

# THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

Our food systems touch every aspect of human existence. The health of our food systems profoundly affects the health of our bodies, as well as the health of our environment, our economies and our cultures. When they function well, food systems have the power to bring us together as families, communities and nations. When our food systems fail, the resulting disorder threatens our education, health and economy, as well as human rights, peace and security. As in so many cases, those who are already poor or marginalized are most likely to suffer the worst effects.

**What do we mean by “food systems”? The term encompasses every person and every process involved in growing, raising or making food, right through to consumption and what we do with our waste** – from farmers to fruit pickers to supermarket cashiers; from flourmills to refrigerated trucks and neighbourhood composting facilities. Billions of people earn their livings from the world's food systems. In 2017, farming alone **accounted for** 68% of rural income in Africa, and about half of rural income in South Asia. Experts at the World Bank **have estimated** that the global food system is worth roughly \$8 trillion – about one tenth of the entire world economy.

**Today's food systems are under more pressure than ever and destroying precious biodiversity.** Land is drying up, forests are being cut, oxygen levels are changing and rivers, seas and oceans are being depleted. Regeneration requires systematic change like we have never seen before.

Across the world, food systems are fragile and inequitable, as millions of people around the globe have experienced first-hand during the COVID-19 crisis. For many – especially those who were already struggling before the pandemic – the recent food system disruptions have led to job losses, hunger and malnutrition. Yet, while COVID-19 may have catalysed food and nutrition insecurity for many more people, is not the underlying cause of the challenges we are now facing with respect to our food systems.

**Over the last 50 years, global food production has increased by nearly 300% thanks to our incredible ability to innovate.** But the number of people going to bed hungry each night also rose to 690 million in 2019 - an increase of 60 million in just five years. At the same time, the number of people who are obese or who suffer

from food-related diseases now stands at more than 2 billion, while more and more countries are experiencing two of more forms of malnutrition. At the same time, we continue to waste over one third of all the food we produce; a loss of more than \$900 billion every year. Finally, globally, our agricultural supply chain – from farm to fork – accounts for more than one quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions. These issues are both complex and urgent.

**The food systems in many locations are beset by multiple challenges and have staggering levels of inequality.** They are often complex, and the groups of stakeholders within them have **differing perspectives on how the challenges are best analysed and tackled** as they draw on their different experiences and sources of evidence to support their positions.

**The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a global roadmap to achieve a better future for all** – from every corner of the Earth. **The 2021 Food Systems Summit** offers a turning point in our efforts to deliver the Agenda's 17 SDGs. The Summit seeks to energize and accelerate our collective journey to eliminate hunger, boost nutrition, create more inclusive and healthier food systems and safeguard the health of our planet. Success of the Summit will hinge on robust, inclusive, and above all, shared preparation – drawing on the best evidence, ideas, and commitments from around the world.

The involvement of different stakeholder groups in the Food Systems Summit is critical. Multi-stakeholder Dialogues are increasingly recognized as a valuable approach for engaging multiple actors and using their combined knowledge, to resolve systems challenges. That is why the programme of Food Systems Summit Dialogues is a core component of the preparations process of the Summit.

**The Dialogues are opportunities for the widespread engagement of all people as stakeholders in food systems. They encourage a collaborative approach at a time when there are many incentives for fragmentation.** Through a progression of Dialogues, stakeholders are able to agree on how they will work together to create food systems that are both sustainable and equitable, aligned with the SDGs, and suited to the needs of our future world and her people.