



**WORLD FARMERS'
ORGANISATION**

WFO POLICY ON SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

FARMERS' CONTRIBUTIONS AND NEEDS

This document was prepared based on a draft by the WFO Working Group on Food Security, with input from all WFO Members and the WFO Scientific Council, under the coordination of the International Secretariat. The consolidated draft, approved by the WFO Board, was discussed and adopted by the WFO General Assembly on 19 June 2024.

World Farmers' Organisation

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Farmers are the key to achieving Sustainable Global Food and Nutrition Security. What farmers produce is the precondition to attain the UN Sustainable Development Goal 2.

Food is a human right. Our daily mandate is to ensure safe, nutritious, and sufficient food for all.

Building upon the outcomes of the United Nations Food Systems Summit and findings from the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World Report 2023, it is evident there is a necessity to consider the detrimental effects on food security caused by various conflicts and crises that were not present during the first policy revision, as well as the widespread, rapid, and intensifying impact of climate change. In response, the General Assembly of WFO has resolved to conduct a second revision of the policy, aiming to reinforce and update its content.

The Food and Agriculture Organization identified the multiple challenges facing agriculture in the 21st century¹:

- Higher production of food, feed and fibre is needed for a growing population.
- Agriculture must contribute to the overall economic growth of agriculture-dependent developing countries.
- The agricultural sector will face the threats posed by climate change, and the intensification of natural disasters, and upsurges in transboundary pests and diseases.

Agriculture must adopt more efficient and sustainable production methods and adapt to climate change.

Farmers feel and are aware of these challenges. Because eradication of hunger and poverty alleviation for the world's 10 billion people by 2050 are not only the responsibility of farmers but the whole global society, farmers must be enabled to address these challenges by receiving adequate support and appropriate political and legal frameworks.

Farmers require personalised support systems designed to tackle their specific challenges, including accessing markets, financial services, and technologies that can withstand climate-related stresses.

The voices of farmers must, therefore, be heard and inform decisions. Decision-makers must consider the diversity of global agriculture and pay particular attention to the practical needs of farmers and marginalised communities, especially in developing countries, in policy development and implementation.

¹ FAO. 2011. *FAO in the 21st century. Ensuring food security in a changing world*. Rome, FAO. <https://www.fao.org/4/i2307e/i2307e.pdf>
FAO. 2017. *The future of food and agriculture – Trends and challenges*. Rome, FAO. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6583e.pdf>

1. Global challenge to feed the world

Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) sets the target to end hunger, enhance food security, improve nutrition, and strengthen sustainable agriculture all over the world by 2030. To meet these targets, concrete and rapid actions are needed in each country.

Food security indicators² demonstrate the high probability of not meeting this goal by 2030. Zero Hunger is far from being achieved. The numerous ongoing conflicts have devastating consequences on the food security of populations, placing arable and livestock sectors at risk.

Access to food is diminished for people around the world: between 691 and 783 million people suffered hunger at global level in 2022, and it is projected that 640 million people, including 121 million children, will be stunted or underweight by 2050.³ 9.2 per cent of the world population suffered from undernourishment in 2022, compared to 7.9 per cent in 2019. Almost 30 per cent of the global population was moderately or severely food insecure in 2022, with 42 per cent of the population unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021. Many of these are farming families.

Addressing hidden hunger is a pressing concern that often goes unnoticed despite impacting over two billion people globally, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This widespread issue arises from multiple micronutrient deficiencies, including those in iron, zinc, iodine, and vitamins, often stemming from the consumption of energy-dense yet nutrient-poor diets. This issue is frequently linked to inadequate dietary choices and insufficient education regarding optimal nutritional practices.

Food security and livelihood of the poor are impacted by a variety of interrelated challenges, such as those resulting from poor market infrastructures and supply chain disruptions, political decisions and armed conflicts, volatility of both input and output prices, climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, resource scarcity, pandemic and endemic illness, plant and animal diseases, as well as misinformation. It is essential to meet the needs of farmers, encompassing access to markets, inputs, extension services, and practices for sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. Moreover, serious logistics and transport deficiencies increase the loss of production, approximately 14 per cent of the world's food, according to FAO, in the post-harvest phase up to the retail market.

² FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural-urban continuum*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>

³ Ruggeri Laderchi et al. (2024). *The Economics of the Food System Transformation*. Food System Economics Commission (FSEC), Global Policy Report. https://foodsystemeconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/FSEC-Global_Policy_Report.pdf

Social inequalities are at the base of poverty and malnutrition. Farmers, particularly subsistence farmers and rural women farmers, who are the majority in rural areas in many countries, are the most affected by poverty and food insecurity (especially in Africa, where 34 per cent of the whole people who is food insecure live).⁴

According to FAO, moderate or severe food insecurity affected 33.3 per cent of adults living in rural areas in 2022, compared with 28.8 per cent in peri-urban areas and 26.0 per cent in urban areas. The gender gap in food insecurity at the global level, which had widened in the wake of the pandemic, narrowed from 3.8 percentage points in 2021 to 2.4 percentage points in 2022.⁵

Farmers are thereby also central in fulfilling the SDG 1: No poverty. It is, therefore, essential that farmers' role in the poverty and food security discussion is strengthened and that farmers and their representatives are involved in the policy design processes, as well as their implementation at all levels.

4 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2021. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4474en>

5 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>

2. Farmers can provide solutions

Farmers are the stewards of the land and sea/water, also through livestock breeding, fisheries/fish farming/seafood production, and aquaculture. They tend and manage the land for coming generations. They are the ones maintaining their lands' fertility and their soils in good health. They take care of livestock and develop animal productivity. Furthermore, Farmers are also the stewards of water through fishery, seafood supply and aquaculture. These farming activities ensure sufficient supply of animal proteins. Farmers have the knowledge and are eager to produce food even more efficiently with the sustainability of natural resources in focus.

Farmers play a vital role in enhancing the well-being of their communities by embracing a One Health approach. This involves responsibly managing soil, ensuring plant and animal health and welfare, and maintaining high standards of hygiene throughout production and storage, thus fostering a harmonious balance that benefits people, animals, and ecosystems alike.

Resource efficiency will be improved further by technology and innovation using and sharing both traditional and technical knowledge, promoting vocational training to farmers in respect of their traditional knowledge, their intellectual property rights, and data ownership, favouring the dissemination of new sustainable practices.

Climate change is a big challenge for world food production.

Farmers around the world are devising and implementing new strategies and techniques to mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate change with a view to ensure the immediate and long-term sustainability of the farm operations. To this end, a combination of farmers' know-how, traditional and scientific knowledge and technological innovation is key in the adaptation to climate change and to further develop and control adequate seeds and breeds ([WFO Policy Paper on Innovation](#)). It is imperative to allocate resources towards research and development, revitalising traditional techniques and promoting novel practices, including precision agriculture and adoption of climate-resilient crop varieties. This strategic approach ensures that no farmers are marginalised from social and market dynamics due to a dearth of technological advancements and innovative solutions.

The new FAO Roadmap⁶ launched at COP28 considers food production, biodiversity and ecosystems in a holistic manner and advocates 'for a profound understanding: historically, agri-food systems have been the sustenance providers. The food they yield is indispensable for human survival'. Farmers' organisations will want to provide input to the further development of the Roadmap.

Governments must provide adequate policies enabling and allowing farmers to produce food in a sustainable and efficient way, ensuring fair economic returns for their work and investments.

To this end, farmers are contributing to food availability with all kinds of farming systems: small and large-scale, conventional and organic, in the north and in the south, sustainably using the existing natural resources, and adapting to all kinds of local settings, natural and agroecological conditions. Farmers promote biodiversity by growing a variety of crops and livestock, which can help improve nutrition and food security by providing a wider range of nutrients to consumers. Moreover, farmers play a crucial role in maintaining the genetic diversity of indigenous crops, growing traditional local varieties and saving seeds. Farmers can be called upon to share knowledge and resources local communities and organisations to improve access to nutritious food for all.

Without farmers, there is no food security and nutrition, no stability of food supply and no access to food. And this must be recognised politically in definitions, goal formulation, and actions to be taken.

⁶ FAO. 2023. *Achieving SDG 2 without breaching the 1.5 °C threshold: A global roadmap*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/interactive/sdg2-roadmap/en/>

3. Actual conditions and challenges for agriculture

Farmers around the world are facing many common challenges. It is important to obtain fair returns from farming business. Livelihood in rural areas is often poor compared to urban agglomerations. When rural areas are left behind, and profitability in agriculture is missing, young people look for opportunities outside farming. It is a global challenge to facilitate the entrance of young people into the agricultural sector. The current development pathways lead to a future that lacks motivated professionals who have the competence to produce safe and healthy food due to a lack of support and, in some cases, the absence of adequate policies or agrarian reforms.

The most important challenges for farmers to provide sustainable food security include:

- **Vulnerability to climate change.** Droughts, floods and other extreme weather events increase the natural risk of agricultural production in large areas of the globe and change the basic conditions of farmers' production.
- **Weak added value for farmers.** Farmers' daily work is not recognised by the market, imposing low prices at farm level, often well below the cost of production, exacerbated by the higher agricultural input and energy prices ([WFO Policy Paper on Value Chain](#)).
- **Ensuring the future availability of food for generations to come relies on boosting farmers' profitability.** This involves equitably distributing the economic value of production throughout the entire value chain, acknowledging the heightened risks farmers face. Additionally, efforts to contain production costs play a crucial role in achieving this goal.
- **Volatility in agricultural prices and increase in input costs,** caused by the higher market fluctuation exacerbated by the recent conflicts, create instability and crop planning is put at risk in the more vulnerable food chains.
- **Dependence on big investors, traders and processors** (oligopolies and monopolies).
- **Increased costs of living** while farmers' incomes are decreasing.
- **Over-regulation, administrative costs and lack of support from government agencies** lead to the decrease in productivity.
- **Food standardisation** that leads to a concentration of power, which undermines the position of farmers in the value chain.
- **Uncertain property rights and, therefore, compromised access to financial services (e.g. credits), production inputs, and new technologies.**

- **Lack of access to land and increasing demand for farmland by non-farmers drives higher prices.** Moreover, the continuous process of urbanization and soil sealing of agricultural land, in addition to land grabbing, reduces the availability of land for agricultural production.
- **Lack of access to good quality seeds, fertilizers, and planting materials,** as well as unequal access to high genetic merit breeding stock and veterinary expertise.
- **Lack of infrastructure.**
- **Lack of access to knowledge, advisory services and technology.**
- **Weak empowerment of women,** who play an important role in food production and food systems.
- **Weak involvement of farmers,** particularly rural women and youth, in decision-making at all levels.
- **Highly aging farming population** because of the availability better opportunities for young people in other professions; and,
- **High levels of food loss and waste along the food supply chain.** By 2050, food waste will increase by 16 per cent, reaching 76 kg of dry matter per capita.⁷

⁷ Ruggeri Laderchi et al. (2024). *The Economics of the Food System Transformation*. Food System Economics Commission (FSEC), Global Policy Report. https://foodsystemeconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/FSEC-Global_Policy_Report.pdf

4. What should be done?

4.1. Stability in trade and adequate prices

An open, fair, and rules-based global trading system, alongside domestic agriculture supported by effective domestic policies, is critical for the implementation of 2030 Agenda and food security goals ([WFO Policy on International Trade](#)).

Assuring market access to farmers offers them a sale opportunity for their products. Access to local, national and international markets is important to achieve higher food security. This generates a production-based income and creates an incentive to improve and increase production. Fair prices for agricultural products are, however, a precondition for assuring this incentive. This is a way to foster entrepreneurship and investment on farm level and, as a consequence, also in the whole value chain. Markets are imperfect, and the supply and demand equilibrium generating market prices does not always hold. Food price inflation exceeded overall inflation in 71% of the 167 countries where data is available.⁸ Moreover, the general consensus is that global agriculture production has to be increased by about 60-70 per cent from the current levels to meet the increased food demand in 2050.⁹ This takes into account several factors. Some overall preconditions to improve markets should be considered, therefore.

Main preconditions

- Fair and transparent prices and margins for agricultural produce and services.
- Strong cooperation and fair sharing of value, risks and responsibilities between the partners in the food chains.
- Fair compensation of publicly expected ecosystem services delivered through agriculture (including carbon sequestration to achieve carbon net zero).
- Stable and predictable access to local, national and international markets.
- Investments needed to build local and regional food value chains.
- Support to improve stocking and preservation of products (better storage facilities, abattoirs and agro-processing infrastructures).
- Access to transparent price and market information in order to react to global market changes.

⁸ The World Bank. March 2024. *Food Security Update*. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/40ebbf38f5a6b68bfc11e5273e1405d4-0090012022/related/Food-Security-Update-CII-March-18-2024.pdf>

⁹ George Silva (2018). *Feeding the world in 2050 and beyond – Part 1: Productivity challenges*. Michigan State University Extension. <https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/feeding-the-world-in-2050-and-beyond-part-1>

4.2. A more efficient and professional agriculture

To increase productivity, an enabling environment has to be guaranteed. Investments in agricultural projects require political stability. Farmers' organisations and cooperatives, combined with a strong involvement of women and youth in the decision-making processes, can represent a powerful way to enhance food production and foster its professionalisation. Such organisations can bring benefits to the farmers on both farm and political levels: the former by using synergies, sharing technologies and know-how and the latter by representing the farmers' interests in the decision-making process at all levels.

Main requirements

- Invest in training for farmers, extension services, foster entrepreneurship and applied research.
- Train farmers to ensure animal health and welfare and sustainability in agriculture, including soil productivity and health in long-term.
- Strong institutions, assuring legal security and safe property rights, and minimising bureaucratic processes.
- Support rural areas to develop infrastructure, irrigation, drainage and water storages, seeds, as well as effective livestock breeding programs, and access to veterinary services.
- Guarantee the issuance of patent rights for native plant species.
- Encourage the establishment of enhanced and profitable value chains for farmers by fostering the creation of value chain agreements involving all stakeholders, from producers to retailers. This aims to strengthen farmers' negotiating leverage.
- Shorten and streamline the agri-food value chain so to eliminate unnecessary steps.
- Realise field implementations of precision livestock farming: monitoring and managing technologies for livestock, including continuous health and welfare monitoring ([WFO Policy on Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Livestock](#)).
- Support farmers in general, small-scale farmers, women and youth in particular, in all agricultural inputs, infrastructures aiming to increase their production and productivity.

- Address the decline of farmers' living and working conditions linked to isolation in the rural areas, poor profitability and over-indebtedness. This entails the need to lifting the socio-economic burden upon them to take care of the physical and mental health of farmers and their families. Support farmers, small-scale, youth and women farmers in particular, with the processing and agro-processing infrastructures to add value to their products, conserve the productions for the scarcity moments in low-cost storage infrastructures, and build resilience to climate change.
- Monitor and optimise production costs increasingly higher for the purchase of production inputs.
- Improve access to financial services, including financial education for farmers.
- Foster local cooperation, agricultural cooperatives and representative advocacy organisations.
- Empower women and motivate the youth to engage in agriculture as a way of closing employment gap and providing decent work.
- Promote crop and livestock varieties which are best adapted to the local circumstances, oriented to protect and enhance the biodiversity.
- Promote the availability of a balanced diet based on the local and traditional preferences of the population ([WFO Position on Real Agriculture](#)).
- Access to nutritious and natural food for all means to guarantee a sustainable future to livestock production and Blue Economy ([WFO Policy on Livestock Production](#)).
- Enhance responsible and coherent international cooperation.
- Invest in food security and nutrition education, and capacity-building on the right to food.
- Ensure the creation of simplified mechanism access for farmers and, particularly, women and youth, in the scope of undergoing discussion on climate change.
- Support the creation of agricultural cooperation for small-scale farmers, particularly women and youth, to ensure sustainable agricultural development; and,
- Support circularity in food systems, which advocates connecting arable and livestock systems to minimise loss and optimise production of highly nutritious food.
- Emphasise the need to prioritise investments in agricultural projects that promote political stability and empower farmers, particularly women and youth.

4.3. Sustainable growth in agricultural production

Farmers are dependent on natural resources and, therefore, have a strong sense of using them in a sustainable way. Without soil, water, nutrients, and energy, there is no possibility to farm or secure food for a growing population. Climate change is a factor that in most parts of the world has shown its devastating consequences for farming, which has increased farmers' awareness to be resource efficient even further. Without effective and continuous natural resource management for soil health of soil physical, chemical, and biological fertility, and water sustainability, there is no long-term production, and food security is put at risk. Food production needs energy, water, and nutrients, which should be circulated at local level to secure self-sufficiency.- Thus, sustainable food security affords that the natural potential in all regions is used to produce healthy food with consideration of long-term outcomes. It is short-sighted to ignore ecological and economical externalities.

Farmers are ready to foster sustainable food production. However, the regulatory environment can be challenging. Legislation, of course, needs to be in the service of sustainability. If rules and costs also are not global, farmers alone cannot carry the extra costs. There is a need for global thinking and understanding of the needs of local pedo-climatical conditions to achieve our living within planetary boundaries.¹⁰

Main requirements

- Support resource-efficient food production by sustainable use of natural resources in all countries according to their pedo-climatical conditions.
- Promote investment in sustainable agriculture and sustainable production systems, including nutrient and energy recycling with agroecological and circular food system principles.
- Empower farmers, family farmers, particularly women and youth, by providing them access to productive resources, as well as all rural communities surrounded by natural resources.
- Ensure farmers receive due recognition for their invaluable contributions and expertise in land management, fostering meaningful conversations surrounding the establishment of natural capital markets.
- Foster public spending on Research & Development in agriculture to promote innovation.

¹⁰ Richardson et al. (2023). *Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries*. Science Advances. <https://doi.org/adh2458>

- Promote digital transformation of primary sector and its development to boost efficiency, sustainability and competitiveness.
- Establish financial conditions leading to effective development and resilience.
- Training and extension services, in particular for rural women.
- Promote climate change-adapted crops by maintaining a high diversity and increased use of local varieties.
- Promote crop rotation and mixed cultures to protect biodiversity and resilience of soil-plant functions for yield productivity.
- Promote crop-livestock and, where possible, forestry integration through rotation, succession and/or consortium to improve productivity, nutrient cycling, biodiversity and income diversification.
- Promote efficient and clean use of energy and low emissions of greenhouse gases per produced unit.
- Optimise circularity in food systems where nutrients are cycled, often via livestock and agricultural land is maximised for human nutrient provision.
- Enhance buyer awareness through targeted information campaigns, encouraging them to reconsider their price expectations for food in order to align with sustainability costs for farmers.
- Reducing land consumption (meaning the conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes) is essential to prevent a shortage of land availability for food production, crucial due to its nutrients, richness and preserving it is vital to maintain soil fertility and support sustainable agriculture.

4.4. Improved awareness by the public

Farming is mankind's future: no farming, no future. Food security is dependent on farmers and healthy, productive soils and animals. Despite this, the burden must not be laid merely on the farming community. An effort must be placed on employing creative measures and consciousness-raising to encourage every single household who occupy at least one square of land to farm and for urban society and all consumers to understand how food is produced. This will improve not only food security for each individual but also awareness and a healthy eating lifestyle. For this goal to be achieved, the governments have to invest in public education by letting people know about the importance of farming and the benefits and difficulties related to it and by showing the importance of them playing a role. Youth must be motivated to get involved in farming and see it as a career and an alternative of employment. Therefore, governments, private sector and partners must provide scholarships to pursue high-level training and degrees in agriculture and assist in professionalising agriculture. In addition, literacy in food production should be shared for all citizens. Today, too many citizens do not know where the food comes from and what does it demand from farmers.

5. Conclusion – Farmers hold the solution to food sovereignty, security and nutrition

To conclude, sustainable food security must and can be fostered by recognising the centrality of the role of farmers and by ensuring they are effectively involved in decision-making on food security measures at local, regional, national and global levels.

An inclusive and participatory governance on food issues is also needed at local and national level, with the participation of farmers and civil society in the development of food policies both within rural communities and in urban contexts.

Climate change and the impact of the extreme weather events in large areas of the globe put at risk the basic conditions of food production. This requires urgent measures such as technologies for the stabilisation of productivity, sustainable management of natural resources, and disaster risk preparedness. These measures, beyond increasing farmers' adaptation to climate change, will also stabilise their income.

Farmers play a pivotal role in fostering circularity that extends beyond individual farms, encompassing entire regions and beyond. The interconnectedness among farms is crucial for the circular flow, not only within the agricultural sector but also extending downstream to industries processing harvested materials and upstream to those industries back to the farms. Unfortunately, the significance of this upstream connection is often overlooked. Recognising and addressing the multifaceted needs of farmers is fundamental for the sustainable development of the entire network and ensuring a harmonious circular system that benefits everyone involved.

Special attention must be given to the needs and involvement of women and youth. Farmers are the key for food sovereignty and security, and they know best, how to improve sustainable food production. WFO and its national member organisations will work towards this in strong collaboration with international organisations and national governments and partners.

Support farmers' activity and profitability in the production of quality and nutritious food, recognise the role of family farmers and women in the rural areas as promoters of local communities and environmental guardians, are strategic tools at local, national and global levels toward a future sustainable world without hunger.



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