

The United States hosted its final National Food Systems Dialogue (“the Dialogue”) on June 30, 2021. This Dialogue, the final of the three-stage National Dialogues, focused on identifying pathways for improving the sustainability of U.S. food systems. This summary of the final Dialogue includes four sections:

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Dialogue structure and focus

To motivate the breakout discussions, participants were requested to come to the Dialogue ready to share their perspectives on the steps necessary to create pathways towards more sustainable food systems in the United States over the next 3-5 years, keeping in mind the challenges and solutions identified in the first and second National Dialogues.

To encourage a systematic assessment of pathways, breakout groups considered the following questions:

- How do we advance sustainable food systems in the United States over the next 3-5 years (economic, social, environmental)? What approaches are necessary?
- How can food system actors work together to meet these goals?
- Additional questions:
 - What **steps/approaches** are necessary to make progress?
 - What **structures/processes** are necessary to ensure that all stakeholders and perspectives are included?
- Consider **synergies** and **tradeoffs** between the three pillars of sustainability:
 - What are the **synergies** among social, economic, and environmental objectives?
 - What are the **tradeoffs** among social, economic, and environmental objectives and how will we manage these tradeoffs and recognize or compensate those who might be made worse off?

Breakout groups were asked to consider pathways to advancing the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainability.

Participants

All participants from the first and second U.S. National Food Systems Dialogues were invited to attend the final Dialogue.

Eighty-three diverse stakeholder groups participated in the final National Dialogue, including 24 U.S. producers and agricultural organizations, 8 food industry members, 18 research and academic institutions, 31 civil society groups and NGOs, and two state and local government organizations, as below.

U.S. producers and agricultural organizations (24):

American Farm Bureau Association, American Feed Industry Association, American Soybean Association, American Sugarbeet Growers Association on behalf of the American Sugar Alliance, Animal Health Institute, Elanco Animal Health, American Seed Trade Association, Hmong

American Farmers Association, Indigo Agriculture, North American Export Grain Association, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, National Chicken Council, National Corn Growers Association, National Dairy Council, National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association, National Pork Producers Council, North American Meat Institute, Orange County Produce, LLC, Seafood Harvesters of America, U.S. Dairy Export Council, U.S. Farmers and Ranchers in Action, U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Poultry & Eggs, U.S. Soybean Export Council, United Egg Producers

Food industry (8):

Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM), American Frozen Food Institute, Bayer, Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO), Crop Life America, Food Industry Association (FMI), Nestle, Walmart

Research and academic institutions (18):

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Alabama A&M University, Arizona State University Swette Center on Sustainable Food Systems, Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), Colorado State University and AAEP, Cornell University, Duke University World Food Policy Center, Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic, Institute for Feed Education & Research, Langston University, Michigan State University, North Carolina A&T State University, Palau Community College, Tufts University, Tuskegee University, University of Maine | Local Catch Network, West Virginia State University, Washington State University Breadlab

Civil society groups and NGOs (31):

Agricorps, Agriculture Future of America (AFA), Alliance to End Hunger, American Farmland Trust, Borlaug Foundation, Bread for the World Institute, Common Market Philadelphia Inc, Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), FairShare CSA Coalition, Family Farm Action Alliance, Farm Foundation, Farm Journal Foundation, Farmer Veteran Coalition, Farmers Market Coalition, Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Food Tank, Global Farmer Network, Green America- Center for Sustainability Solutions, Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, National Black Food and Justice Alliance, National Consumer's League, National Farm to School Network, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), North American Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Solutions from the Land, Union Of Concerned Scientists, Winrock Solutions + Wallace Center, World Food Program USA

State and local government (2):

City of New Haven/U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA)

Reporting integrity

Neutral U.S. government experts and researchers were trained to facilitate the Dialogue's small group discussions and emphasized respect and building trust. The Chatham House Rule of non-attribution encouraged participants to engage in frank discussion and a collaborative approach.

To build trust, promote transparency, and accurately reflect the diverse voices of U.S. food systems stakeholders, readout reports and summaries went through multiple levels of review and validation. The

notetakers sent anonymized notes from the breakout rooms to facilitators, who developed anonymized reports that were shared and validated by participants before they were incorporated into this report and the final official [UN Dialogues Gateway feedback form](#).

Findings

These findings represent the views of Dialogue participants, not those of the United States Department of Agriculture or the United States Government.

The pathways towards more sustainable U.S. food systems by 2030 that emerged were: 1) resilient, efficient, and productive food systems based on fair and competitive markets; 2) nutrition security, equitable livelihoods, and inclusion ensured by collaboration; 3) climate-smart agriculture enabled by innovation, incentives, and markets; and 4) cross-cutting approaches including education and capacity building, equity and inclusion, incentives for change and investment at all levels, multi-stakeholder dialogue, resilience, efficiency, and productivity, and trust and collaboration across sectors.

1. *Economic Pathway: resilient, efficient, and productive food systems based on fair and competitive markets*

Dialogue participants identified building resilient, efficient, and productive food systems through fair and competitive markets as a pathway towards greater economic sustainability. Some participants hypothesized that increased productivity, efficiency, and deployment of appropriate technologies could increase profitability and create synergies between social, environmental, and economic goals. Some participants noted how resilient supply chains and access to rural broadband could increase market access. Some participants emphasized that science- and rules-based international trade is also a key to expanding market access. Funding and market-based mechanisms were noted by some participants to incentivize social and environmental actions. Some participants stressed the importance of resilience, noting the need to increase adaptivity across infrastructure, supply chains, and food systems.

2. *Social Pathway: nutrition security, equitable livelihoods, and inclusion ensured by collaboration*

Dialogue participants agreed that pathways towards greater social sustainability require collaboration to achieve positive outcomes in nutrition security, equitable livelihoods, and inclusion. Participants emphasized the urgent need for diverse stakeholders to build trust and work together to make progress towards sustainable food systems. Some participants highlighted the importance of nutrition security, not simply increasing calories, but enhancing the quality of those calories and access to safe, nutritious, healthy food. Participants also agreed that producers' equitable access to economic opportunities is a priority, and that policies and programs should prioritize the most vulnerable communities. Some participants noted the importance of youth engagement in food systems. Some participants highlighted the need to improve information flows amongst disadvantaged and minority farmers to increase access to markets and programs.

3. *Environmental Pathway: climate-smart agriculture enabled by innovation, incentives, and markets*

Dialogue participants agreed that pathways towards greater environmental sustainability are built through innovation, incentives, and markets that enable the adoption of climate-smart agriculture. Some participants stressed that multiple levels of public investment and support are needed to plan and adapt to environmental crises. Some approaches mentioned by participants include resilient infrastructure and supply chains, voluntary incentives for climate-smart agriculture, financial measures to mitigate risk (price or yield supports, crop insurance, and insurance markets), investment in research and development, and extension and capacity building. Some participants noted that improved use of and access to technology could allow producers to stay competitive, resilient, and to learn from extreme climate events. Some participants explored the idea of building soil health and carbon markets, noting that better-functioning carbon markets could encourage farmer participation.

4. Cross-Cutting Approaches

Some participants highlighted approaches that would address the social, environmental, and economic aspects of sustainability and should be considered in U.S. pathways towards more sustainable food systems. Some participants agreed that multi-stakeholder dialogue was an important first step in the pathways to more sustainable U.S. food systems. Cross-cutting approaches included:

- Education and capacity building amongst producers and consumers
- Equity and inclusion, with a focus on youth, women, and marginalized groups
- Incentives for change and investment at all levels
- Multi-stakeholder dialogue
- Resilience, efficiency, and productivity
- Trust and collaboration across sectors

While not all discussion groups reached consensus on a pathway or pathways, discussion participants built on each other's ideas and agreed that pathways for U.S. food systems sustainability need to holistically consider economic, social, and environmental aspects and related trade-offs. Participants agreed that the complexity and interconnectedness of our food systems will continue to create challenges and require compromises for solutions that optimize all dimensions of sustainability. Some participants noted the significant challenge of identifying who should pay for actions to address climate change at the producer and farm level.

Participants agreed on the need to ensure the inclusion and input from diverse farmers, including women and minority farmers, as well as the need to ensure their access to innovative programs and tools. Some participants recognized the need to listen to participants in all sectors of the food systems, including farm workers (including immigrant farm workers who often lack protected rights), owners of production, processors and retailers, and consumers. Some participants noted that local communities and producers' stakeholder interests must have a seat at the table, in particular Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) producers, pastoralists, hunters, fishers, and wild harvesters who must see their values and interests reflected in any pathway that is advanced through these discussions. Some participants noted that the communities and stakeholders most negatively impacted by current food systems, predominantly BIPOC communities, must be central in these discussions.

Some participants noted the importance of youth engagement in food systems, and the need to address structural barriers for youth and youth of color through programs, removing institutional barriers, and improving access to land.