



HEALTHY & SUSTAINABLE DIETS

POLICY BRIEF • MAY 2022

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Healthy and Sustainable Diets: A Global Enabler for Keeping Land in Balance

Prepared by the organisers of the UNCCD COP15 Food Day - Seeds for Change for a Nature-Positive Future

Key Messages:

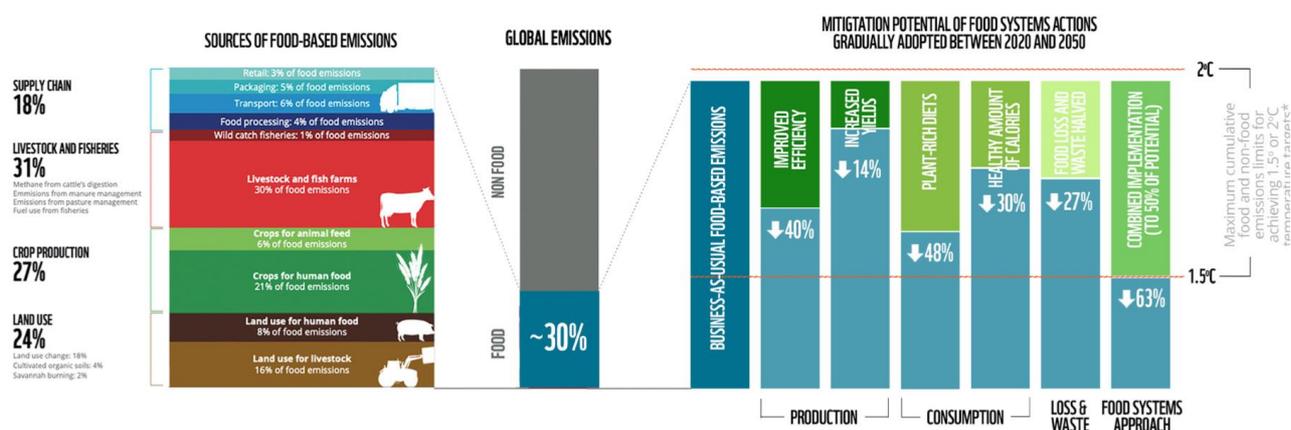
1. **Include a food systems approach in land restoration commitments**
2. **Halt conversion of natural habitats for food production**
3. **Commit to turning food systems from being a primary cause of land degradation to being a primary solution for land restoration**
4. **Repurpose food and agriculture subsidies to reward actions that are good for climate, nature, and people**

Rapid transformation of the global food system is needed to ensure that land stays healthy and able to sustain life. Despite this, certain parts of the food system are still not included in land negotiations and policy. This failure to take a “food systems approach” to account for all impacts of the food system, from production to consumption, will preclude our chances of keeping land in balance. This includes, addressing a key driver of land degradation, the widespread adoption of unsustainable and unhealthy diets.

Food systems occupy approximately 40% of land and are responsible for 80% of deforestation. We can't phase out food in the same way we can fossil fuels, but we can transform food systems so that they pivot from being the primary cause of land degradation to becoming the principal catalyst for land and soil restoration. With systemic transformation, the food system can become a major part of the solution to the land crisis.

Currently, however, not enough is being done to realise this potential. No country has committed to a food systems approach in achieving land restoration commitments. Many have committed to action on agriculture, including supporting innovative methods such as nature-positive, regenerative, or agroecological farming practices. Yet even radically different modes of farming will drive a rising demand for land, including continued land degradation, if they are not accompanied by more sustainable food consumption patterns.

Dietary change is a necessary global enabler to allow for widespread adoption of nature-positive farming practices, without increasing the pressure to convert more land and use more of nature's resources to produce more food. Integrated action across food systems is required to achieve the potential of agriculture to restore land and achieve zero land degradation. Taking a food systems approach is no longer optional, it is a prerequisite for a 1.5C world.



Adapted from *Bending the Curve: The Restorative Power of Planet-Based Diets* (WWF) and *Global food system emissions could preclude achieving the 1.5° and 2°C climate change targets* (Clark et. al.)

For illustrative purposes only

* Assumes linear reduction to decarbonisation in 2050 in all other sectors

Essential food-based climate commitments that must be advanced at COP15

- 1. Include a food systems approach in land restoration commitments:** Although a food systems approach is required to realise the potential of agriculture to achieve land and soil restoration, systemic thinking is missing from current plans. Several land restoration commitments, including on agriculture, land use and natural ecosystems, are clearly connected to food systems but are treated in a siloed and disconnected manner. Currently, there is insufficient attention on addressing unhealthy and unsustainable diets, a key driver of land-use and degradation. Unless all relevant land-use strategies (demand and supply side) are included, and food actions coordinated through integrated target setting, land restoration commitment will not be ambitious enough to achieve global goals.
- 2. Halt conversion of natural habitats for food production:** Halting conversion of nature for food production will require optimising food production on all existing farmlands. Doing so will require investment in soil health, which has the triple benefit of supporting yields (easing pressures to convert more nature to meet food demand), restoring biodiversity, and sequestering carbon. In fact, carbon sequestration in soils is an important nature-based solution and better management can significantly increase the amount of carbon stored on agricultural lands. In addition, combining rehabilitation of farmlands, half of which are degraded, with other actions has the potential to even release some agricultural lands for implementation of additional nature-based solutions, such as reforestation.
- 3. Commit to turning food systems from being a primary cause of land degradation to being a primary solution for land restoration:** Agricultural lands offer tremendous potential for restoring land. Achieving this will require that we adopt nature-positive production, reduce food loss and waste, and transition to healthy and sustainable diets. These actions will enable wide scale implementation of nature-based solutions. However, implementation of any nature-based solution, including reforestation, must not come at the expense of natural habitats such as grasslands and savannahs. Natural grasslands and savannahs can sequester large amounts of carbon, are important reservoirs of

biodiversity, and support the livelihoods of millions of people globally – services which would be impacted if they were to be afforested. We must not solve one problem and create another.

- 4. Repurpose food and agriculture subsidies to reward actions that are good for climate, nature, and people:** Current public financial support to food and agriculture has helped to rapidly increase production but has failed to address growing environmental and climate challenges, such as soil degradation and water pollution, biodiversity loss, food insecurity and pandemic risks, nor have they effectively addressed world hunger. Only a fraction of subsidies support production practices that are good for climate and nature. Actions to repurpose harmful subsidies and reward food producers for sustainable practices must be accelerated if we are to achieve the Paris Agreement. This will require holistic approaches to policy-making and aligning agriculture with national climate, nature and health goals. True Cost Accounting, which measures the full economic, environmental and social costs of food production, should be applied and used to guide public spending.

The **UNCCD Food Day - Seeds of Change for a Nature-Positive Future** is co-organised by [WWF](#), [CGIAR](#), the [Committee on World Food Security \(CFS\)](#), [FAO](#), [CIFOR-ICRAF](#), [TMG Think Tank](#), [UN Environment Programme](#), [IICA](#) and the [One Planet Network](#). The full day event, the first ever Food Day at a UN Conference of the Parties, encourages stakeholders to include food systems approaches in the implementation of the Rio Conventions on Desertification, Biodiversity and Climate. Organisers may hold individual opinions and positions on the topic of this briefing paper. The paper is not an official joint position from the organisers.

For more information

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