



GLOBAL DAIRY PLATFORM

Climate Action & Nutrition: The FAO Perspective

December 2023

Global Dairy Platform recently attended the [UN Committee on World Food Security \(CFS\)](#) annual meeting in Rome. The meeting was held at the Food and Nutrition Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Three days of plenary sessions and side events touched on a number of familiar themes, including the idea that healthy, nutritious food should be accessible and affordable for all people regardless of the country or region in which they reside, steps that need to be taken to ensure the enactment of more sustainable global diets in the future, and ways that the agriculture sector can help to be a positive force for change in sustainable food systems.

FAO Makes Its Perspective Known

During the conference, FAO made its perspective known via various fora and documents about the actions they believe need to be taken to ensure that future nutrition activities have a positive impact on the climate, and other factors, if we are to come close to achieving the [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), as outlined by the United Nations.

FAO leadership made it clear that they view climate change and malnutrition as major barriers to sustainable development, although these two issues have been considered in isolation for too long. In fact, the two issues are interlinked and future initiatives that take this into account stand the best chances of success moving forward. In a document provided during the CFS conference entitled, [Climate Action and Nutrition: Pathways to Impact](#), data from an [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) report](#) were cited, indicating that without urgent action to tamp down increases in greenhouse gas emissions and the loss of natural resources and livelihoods that inaction will provoke, around 250,000 additional premature deaths per year will occur globally from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress.

Core Systems with Nutrition and Climate Impact

FAO leadership focused on four core systems that contribute to good nutrition: agrifood, water, social protection, and health, and made the point that all of these systems are threatened by climate change.

Agrifood systems involve actors and actions at all levels of the food supply chain, from production to aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of foods and non-foods that originate from agriculture. According to FAO, data agrifood systems are currently failing to enable healthy diets for all. It is estimated that upwards of 3 billion people cannot afford or don't have access to healthy foods and diets. Recommended actions for improving global agrifood systems include diversifying crop and animal production, managing soil sustainability, reducing food loss and waste, implementing market incentives that improve consumer awareness and behaviors, and enabling sustainable local food markets, among several others.



Water systems include streams, wetlands, and other surface and groundwater interactions with terrestrial environments and reflect the ways in which water is used and managed for supporting nutrition, livelihoods, food security, ecosystems, and the economy. Integrated actions to improve water safety and access include improved holistic water governance, integrating innovative technologies, and updating policies.

Social protection systems involve policies and programs that address economic, environmental, and social vulnerabilities to food insecurity and poverty, and that protect and promote livelihoods. Steps to improve social protection systems include addressing economic and social barriers that enable livelihoods, particularly among women, designing systems with the dual purpose of reducing poverty and addressing climate vulnerability, incentivizing investments in technologies, and ensuring that workers are prepared to use these technologies.

Health systems, according to [WHO](#), consists of “all organizations, people and actions whose primary intent is to promote, restore or maintain health.” They may include efforts or individuals engaged in health care, legislation, and policy development. Actions to improve health systems may include increased availability and utilization of data on health risks from climate change; implementing gender-sensitive health assessments; practicing nutrition-sensitive, climate-smart food procurement in health care workplaces; and employing a [One Health](#) approach to holistic health care.

The Livestock Sector Must Play an Expanded Role

It is clear that the FAO and other global health organizations are serious about enacting changes at various levels that will simultaneously improve nutrition, human and animal health, livelihoods, and the environment, and plan to utilize techniques like True Cost Accounting in the future in order to achieve/justify their aims. The livestock sector is viewed in many circles as an integral part of this change, a sector that satisfies diverse nutrient needs, promotes better health, and provides opportunities for improved livelihoods and gender equality throughout the globe. So, it is important that the sector continues to play its part.

How is the Dairy Sector responding?

The dairy sector has long played a role in promoting sustainable food systems, not only by producing products with proven health benefits, but also by providing livelihoods for almost one billion people globally through gender empowerment, youth employment, and economic growth and prosperity opportunities in some of the most impoverished regions of the world. But, like all players in the agriculture commodity sector we have a responsibility to do better, particularly during this period of climate uncertainty and continuing global malnutrition. Through programs like [Pathways to Dairy Net Zero](#) and [Dairy Nourishes Africa](#), the global dairy sector continues to promote changes that can improve the environment and provide access to better nutrition and more equal employment opportunities worldwide. To be sure, further action will be needed moving forward. Improved farm practices, development, and dissemination of technologies to improve



both the environment and health, and generating systems that can provide greater access and affordability to healthy food products are a small part of the challenges the sector will face in the future. Understanding the issues and keeping a finger on the pulse of organizations like FAO who are seeking to drive these changes will make it easier for the sector to answer the bell as additional challenges arise.