

Improved climate action on food systems can deliver 20 percent of global emissions reductions needed by 2050

Nairobi, 1 September 2020 - Policymakers can improve the chances of achieving climate goals and limiting global warming to 1.5°C by making more specific commitments to transforming national food systems. [Enhancing Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\) for Food Systems](#), a new report published today by [WWF](#), [the UN Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#), [EAT](#) and [Climate Focus](#), finds countries are missing significant opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and identifies 16 ways policymakers could take more action, from farm to fork.

Currently, diets and food loss and waste are widely ignored, but by adding them to national climate plans, policymakers can improve their mitigation and adaptation contributions from food systems, by as much as 25 percent. Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, countries are expected to revise or resubmit their NDCs every five years. This year, therefore, policymakers have the opportunity to adopt food systems solutions and set more ambitious targets and measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and in turn, improve biodiversity, food security and public health.

Food systems – which gather all the elements and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food – account for [up to 37 percent](#) of all greenhouse gas emissions; continuing on a business-as-usual trajectory will single-handedly exhaust the 1.5°C compatible emissions budgets for all sectors. Although 89 percent of NDCs mention agriculture production, agriculture emissions reduction targets are mainly included in wider land-use targets. More notably, other actions in the

food system, such as reducing food loss and waste, or shifting to more sustainable diets, are widely ignored, despite presenting the combined opportunity to reduce emissions by as much as 12.5 Gt CO₂e - the equivalent of taking 2.7 billion cars off the road.

“Ambitious, time-bound and measurable commitments to food systems transformation are needed if we are to achieve a 1.5°C future. Failing to do so is ignoring one of the main drivers of today’s climate crisis. Without action on how we produce and consume food, we cannot achieve our climate or biodiversity goals, which are the foundation to achieve food security, prevent the emergence of diseases and ultimately deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. That’s why we urge governments to include climate and nature positive food systems approaches in revised and more ambitious NDCs submitted this year,” said Marco Lambertini, Director General WWF-International.

“The pandemic has exposed the fragility of our food supply systems, from complex value chains to impacts on our ecosystems. But it has also demonstrated that businesses and people are ready to build back better. This crisis offers us a chance to radically rethink how we produce and consume food. For example, reorienting consumption by halving food waste and catalyzing a shift towards more plant-rich diets, is also a powerful climate mitigation tool to take advantage of. It is up to us to seize this opportunity and put sustainable food systems at the heart of the green recovery,” said Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP.

The 16 actions identified in the report include reducing land-use change and conversion of natural habitats, which could reduce emissions by 4.6 Gt CO₂e per year. Comparably, reducing food loss and waste, which accounts for 8 percent of all GHG emissions, could reduce emissions by 4.5 Gt CO₂e per year. Yet only 11 countries currently mention food loss in their plans and none consider food waste. Improving production methods and reducing methane emissions from livestock, could reduce emissions by up to 1.44 Gt

CO₂e per year, but much greater reductions could be achieved by shifting to healthier and more sustainable diets with a higher proportion of plant-based than animal-based foods could avoid emissions of up to 8 Gt CO₂e each year. No current national climate plans explicitly discuss more sustainable diets.

The report finds that developed countries are less likely than developing countries to provide sector-specific mitigation actions for agriculture in their current climate plans though in absolute terms, the number of specific actions for reducing emissions in the food system in developing countries is also low. Through August 2020, 15 NDC updates and revisions have been submitted and though some feature agriculture, actions are still lacking. Early indications are that sustainable food consumption and food loss and waste will continue to be ignored in the review process. None of the updates and revisions submitted mention them in their mitigation contributions or policies and measures.

“Food systems are a neglected mitigation opportunity and there is rarely any mitigation opportunity with so many sustainable development benefits. Eliminating excessive meat consumption, improving storage facilities and reducing food waste is good for our health and improves food security. With a check-list and concrete examples of activities and targets, this report provides guidance for policymakers to integrate food systems in their national climate strategies,” said Charlotte Streck, Co-founder and Director, Climate Focus.

“Fixing food is not only a prerequisite to achieve the 2030 Agenda, but is as important as the energy transformation to deliver on the Paris Climate Agreement. Shifting to regenerative, carbon-absorbing production and adoption of healthy, predominantly plant-based diets that are affordable and accessible, as well as halving food waste and loss, are crucial actions that must be included in countries’ NDCs and integrated in their climate action plans with clear ambitions. As we enter the [Decade of Action](#), let’s make it the decade of delivery for a

healthy, sustainable and equitable food future for all,” said Dr. Gunhild Stordalen, EAT Founder and Executive Chair.

In addition to increasing ambition in their NDCs, countries have a number of additional opportunities to reduce emissions and preserve nature through food systems. In 2021, in the context of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity Conference of Parties (COP 15), world leaders can agree to a new deal for nature and people, to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. In addition, the first ever [UN Food Systems Summit](#) will take place in 2021; as UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted when launching the Summit, “transforming food systems is crucial for delivering all the Sustainable Development Goals”.

<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/improved-climate-action-food-systems-can-deliver-20-percent-global>