



GLOBAL DAIRY PLATFORM

Perspective Paper

Recognizing Dairy as a Source of Global Nourishment in the Fight Against Malnutrition

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KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Malnutrition affects 3 billion people worldwide and is exacerbated by climate change**
- **The Goalkeepers report published by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation indicates dairy availability is a key solution to combatting global malnutrition**
- **Investment in nutrition addresses both health and climate crises**

Currently, the triple burden of malnutrition, which includes overnutrition, undernutrition, and/or micronutrient deficiencies affects **3 billion people worldwide**.¹ Further, climate change is exacerbating the issue, emphasizing the need to nourish people and the planet.

A report sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation titled, *The Race To Nourish a Warming World*,² unveiled during Climate Week NYC in September 2024, outlines four solutions to the global malnutrition crisis, the first of which is ensuring more productive cows and safer milk for vulnerable populations. As the report highlights, there is an urgent need to, “ensure kids get healthier even as the world gets hotter.”

In several countries, dietary guidelines that once were developed to ensure nutritional adequacy for the population based on the nutrients provided by foods, now use metrics assessing the environmental footprint of food production and waste, cultural aspects of food production and consumption, health effects of foods as part of dietary patterns, and other indices to generate regional diet recommendations for sustainable healthy diets. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) reiterate that the primary role of the food system is to **nourish the world** and defines sustainable healthy diets as “dietary patterns that promote all dimensions of individuals’ health and wellbeing; have low environmental pressure and impact; are accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; and are culturally acceptable.”³

As recommendations evolve to capture the complexity of the food system, recent research indicates that nutrition and health cannot be sacrificed as we transition to more sustainable ways of producing and consuming foods if we are to ensure nutritional security for all.

Progress against malnutrition has stalled

The sharp decline in childhood mortality that was observed in the first quarter of the century came to a halt when the Covid-19 pandemic spread around the world.

According to [UNICEF](#), two-thirds of the world’s children, more than 400 million, are not consuming enough nutrients to grow and thrive.⁴

UNICEF, WHO, and World Bank Group estimated in 2023 that 148 million children experienced stunting and 45 million experienced wasting, the [most severe forms of malnutrition](#).⁵ In some regions, over-fed and undernourished children are experiencing “hidden hunger.” Malnutrition, in all its forms, can have irreversible effects on children’s bodies and brains. The cost of malnutrition isn’t just in physical growth; malnutrition is linked with poor performance in school and work that translates to [USD 3 trillion](#) in lost productivity annually.

The Importance of Dairy, Particularly in Vulnerable Regions

The [FAO recognizes dairy foods](#) as important contributors of high-quality protein and essential vitamins and minerals, such as B12, riboflavin, calcium and iodine and acknowledges the vital role for dairy in combatting malnutrition, particularly in low and middle-income countries where dairy is often the most affordable and accessible animal source food.⁶ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation invests in solutions to ending childhood malnutrition because it recognizes that the health crisis and the climate crisis are actually the same crisis – particularly in low- and middle-income countries – and that the most effective fight against the impacts of climate change is investment in proper nutrition.

In the 2024 Goalkeepers report, the Gates Foundation highlighted research from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the only [CGIAR](#) center solely dedicated to food policy research, which found that improving dairy productivity and supply in just five countries – Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania, could prevent 109 million cases of childhood stunting by 2050. Proponents and contributors to the report, including the former head of WHO, referred to milk as a “superfood,” and encouraged its safe production and consumption globally.

The [research](#)⁷ led by IFPRI and highlighted in the Goalkeepers report, which was also the topic of the [June GDP Perspective Paper](#), questions why, in light of dairy’s rich nutrient profile, isn’t it more actively promoted in the developing world? The authors cite data from pre-school children and young adults in low- and middle-income countries indicating, among other things, that dairy price subsidies and higher dairy intake reduces micronutrient deficiencies in these vulnerable populations, which in turn reduces the risk of childhood stunting and wasting that can have lifelong consequences. In their conclusion, the authors state that “dairy has tremendous potential for reducing the global burden of undernutrition and at the same time augmenting the income of farm households in a wide range of countries” demonstrating dairy role in healthy sustainable diets and food systems.

First, nourish the world

As we work together across sectors toward building a more sustainable food system, the FAO emphasizes that the primary focus must be on nourishing the world's population. This entails not only increasing the availability of nutritious food but also ensuring equitable access for all, particularly for more vulnerable communities.

By prioritizing the nourishment of individuals, we can address pressing issues such as food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms, which are critical components of a sustainable future. Only by placing people at the heart of sustainable practices can we create food systems that are resilient, equitable, and capable of supporting the health of people and the planet.

DAIRY LEADERSHIP: A CALL TO ACTION

- **Educate key stakeholders on the unique nutrient package that dairy has to offer and how it plays a critical role in ending malnutrition in all its forms.**
- **Advocate for the inclusion of dairy foods in dietary guidelines, highlighting the importance of dairy's role in healthy sustainable diets and food systems.**
- **Share the facts: A thriving dairy industry not only combats malnutrition but also contributes to livelihoods and the resilience and sustainability of the global food system.**

For more information on the Global Dairy Platform's Perspective Papers or our Quarterly Webinar Series, please reach out to Dr. Beth Bradley at beth.bradley@globaldairyplatform.com.

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