

On May 19, 2021, USDA hosted the second U.S. National Food Systems Dialogues. This Dialogue, the second of the three-stage National Dialogues, focused on identifying solutions to building more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable food systems in the United States. This summary of the first Dialogue includes four sections:

- [Dialogue structure and focus](#)
- [Participants](#)
- [Reporting integrity](#)
- [Findings](#)

Dialogue structure and focus

This first Dialogue focused on identifying solutions to building more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable food systems in the United States. To motivate the breakout discussions, we asked participants to come to the Dialogue with 2-3 solutions addressing one or more of the three overarching challenges identified in the first U.S. National Food Systems Dialogue, which were 1) information gaps with respect to nutrition and sustainability, 2) inequalities in access to healthy diets and opportunities in farming and food industries, and 3) environmental degradation and climate change. The solutions could be targeted at a specific challenge or crosscutting and provide benefits to more than one of the overarching challenges.

Participants were asked to share their solutions in both breakout sessions and to narrow down the top solutions as a group. In the second session, participants were asked to refine their solutions based on something new learned in the first session. This iterative process aimed to build consensus around a core set of solutions across distinct stakeholder groups.

Participants

Along with participants from the first National Dialogue held in January, there was additional representation from minority groups, women, and youth in food and agriculture,

Ninety-eight diverse stakeholder groups participated in the second National Dialogue, including 27 U.S. producers and agricultural organizations, 11 food industry members, 11 research and academic institutions, 46 civil society groups and NGOs, and three state and local government organizations, as below.

U.S. producers and agricultural organizations (27):

AFL-CIO, American Feed Industry Association (AFIA), American Seed Trade Association (ASTA), American Soybean Association, American Sugarbeet Growers Association on behalf of the American Sugar Alliance, Animal Health Institute, Elanco Animal Health, Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, Indigo Agriculture, Intertribal Agriculture Council, North American Export Grain Association, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, National Corn Growers Association, National Dairy Council, National Farmers Union, National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association, National Chicken 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 Farm Workers, USDA Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, Zoetis

Food industry (11):

Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM), American Frozen Food Institute, Bayer, Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO), Cargill, Food Industry Association (FMI), Nestle, PepsiCo, Syngenta, Walmart

Research and academic institutions (11):

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Arizona State University Swette Center on Sustainable Food Systems, College of the Muscogee Nation, Colorado State University and AAEA, Duke University World Food Policy Center, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), Institute for Feed Education and Research, Michigan State University, Stanford Center for Ocean Solutions, University of Arkansas, University of Missouri

Civil society groups and NGOs (46):

Adirondack Action Network, Agrarian Trust, AgriCorps, Agriculture Future of America (AFA), Alliance to End Hunger, American Economic Liberties Project, American Farmland Trust, Borlaug Foundation, Bread for the World, Center for Good Food Purchasing, Environmental Defense Fund, Equitable Food Initiative, Family Farm Action Alliance, Farm Aid, Farm Foundation, Farmer Veteran Coalition, Feeding America, Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, First Nations Development Institute, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Food Systems for the Future, Food Tank, Global Farmer Network, InterAction, National Consumers League, National Young Farmers Coalition, NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council), Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, Presbyterian Hunger Program, Regenerative Agriculture Alliance, Rural Coalition, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders, Sankofa Farms, Savanna Institute, SDG2 Advocacy Hub, Society of American Foresters, Solutions from the Land, Southwest Georgia Project, The Chicago Council, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, The Rockefeller Foundation, World Central Kitchen, World Food Program USA, World Wildlife Foundation USA

State and local government (3):

City of New Haven/U.S. Conference of Mayors, Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), 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 focus of the second Dialogue was to identify solutions to improving the sustainability of food systems. Although the discussion topics were organized around the three overarching challenges outlined above, some solutions addressed a single challenge while others were cross-cutting and holistically considered challenges and tradeoffs across food systems. Conversations aggregated and analyzed individual solutions to arrive at different clusters with greater consensus, or topics for further exploration. The solutions clusters that emerged in response to the challenges were: 1) Technology (including rural broadband) and dietary and food production choice, 2) Bolstering the participation of socially disadvantaged groups, infrastructure for nutritious foods sustainably produced, and competitive markets that serve all size producers, 3) Voluntary incentives and technical support for sustainable production, and 4) Food systems policy and planning and youth involvement.

1. Solutions Cluster #1 (Information gaps about healthy diets and sustainably produced food): Technology (including rural broadband) and dietary and food production choice

Participants identified increasing the application of technology (including rural broadband), clear definitions and standards, and dietary and food production choice as the most promising solutions to address information gaps about healthy diets and sustainably produced food. Some participants noted that broader access to technology could eliminate information gaps and help consumers and farmers make healthy food choices and produce food in a sustainable manner. Others discussed information silos and noted that standardization of nutrition and sustainability definitions could assist in meeting shared goals, particularly with respect to climate and equity. Some participants noted the importance of broadening food choice through public outreach to consumers on nutrition and producers on environmental impacts.

2. Solutions Cluster #2 (Inequalities): Bolster the participation of socially disadvantaged groups, infrastructure for nutritious foods sustainably produced, and competitive markets that serve all size producers

Dialogue participants identified bolstering the participation of socially disadvantaged groups, infrastructure for nutritious foods sustainably produced, and competitive markets that serve all size producers as the most promising solutions to address inequalities in access to healthy diets and opportunities in farming and food industries. Some participants emphasized that centering the voices of socially disadvantaged groups is vital to the success of any food system. Primary avenues that some participants identified to facilitate participation of socially disadvantaged groups in the food system include community engagement, agricultural land preservation and resource access, focus on land tenure laws, public support for community-led and regional approaches, and research and extension. Some participants emphasized that better infrastructure and resilient and equitable supply chains can increase access to nutritious food. Some participants noted that competitive markets that serve all size producers are key to addressing inequalities.

3. Solutions Cluster #3 (Environmental Degradation and Climate Change): Voluntary incentives and technical support for sustainable production

Participants identified voluntary incentives for sustainable production and related technical support as the most promising solutions to address environmental degradation and climate change. There was consensus among participants that the provision of incentives for producers of all sizes is a key solution to more sustainable consumption and production. Some of the incentives participants discussed are: keeping land in reserve (e.g. easements) to protect the

environment, recognizing and rewarding farm stewardship practices, recognizing the role of retailers and restaurants in reducing food/packaging waste and repurposing food, and supporting sustainable practices that may not be economically feasible in the short-term. Some participants shared support for aligning incentives with national conservation goals. In setting environmental goals, some participants noted the importance of addressing environmental impacts beyond carbon footprints by including issues such as nitrogen, water quality, and waste reduction.

- 4. Solutions Cluster #4 (Cross-Cutting): Food systems policy and planning and youth involvement**
Participants agreed that cross-cutting solutions require participatory and adaptive food systems policy and planning and the involvement of youth across food systems. Participants agreed that food systems policy and planning should be science and evidence-based, and support inclusive, diverse, and integrated approaches that address all three challenges identified in the first U.S. National Food Systems Dialogue. Some participants elaborated on the approaches needed to achieve sustainable food systems, highlighting voluntary, adaptive, and participatory approaches. Participants agreed that involvement of youth in food systems was a cross-cutting requirement for solutions in all three challenges. One group agreed that through additional training on healthy foods, youth will fill information gaps and solve problems affecting food systems.

Participants expressed divergent views on the role of consolidation and global, regional, and local food systems. Some participants expressed that smaller scale food systems are more sustainable while others countered that smaller is not always more sustainable, as smaller operations cannot always afford to support workers or achieve the efficiency of larger operations. Facilitators flagged this as an area requiring further exploration.