

JOINT STATEMENT LETTER

Food-system change is key to achieving the SDGs

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Dr Qu Dongyu

Director General of the FAO

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Dear Dr Dongyu,

Ahead of the International Day of Forests, and in the context of the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables, we are writing to you to express our support for the work of the FAO in ensuring food security for all and building more sustainable food systems.

As a coalition of civil society organisations that have been working for many years with the UN, we urge you to use the upcoming Food Systems Summit (including the pre-summit in Rome), the Convention on Biological Diversity's development of the new global biodiversity framework, and COP26 to accelerate the ongoing shift towards more plant-rich food-systems and explore the potential of cellular agriculture to mitigate the impacts caused by industrial animal agriculture.

As you know, the livestock sector alone accounts for more than 14.5% of global GHG emissions,¹ and the food system as a whole contributes nearly a third of total emissions.^{2 3} At the same time, the demand for livestock products could increase massively by 2050 as a consequence of population growth and rising incomes. The negative impact of industrial animal agriculture on our environment has been acknowledged by experts for years. Deforestation to make space for livestock and feed crops has always played a key role in this context and was dramatically highlighted by the devastating fires in 2019 and 2020. UNEP reports that the production of agricultural commodities is driving around 70% of tropical deforestation.⁴

¹ Gerber, P., H. Steinfeld, B. Henderson, et al. (2013): Tackling climate change through livestock: a global assessment of emissions and mitigation opportunities. FAO, Rome.

² IPCC (2019): Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.- O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, P. Zhai, R. Slade, S. Connors, R. van Diemen, M. Ferrat, E. Haughey, S. Luz, S. Neogi, M. Pathak, J. Petzold, J. Portugal Pereira, P. Vyas, E. Huntley, K. Kissick, M. Belkacemi, J. Malley, (eds.)].

³ Crippa, M., E. Solazzo, D. Guizzardi, et al. (2021): Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. Nature Food. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9>

⁴ UNEP, Why do forests matter? Available at: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/forests/why-do-forests-matter> [16.03.2021]

On the other hand, solutions to halt deforestation, mitigate the impact of agriculture on climate change, reduce pandemic risks and antimicrobial resistance, and build healthier and more sustainable food systems that also benefit farmers and their livelihoods have been widely showcased in recent years in numerous studies and articles. Shifting away from resource-intensive diets based on the excessive consumption of animal proteins and towards more plant-rich diets has been identified as one of the most impactful solutions, along with tackling food waste.

In this context, we would therefore like to work with you on:

- **Promoting** more plant-rich diets (such as the planetary health diet⁵) in UN processes in 2021, and developing healthier and less resource-intensive dietary guidelines.
- **Focusing** on the mitigation potential of plant-based innovations and the need for massive investment in order to mainstream these sustainable alternatives, including increased subsidies, thus guaranteeing a just transition for farmers.
- **Creating** a working group to explore the potential of cellular agriculture, as well as organising conferences with all relevant stakeholders, so as to increase awareness of this potentially high-impact technological solution.

With a noticeable increase in the public demand for alternative proteins since the COVID-19 crisis began, **we are now seeing the emergence of a potential paradigm shift in our food systems. This is the moment for accelerating this shift – for the sake of both human and planetary health.** The FAO's voice and leadership on these crucial issues is urgently needed and will be crucial to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to your reply, and to developing a shared agenda.

Kind regards

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⁵ <https://eatforum.org/learn-and-discover/the-planetary-health-diet/>

