Linking agriculture, food systems and nutrition: what’s your perspective?

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Dear Forum members,

Agriculture and food systems face the challenge of meeting the growing demand for more and higher quality food, but also of doing do in a way that is sustainable, equitable and meets the nutritional needs and preferences of consumers. Agricultural production is important not only for ensuring sufficient food is available for consumption, it also constitutes a major source of livelihood for many people around the world.

Given the persistence of nutrition problems and the co-existence of problems related to under- and over-nourishment, there is need to review our food system(s) through a nutrition lens to identify bottlenecks as well as opportunities for action. To this end, we need to better understand how consumers’ nutritional needs and demands are currently addressed by the various players in the food system. It is important to look at all the key players, starting with the consumers (the poor as well as the affluent) and working our way back to those involved in marketing and distribution of food, processing and storage, production, and natural resources management. It is equally important to review the roles played by key players in the institutional environment, e.g. civil society and the private sector, policy makers, legislators, investors. This online discussion will focus on exploring ways to work together to leverage agriculture and food systems for improving nutrition.

The topic of nutrition-sensitive food systems is of high priority and is gaining international attention through initiatives such as the Scaling-Up Nutrition movement (SUN), Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger (REACH), the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition and the updated comprehensive framework for action of the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. In November 2010, FAO and AED held a live forum on “Agriculture and nutrition collaborations for enhancing food security” that looked at the possible programmatic linkages between agriculture and nutrition. FAO’s flagship publication “The State of Food and Agriculture 2013” will focus on
mainstreaming nutrition throughout the food system and will discuss food- and agriculture-based approaches to nutrition within a framework of nutrition/health outcomes.

The purpose of this online discussion is to take the debate a step further and review how agriculture and food systems can be leveraged to improve nutrition in a more sustainable and equitable manner.

**The questions:**

1. Agriculture is often looked upon as a tool to generate nutritional outcomes. What is the value added of looking at how agriculture could contribute not just to improved nutritional outcomes, but food systems more broadly? What are the risks and benefits of taking a food systems perspective?

2. What / where/ who are the key entry points within agriculture and food systems to incorporate nutritional objectives? Why? And how can they best be leveraged?

3. Do you have experience in agricultural/food systems projects and programmes that have resulted in improved nutritional outcomes? If yes, please share the success factors, constraints faced, lessons learned: why you consider it as a success, how you measured the impact and whether a nutritional objective was explicitly built into the programme.
   If you have experience of an agricultural/food systems project or programme with a nutritional objective but that failed to achieve it, what were the factors that led to the failure and what would you recommend to others to overcome the barriers to success?

4. What are the key gaps in knowledge or good practices that limit the ability of agriculture and food systems to improve nutritional outcomes?

Please feel free to share relevant publications on this topic.

We hope this discussion will facilitate knowledge sharing, communication and effective learning from your experiences on linking Agriculture, Food systems and Nutrition.

**The facilitators:**

Karel Callens is a Senior Food Security Officer and Coordinator of the Monitoring & Evaluation Team in Integrated Food Security Support Service at FAO, Italy; Corinna Hawkes is a specialist in food policy and public health and a visiting fellow at the Centre for Food Policy, City University, London.