

FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES (FSDs)

24 September 2020

CO-ORGANIZED BY Consumers International and the World Economic Forum

SUMMARY REPORT*

*Disclaimer: This summary report highlights a range of issues from different perspectives. Unless otherwise stated they do not represent the position of Consumers International.

Executive Summary

A truly inclusive food system supports consumers and small-holder farmers through safe fair and sustainable mechanisms, and yet these two communities on the two ends of the value chain often remain disconnected. In an inaugural Food Systems Dialogue (FSD) between consumer and farmer organizations and co-organized by Consumers International and the World Economic Forum (the Forum), discussion explored how increasing access to information, developing environmentally sustainable choices and utilising appropriate technologies can meet the needs of consumers and smallholder farmers. This FSD was convened in an online format.

'Connecting Farmers and Consumers' was held in the context of the Sustainable Development Impact Summit (SDIS) with 56 participants in attendance, reflecting a range of actors working in Food Systems. During the dialogue consumer advocates and farmer organization representatives came together in agreement on a range of issues. Priorities included support for small-holder farmers through policy changes, the formation of a farmer consumer alliance established in time for the 2021 Food Systems Summit, and a call to action on more dialogues connecting the two.

David Nabarro, Senior Curator of the Food Systems Dialogues, opened the session by recognizing how dialogues between consumers and producers are critical. David shared that he was hopeful that as a result of this FSD the two constituencies will engage in more conversations which contribute to the World Food System Summit in 2021. Helena Leurent, Director General of Consumers International, moderated the panel discussion which explored how consumers and producers can collaborate in a changing food system. The panel featured Anabel Hout, CEO of Which? in the UK and Theo de Jager, President of the World Farmers Association.

Anabel outlined 3 priorities on the consumer agenda necessary for the transition of the Food System. First, trade policies are too often developed in isolation for environmental and health strategies yet have a huge influence on what we produce and eat. Second, agricultural policy and farmer support subsidies need to incentivise farmers to prefer sustainable production and promote the use of technologies which are suitable for consumers and farmers. Third, the need for a coherent approach further upstream, manufacturing, processing, retail and catering. Consumers need to be able to make informed decisions with the use of labelling, with health and environmental impact on labels.

Theo de Jager was eager to remind that consumer demand can often set the market preferences for what farmers produce. For farmers, consumer behaviour continues to shift,

varying dramatically across geographies and income levels. For low income households, availability and price are the most important influencers, whilst in middle-income household's nutrition and health become more important. In more affluent parts of the world, consumers are asking questions on where, how and who produced the food. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new awareness of nutrition and health around the world, yet it also showed the ugliest face of hunger in vulnerable communities. *"We must harness this golden opportunity to join consumers and farmers together"* urged Theo.

Discussion Topics

The discussion topics for dialogue at this event addressed the following areas:

- **Discussion Topic 1:** All consumers have access to nutritious, healthy diets that are affordable and competitive, contributing to the reduction of all forms of malnutrition and enhancing livelihoods for smallholder farmers.
- **Discussion Topic 2:** Comprehensive traceability systems and appropriate labelling ensure all consumers have access to clear, reliable information about how and where food is produced, empowering them to make informed choices
- **Discussion Topic 3:** Fair, safe and sustainable supply chains ensure a responsible use of natural resources and a reduction of food loss and waste, making sustainability the easy choice for consumers.

Each discussion topic is shown in the report below, followed by the proposal(s) which emerged in response to that topic. Discussion topics are phrased as ambitious 'ideal future states' of food systems.

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 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

Discussion Topic 1: *All consumers have access to nutritious, healthy diets that are affordable and competitive, contributing to the reduction of all forms of malnutrition and enhancing livelihoods for smallholder farmers.*

Proposal 1: Linking farmers with consumers is critical to ensure further collaboration. Shortening the chain so products are available and cheaper will benefit both smallholder farmers and consumers.

Proposal 2: Educating communities through better labelling so that they can understand when a product has less of an environmental footprint but is also healthier.

Proposal 3: COVID-19 also brought some challenges to producers and consumers. Huge opportunity of heightened awareness and could bring together more significant alliance between farmers and consumers. A new alliance could be formed in time for the 2021 Food Systems Summit.

Proposal 4: All stakeholders need to address challenges of obesity alongside malnutrition which affect so many around the world. It will require tailored approaches to both.

Discussion Topic 2: *Fair, safe and sustainable supply chains ensure a responsible use of natural resources and a reduction of food loss and waste, making sustainability the easy choice for consumers.*

Proposal 1: Farmers and consumers need to have open and honest conversations and solutions must be transformative and at scale.

Proposal 2: Farmers should be paid fairly for their quality produce and consumers should be able to afford it.

Proposal 3: The consumer voice needs to be heard in food spaces so that brands and companies respond.

Discussion Topic 3: *Comprehensive traceability systems and appropriate labelling ensure all consumers have access to clear, reliable information about how and where food is produced, empowering them to make informed choices*

Proposal 1: Importance of having effective public private partnerships in accordance with the SDG framework in order to ensure that the monopolies are not just in the hand of larger corporations.

Proposal 2: Youth involvement and the incentives that should be given to them especially in the field of technology and innovation.

Proposal 3: Education and training of consumers and producers to close the gap between these groups.

Proposal 4: Regulatory environment should always remain adapted to the local situation: income level, environment etc... The conversation between consumers and producers should also bring in the regulators.

Proposal 5: We need for policy frameworks, harmonised standards, capacity building down the supply chain.

Proposal 6: We need public policies that change incentives.

Proposal 7: We should encourage consumer groups and producer cooperatives to collaborate.

Conclusion

It is acknowledged that this conversation should be the first of many and that there is a necessity to dig deeper in the different conversations and proposals.

These dialogues will help farmers and consumers collaborate further and understand their different roles in the value chain.

We need a solid consumer and producer alliance in time for Food Systems Summit in 2021.

For further details please have a look at www.foodsystemsdialogues.org