

On the road to the United Nations Food Systems Summit: key messages from the perspective of agriculture in the Americas¹

1. Framework for a conceptual and policy-related discussion on food systems²

The 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit presents a unique opportunity to advance processes that will enable the continued transformation of food systems to sustainably enhance food and nutritional security throughout the world.

Agricultural producers, and other food systems stakeholders should be central to the process of transformation and the ministries of Agriculture of the countries of the Americas and should take into account their perspectives. In preparation for the Summit, these countries—through the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)—are highlighting the contribution of the agriculture sector of the Americas to global food and nutritional security and are thus emphasizing the following three principles: i) agricultural producers should be adequately represented and their leading role in the transformation of food systems should be fully recognized; ii) the decisions and policies to be adopted should be science-based; and iii) agriculture is part of the solution to the main challenges faced by humanity now and into the future.

Based on this, the Institute has organized several related dialogues, engaging the participation and contribution of key stakeholders, who have reached a consensus regarding messages that the agriculture and rural sector of the Americas should convey at the Food Systems Summit. The dialogues have allowed the participants to arrive at a definitive consensus with respect to the transformation and strengthening process required to improve food systems in the hemisphere, and globally. Therefore, a series of messages are being proposed, which have been grouped into four general categories that are summarized below and then explained in greater detail in section 2 of this document.

First of all, **certain principles for the transformation of food systems** have been identified. While broadly speaking, global food systems have functioned efficiently to feed the world's growing population, many people across the globe lack access to sufficient, safe, and affordable food. There are still certain challenges and room for improvement in various areas including: production; agricultural health and food safety; nutritional quality; and in the three dimensions of sustainability: environmental, economic and social. The agriculture sector has played a central role in this system and has proven itself to be resilient to shocks and stresses. On the other hand, the proposed transformation should of necessity consider environmental health (with special emphasis on soil health and water), as well as human and animal health, given their importance and the interconnection between the three dimensions. Furthermore, international agricultural trade is a key aspect of food systems, given its direct impact on the orientation of production and consumption processes. Thus, it should be open, transparent and predictable, while safeguarding against the unilateral imposition of unjustified tariff and non-tariff barriers.

¹ This document has been prepared on the basis of three dialogues that were held with representatives of the Member States on May 12 and 25 and on June 15, 2021.

² The terms “food systems” and “agrifood systems” are used interchangeably in this document, in order to recognize agriculture's central role in achieving food security.

The second area of messaging addresses issues related to **consumer demand and nutritional aspects**. It emphasizes that for a diet to be healthy and balanced it should include diverse foods in sufficient quantities and should be available to all strata of the population. Decisions on what to consume are individual and it is the responsibility of States to promote food-related educational and informational campaigns.

The third category focuses on **production strategies and environmental matters**. Strategies should seek to capitalize on scientific and technological innovations, digitalization and the bioeconomy, among other aspects. Their implementation will call for adequate levels of public and private investment, as well as the support of international cooperation and financing.

Category four emphasizes the **role of the Americas** in global food and nutritional security and the provision of ecosystem services. The region comes to this debate from the perspective that the Americas will be pivotal to achieving long-term environmental and food equilibrium—in all its dimensions—as a primary actor in international food markets and a region endowed with abundant natural resources and biodiversity that must be conserved for future generations. On the other hand, although the countries of the region face common challenges, there is also a great deal of heterogeneity among and within each of them, as they have different subsystems, subregions and approaches to production. Therefore, instead of generalizing or proposing universal formulas, we should be guided by the principle of locally adapted solutions according to national realities. Tackling the challenges will call for production policies in rural areas, as well as social protection policies targeting the most vulnerable sectors. Poverty and inequality persist within the region and are incompatible with the notion of progress that underpins the debate leading up to the Summit

The close to 17 million family farmers in agrifood systems deserve special mention and recognition, as their production is closely tied to the food security of the American hemisphere and to many of the achievements made within the framework of these systems. Also worthy of special mention and attention are the women, young people, rural poor, and indigenous groups who are a part of the diversity of rural societies in the Americas.

The key specific messages for each of these four areas are detailed below, reflecting and embodying the essence of food systems in the Americas.

2 Main messages

2.1 Transformation of agrifood systems

Message 1. In recent decades, global food systems have largely successfully met the food demand, which has been increasing, due to population growth and greater per capita income. Thus, future transformation should build on the system's demonstrated strengths and contributions already made.

Message 2. Agricultural producers and other food systems workers are an essential and central link in the food system. Without agricultural production, there would be no raw material to transform into food, thereby seriously endangering food security. In addition, agriculture is central to poverty eradication, rural development and provides key ecosystem services for sustainable food systems.

Message 3. The transformation of global food systems should strike a balance among the following objectives: the capacity to increase food production levels and variety; agricultural health and food safety; nutritional diversity and quality; and environmental, economic and social sustainability. It is recognized that there is no single model and the balances and trade-offs will differ according to country and subregion, and responsibilities; thus, transformation should be varied, in keeping with the realities and specificities of each location, ensuring that this transition is just and fair, leaving no one behind.

Message 4. Open, transparent and predictable international trade is essential for an efficient global food system and should be governed by multilateral rules and standards, with a view to promoting agricultural trade liberalization and a reduction in tariff and non-tariff restrictions. The multilateral system should play an increasingly active role in limiting and reducing measures which distort trade and production and ensure the adoption and application of science-based sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

2.2 Consumer demand and nutritional aspects

Message 5. Decisions about what to consume should be left to consumers. Consumer choices could be based on historical and cultural factors and on accessibility and availability, among other considerations, and should be respected. The State should educate and inform the public about healthy diets and develop prevention campaigns to safeguard public health, based on the latest information and scientific evidence.

Message 6. High-quality protein, carbohydrates (grains and sugars), fats and fortified and biofortified foods are the building blocks of a balanced and nutritious diet that contributes to human health.

Message 7. The desired and necessary increase in fruits, legume and vegetable consumption will only be possible if significant efforts are made to increase production and educate the population for the consumption of these products and in the logistics for their commercialization, thus making them more competitive and accessible, particularly to lower-income consumers.

Message 8. The implementation of sustainable production systems throughout the entire value chain, within the context of “One Health” or other approaches that benefit public health, is a useful strategy to develop agrifood systems that optimize health outcomes recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment.

2.3 Production strategies and environmental factors

Message 9. The new frontiers of science and technology represent a strategic opportunity to move towards developing a more productive and sustainable agriculture sector, given that they facilitate greater precision and efficiency. Circular and bioeconomy approaches that focus on resource use efficiency (including the sustainable intensification of production), the reduction and reuse of agricultural production waste for the production of other goods, as well as investment in research and development (R+D), are key aspects of this new scenario.

Message 10. Food production systems are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. The challenges posed by climate change make it essential to focus efforts on adaptation in order to ensure the resilience of the system and maintain the production necessary for food security. Agricultural production should move in the direction of sustainable systems that provide a balance between carbon

emission and carbon capture, while considering positive external factors resulting from ecosystem services, all of which will require systems that quantify and promote their usage. The new technologies contribute to reconciling agricultural production with environmental and ecosystem health, which is an indispensable factor for agriculture's resilience.

Message 11. Achieving a more balanced and efficient food system will require an investment plan for widescale development of production, transportation, and logistics technology and infrastructure. For these investments to be effective, countries must design and execute medium-term strategic plans that facilitate the creation of public-private partnerships. States should invest in basic infrastructure and public goods, into which private actors may then channel their investments. These efforts will call for significant support from international cooperation and financing

2.4 The role of the Americas

Message 12. The Americas contribute to global food and nutritional security, by being the main food exporting region and the largest ecosystem service provider and source of biodiversity. The region is also critical to environmental sustainability and the mitigation of climate change effects at the global level.

Message 13. For agriculture to contribute to achieving these global balances, there must be production inclusion and social protection policies geared towards ensuring social and economic sustainability and addressing the deficiencies experienced by the most vulnerable sectors in rural areas. These policies should apply to the entire spectrum of producers and pay special attention to the needs of family farmers, youth, rural women and rural poor and indigenous groups.

Message 14. Agricultural producers are at the heart of agrifood systems in the Americas, operating within a wide variety of systems and production approaches, including family farming. It is therefore essential that they participate in the debate surrounding the differentiated strategies to be implemented and their design.

Message 15. The Caribbean requires special consideration, given that it is a food import-dependent subregion, subject to frequent natural disasters and climate change and made up of smaller and less agriculturally competitive island States. Strengthening resilience to climate events, reducing levels of food insecurity and applying international cooperation and financing approaches to deal with the new context are priorities that should be considered, particularly with respect to the Eastern Caribbean and Haiti.

Message 16. The food insecurity situation with social, economic and environmental implications affecting the Northern Triangle of Central America also deserves special attention.