

FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES (FSDs)
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CO-ORGANIZED BY SANDRO DEMAIO FOUNDATION

SUMMARY REPORT*

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*The format of FSDs Summary Reports is under development. This report may be subject to change

Executive Summary

On 01 February 2019 a Food Systems Dialogues (FSDs) event took place in Melbourne, Australia. This FSDs event was held in the context of the sustainable food initiative, Festival 21, and coinciding with the Australia launch of the EAT Lancet Commission Report: “Our Food in the Anthropocene: Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems”. Approximately 70 participants attended, reflecting a range of actors working in Food Systems, ranging from commercial food service providers to grocery retailers, to university researchers to founders of innovative food start-ups.

Tables were asked to present one or more proposals to address a specific area of food systems, with a geographical focus on Australia. Ideally, the proposals were to be achievable within 3 years. The prompt themes for dialogue at this event addressed the following areas: Agriculture, Climate, Environment, Education, Health, Humanitarian, Retail, Finance and Research.

The following is a summary of the tables’ proposals for food systems transformation as well as the discussions that led them to their conclusions.

As is the norm at FSDs events, all Proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Each proposal did not necessarily receive universal support from all participants at the event; rather, the aim of this report is to capture recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a ‘red thread’ - to emerge across all FSDs events.

Proposals

Proposal 1: Increase collaboration between industry and academia that leads to impact

Universities could be better recognized and rewarded for contributions to sustainable food systems. These contributions could include environmental studies, leadership, teaching, research outputs and impact.

Often academic efforts do not lead to impact because there aren't incentives to share with or to work directly with industries.

To address this problem governments could create more incentives such as offer credentials, or funders could tie their funding to whether impact was made. It is also possible that students would be more interested in a university that is making an impact for their future.

If this approach worked, there would be increased collaboration between industry and academia. There would also be increased training for academics and individuals on how to do cooperative research, as well as more funding grants for collaborate work.

Proposal 2: Tie food industry funding to sustainable practices

To change the behaviour of actors in the food industry, a diverse range of funding strategies is needed because the industry is so diverse.

There are currently levies on food producers however these have a limited application and it would be better to vary this approach so these funds could be used more to promote sustainable food production.

Research could be funded to help to define solutions and markers for success, as well as advocacy, community education and schools projects. This is crucial for creating consumer demand for sustainable food.

Proposal 3: Supermarket intervention

The supermarket duopoly is driving down the price of food and income of farmers.

Supermarkets should be encouraged to support a more sustainable approach through investor pressure or a voluntary code of conduct for the industry. This could lead to more transparency around provenance and health indicators.

Although this outcome may seem unlikely now, the experience with the coal industry is promising - where in less than a decade we have seen massive changes. This was due to a combination of factors. Like with the coal industry, in the supermarket industry power is concentrated in only a few hands which provides a clear path of who to influence.

Proposal 4: Provide farmers with capital and other incentives to produce sustainable food

To change food systems, a whole-of-government approach to food that includes a national plan for food, agriculture and nutrition is needed. This plan should support funding for innovation and provide capital for farmers. Farmers need to be adequately capitalised to produce sustainable food and practice agriculture innovatively.

It is especially important to ensure farmers who are isolated have adequate access to technology and innovation.

Policies should be created that reward good practice in farming (maybe through better food labelling) to create trust with consumers. Consumers need to be able to know what healthy consumption is.

To encourage farmers to practice more sustainably, consumer demand needs to change. Consumers need to be educated to value food and demand sustainable local food, rather than only wanting low cost food.

Proposal 5: Create a Ministry of Food

The importance of food could be elevated by creating a new Ministry of Food that sits at the same level as the treasury. A Ministry of Food that was properly funded and had a legislative mandate could determine the goals of a sustainable food system and implement those goals nationally. This ministry could use levers such as procurement.

The Ministry could work as an umbrella to coordinate, be cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder. This would help to ensure that food policy was research based and effective.

Proposal 6: Create a standardised and comprehensive monitoring system

It could be very useful to introduce a system that can monitor and evaluate progress on sustainability, and is linked to transparency in supply chains. This system could be communicated to consumers so they understand the metrics and what they should look for when purchasing food.

The monitoring system could be multi-stakeholder owned to ensure buy-in from across the industry.

This system should be set up in a way that provides both incentives and disincentives that encourage farmers to make better decisions towards improved productivity practice in a sustainable way.

Currently, state and local government and universities implement and monitor food procurement guidelines both in their own institutions and in others. This expertise could be utilised to develop a community of practice.

Proposal 7: Focus on significantly decreasing food waste

Food waste remains a significant issue in Australia. With the right policies, within three years a 10-20% reduction in waste could be achieved, followed by a 50% reduction in waste by 2030.

This would need to include increased levels of food waste recycling into products and also into soil.

CSIRO should provide expertise in how to a) improve processing and packaging of food to reduce food waste and b) increase waste valorization.

There should also be an emphasis on innovation and incubation, with more funding and attention to companies doing new things with products that might have otherwise been wasted.