

HARMONY AND THE FOOD SYSTEM

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WHAT WE EAT AND HOW WE PRODUCE is currently at the heart of some of our greatest health and environmental challenges, including the double burden of malnutrition and the epidemic of diet-related diseases, along with climate change and wider environmental degradation. One third of all food produced is either lost or wasted.¹ And when talking about a sustainable food system, we cannot forget the more than one billion people who work to produce and serve food every day, including some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable – the 500 million smallholder farmers in the world.

The growing demand for cheap meat is driving up intensive livestock production at the expense of animal health and welfare with multi-resistant superbugs and scandals like swine flu, avian flu and horsemeat representing the top of the iceberg of detrimental consequences caused by factory farming. And all this is set to get worse as we will have another two billion people to feed over the next decades. Yet, with business as usual on food, there is no way we can achieve the targets of the Paris Climate Agreement or the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as food is linked, whether directly or indirectly, to almost all seventeen of them.² On the other hand, getting it right on food could be our greatest opportunity to improve our health and wellbeing while at the same time protecting our planet.

The American food journalist Michael Pollan famously stated, 'Eat real food. Not too much. Mostly plants'.³ In fact, now there is consistent evidence that he is right: plant-based diets tend to be both healthier and better for the environment. Although this is true for the world as a whole, in some regions, people may actually have to increase consumption of meat and animal products to meet dietary needs. Currently, there is no agreement on how we can create a global food system that can deliver healthy diets to a growing population within the boundaries of our planet.

To alert us to the dangers of climate change, we have the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which has enabled the world to agree on limiting global warming to less than two degrees Celsius, as well as to coordinate action to

restrict greenhouse gases. But so far, there is no equivalent to the IPCC to address challenges in the food system and therefore no science-based targets for decision-makers. As an initial attempt to define the two-degree equivalent for the food system, my foundation, EAT, has, in collaboration with the *Lancet*, the leading medical journal set up a commission of twenty leading experts in nutrition and environmental sciences and policy.⁴ The ‘EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health’, published in 2019, provides the first comprehensive assessment of what constitutes healthy diets from sustainable food systems and brings us one step closer towards a scientific consensus and evidence-based targets for a global food system that meet the needs of a 2030 world.⁵

But knowledge alone is not enough to change the world. We need innovation, not only in technology but also in business models. Although a growing number of actors in the food industry are making serious efforts to change, it is so far not nearly radical enough to take us to where we have to be in 2030. For most large producers, change is still about ‘less bad’, about making their products and production practices less unhealthy and with a smaller environmental footprint. And instead of investing in research and development in order to improve the health of both people and planet, many companies continue to put their research and development money into nutria pharma in order to tackle problems that they themselves are causing in the first place. As an example: only 40% of new products entering the US food and beverage market in 2016 were classified as net positive for health.⁶ Therefore, in order to meet the needs of a 2030 world and achieve the SDGs, we need to shift from ‘reducing, repairing and less bad’ to ‘preventing, mitigating and regenerating’! By starting to address the root causes, we can prevent problems from happening in the first place.

Today, there is a total disconnect between production and consumption policies in different government departments. Around the world, agricultural departments tend to subsidise the production of animal feed and junk food, fueling health and environmental crises which then have to be tackled by other departments across the corridor. What we need is coherent food and agricultural policies and aligned incentives, linking what we produce to what we actually can and should consume. And to make healthy and sustainable food available and affordable for all, health and sustainability objectives need to be integrated in all policies at all levels, from the ways that agriculture is subsidised to the ways in which consumers are incentivised.

Last, but not least, we need more collaboration and better alignment between sectors and disciplines and across borders, as no single actor, government or industry can change the system alone. This will require major commitment from science, business and politics as well as civil society, and will have to be a well-coordinated

effort, because, in spite of new research projects, government commitments, business solutions and positive consumer trends, progress is still fragmented and too slow. That is why the EAT Foundation works to help turn these many scattered changemakers into an efficient and comprehensive game-changing movement.

Through events like the annual EAT Stockholm Food Forum, or EAT Asia-Pacific Food Forum in Jakarta, EAT offers neutral, collaborative platforms for stakeholders to take part, take action and take the lead on finding win-win solutions to food system challenges.⁷ And throughout the year, we are working to translate the latest science into action, through partnerships with cities, governments, academic institutions, the food industry, investors and innovators. By working together we can shift food production and consumption from a cause of problems to a cure, thereby creating a healthier and more prosperous world for all.

Radical changes will be needed. But to get there, we need more integrated knowledge and science-based targets. We need more innovation in technology but also new business models, and more collaboration across governments and across sectors. Last, but not least, we need to hurry up as 2030 is only eleven years from now. So let's get to work!

NOTES

1. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 'Key facts on food loss and waste you should know', <http://www.fao.org/save-food/resources/keyfindings/en/> [accessed 7 June 2019].

2. For the Paris Climate Agreement see 'Paris Agreement', https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf [accessed 7 June 2019]; United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> [Accessed 7 June 2019].

3. Daniel J. DeNoon, '7 Rules for Eating Choose Food Over Food-Like Substances, Food Writer Michael Pollan Tells CDC', WebMD 23 March 2009, <https://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/news/20090323/7-rules-for-eating#1> [accessed 10 July 2017].

4. For EAT see <https://eatforum.org/> [accessed 7 June 2019].

5. 'Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–*Lancet* Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems', 16 Jan 2019, <https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/EAT> [accessed 16 Jan 2019].

6. For wider context see the US Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 'Dietary Guidelines 2015-2020', <https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/table-of-contents/> [accessed 16 Jan 2019].

7. EAT Stockholm Food Forum, <https://eatforum.org/event/eat-stockholm-food-forum-2018/> [accessed 16 Jan 2019]; EAT Asia-Pacific Food Forum, <https://eatforum.org/event/eat-asia-pacific-food-forum-2017/> [accessed 16 Jan 2019].