high or too low. Some participants pointed to the high cost of nutritious foods (perceived or actual) as a challenge to achieving healthy diets for all. On the other hand, some participants noted high rates of food waste and hypothesized that the low cost of food (some participants noted that food is like a "free good") leads to people throwing it away. When discussing environmental sustainability, some participants hypothesized that food is too cheap since the price does not factor in the true cost of environmental inputs or negative environmental externalities. Some participants noted that because environmental costs are not priced into agricultural production—especially in commodity agriculture—there are few immediate financial benefits to producers who improve their practices. Some participants noted that while the low cost of food helps with affordability and access for some, it also creates economic and social complications for low wage earners if wages are kept low to keep food prices low.

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