

A FOOD AWAKENING

The UK's Global Food Security programme led the Food Security workshop, which consisted of two cross-stakeholder, multidisciplinary, intergenerational panels. The first panel discussed the global and national actions that could be taken to transform the food system to meet today's global challenges, while the second panel discussed local and individual actions. These actions had been drafted earlier by an expert working group consisting of 20 food producers, campaigners, community leaders, academics, and youth representatives. Workshop attendees were invited to contribute to the action plan and the panel discussion.

SHIFTING TO SYSTEMS THINKING

The first theme was the recognition that food system transformation has the potential to address multiple global challenges due to its systemic nature and universal importance. The panel identified the need for 'food system thinkers', who are able to navigate the complexities and uncertainties in the food system to affect widespread systemic change. Increasing food system transparency and food system education were also identified as key strategies to bring about food system transformation - not just for consumers, but for all stakeholders in the supply chain.

EMPOWERING MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Another recurring theme was the importance of actively engaging and empowering marginalised communities when reshaping the food system to meet global challenges. This theme is underpinned by the recognition that problems and solutions identified by one community are not necessarily applicable in another community, as these communities may experience the food system very differently. Strategies to engage and empower marginalised groups include enabling communities to identify their own problems relating to the food system, as well as develop their own solutions.



These solutions can then be implemented through establishing community projects or the involvement of marginalised groups in the policymaking process at the local, national and international levels. Collaborative approaches to food system transformation also help to ensure that the changes made are culturally appropriate and sensitive to context, as well as being capable of highlighting and dismantling the socioeconomic and racial injustices perpetuated by the current food system.

LISTENING TO YOUTH

The third key theme that emerged during the workshop was the need to listen to youth voices in decision-making about the future of the food system. It was stressed that youth representatives should not be invited to attend as a box-ticking exercise, but that their presence and contributions should be actively sought and valued at every level of decision making. The youth representatives also highlighted that youth experts do not need to possess an in-depth knowledge of the food system in order to challenge the status quo, and that the best way to learn about the food system was to get involved in a food movement.

BALANCING GLOBAL AND LOCAL

The cross-stakeholder expert panels discussed the globalisation of the food system and the ideal balance between local and global food systems. Local food production systems are often considered more sustainable and fairer than globalised food production systems due to their increased transparency and the greater public awareness of externalities (such as the environmental, health and social costs). Nevertheless, many local food producers struggle to compete with the ever-increasing productivity and ever-decreasing food prices of (often large-scale) international food producers. Strategies to support local, small-scale food producers include: community-supported agriculture and consumers; consumers buying directly from food producers; and government subsidies for small-scale producers.

Although local food systems are important to address global challenges, they do not necessarily serve communities who live in the UK as a result of immigration. Acknowledging the cultural value of food, it was agreed that it is important that communities who prepare and consume traditional foods to connect with their heritage should be able to retain physical and economic access to a global food market into the future.

BEING CAUTIOUS ABOUT 'TECHNOFIXES'

There were recurring warnings regarding the glamorisation of technological fixes to the food system (most of which are not yet fully developed or understood). Besides facilitating business-as-usual and the concentration of power in the food system, these techno-fixes are also capable of distracting attention and diverting funds from simpler methods that have already been proven to work, such as agroforestry and regenerating soil health. The focus on new technologies can also cut food system workers out of discussions about food system transformation, as workers are not deemed to play an important role in highly mechanised futures. Although technology will undoubtedly play a role in the future food system, the focus should shift to rapidly adopting and upscaling sustainable practices and behavioural changes that are known to help address global challenges.

RECOGNISING THE ROLE OF POLITICS IN FOOD

The impacts of politics on the food system was evident during the discussion, with both panels highlighting the vital role of state support in achieving positive food system change. Various strategies were suggested, such as introducing a universal right to food, subsidising healthy, sustainable diets, and financial support for small-scale food producers. Although businesses play a key role in transforming the food system, the first panel highlighted the folly of relying on the market alone. They also discussed the role of international legislation, particularly its futility if individual nations are not enforcing them. The panel expressed a preference for providing strong incentives that support the global adoption of sustainable, healthy and just practices in the food system, instead of punishing nations that are unable to meet the desired standards.

The importance of context-sensitive food system interventions and the dangers of imposing Western-centric ideals on non-Western food systems were also raised, as well as the need repeatedly to challenge the assumption that "West is best".

Actions

INDIVIDUALS

1. Join a local, national or global movement/network to help fight injustices in the food system.
2. If you can, learn to cook with plant-based whole foods, utilise food 'waste', and eat seasonally.

COMMUNITIES

1. Organise local food-sharing events to explore the cultural importance of food in the community, and collaboratively identify culturally appropriate changes that members can make to address the health-, sustainability-, and accessibility issues in the food system.
2. Establish community-led food growing, -sharing and -composting schemes.

NATIONS

1. Establish food system education (incl. dietary health, food sustainability and food justice) as a core subject in the national curriculum.
2. Adopt a whole-government food policy framework that supports sustainable food production, healthy diets, food waste-reduction, agricultural diversification, small-scale producers, high trade standards, and a just transition for food system actors.

THE UN / INTERNATIONALLY

1. Establish a global reward & recognition scheme to incentivise food system transparency and embed the SDGs in the food system.
2. Work with all members of civil society, particularly marginalised groups, to build a social revolution that promotes global citizenship through food.