

**High-Level Panel
13th Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA 2021)
Tuesday, 19 January 2021**

**How innovation can help strengthen the sustainability of food systems and
prevent future pandemics**

Speaking Notes for the Director-General

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First Round- Key aspects of innovation and food security during pandemic

Question: How do you see that the COVID-19 pandemic will give a boost to innovation in agriculture and what do you think are the key elements in the post-pandemic recovery?

1. This year, the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture takes place in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Food systems have been proven fairly resilient to the effects of the pandemic; global markets are well-supplied but difficulties at the national level still remain.
3. Economic growth, equality, and the progress towards sustainable development are all affected.
4. FAO's latest assessment suggests that the pandemic might have added between 83 and 132 million people globally, to the ranks of undernourished in 2020.
5. Together with conflicts and climate extremes, the COVID-19 pandemic becomes a primary driver of food insecurity.
6. We should work together to prevent this health crisis from becoming a global food crisis.
7. Collective action and innovative solutions have levelled out disruption in food supply chains.
8. FAO together with the World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization urged countries to keep food supply chains alive and food trade flowing to safeguard global food security.
9. At the global level, countries avoided unjustified trade restrictions that could lead to extreme price volatility in international markets.
10. The Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) has been key in contributing to global market transparency.
11. Innovative policy approaches included an African Union Tripartite Ministerial Meeting (Agriculture, Trade and Finance) - the first meeting of its kind - in response to the COVID-19 emergency, with technical support from FAO.
12. At the national level, innovations such as 'green channels' connected producers of fresh and nutritious food with urban centres, ensuring food safety and the workers' health.
13. During the lockdown, e-commerce showed that digital technologies can help transform our food systems.

14. Along the entire food supply chain, innovations in organization, technology and safety practices minimized disruptions caused by the pandemic.
15. The COVID-19 crisis makes our work more difficult; but at the same time, it creates opportunities to innovate, address the multiple challenges we face, and drive long-term transformation.
16. In the early weeks of the pandemic, FAO launched its comprehensive **COVID-19 Response and Recovery Program** to help countries building back better and stronger.
17. The Programme focuses on the One Health approach, data for decision making, social protection programs, boosting smallholder resilience, rural women empowerment, inter-regional cooperation, trade facilitation and market transparency.
18. These are key drivers for recovery.
19. Together with Italy and other partners, we have also launched the **Food Coalition**, a multi-stakeholder global alliance for unified action to prevent the health crisis becoming a food crisis.
20. We also launched a white book on Building back better in a post-COVID-19 world, including recommendations on how to reduce future wildlife-borne spillover of disease, with a special focus on priority interventions at the human-wildlife-livestock interfaces.
21. The **FAO Hand-in-Hand Initiative** takes an innovative approach to strengthening partnerships between countries to accelerate transformation and sustainable development in food and agriculture.
22. The initiative is based on data and information and the **Hand in Hand Geospatial Platform** overlays data from multiple sources to identify investment gaps and guide food-security interventions.
23. Our new **Data Lab for Statistical Innovation** is a Big Data tool that combines unconventional data sources and artificial intelligence for decision-making and impact evaluation.
24. These innovative data tools provide timely and reliable information. They can help us to better understand the impact of COVID-19 but also to anticipate and mitigate potential disruptions caused by the pandemic.
25. This can help to avert major food security and livelihood crises.
26. Let me conclude by saying that the COVID-19 crisis underlined the importance of solidarity but also the crucial role of innovation - not only technological innovation, but also policy and management innovation.
27. FAO's commitment to innovative solutions remains central, especially in these times of uncertainty.

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Second Round - Innovation and post COVID recovery - One Health

Question: How digital technology can support innovative solutions in preventing future pandemics and promote the One Health approach?

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our global health systems and food supply chains.
2. But it has demonstrated that a longstanding and sustainable **One Health** collaboration is necessary.
3. The One Health approach – integrating measures for human, animal and plant health, as promoted by FAO, OIE and the WHO – in collaboration with UNEP has potential to prevent the emergence of new zoonotic reservoirs.
4. It can support interventions to tackle future pandemics and can also contribute to wider goals relating to the sustainability of agri-food systems.
5. We need to prepare for, prevent, detect and respond to animal-origin diseases in areas where the next zoonotic pandemic is likely to take hold.
6. The risk is highest where there is close interaction between wildlife and livestock production.
7. I had mentioned the white book on Building back better in a post-COVID-19 world that FAO had produced recently, to reduce future wildlife-borne spillover of disease to humans with recommended interventions to prevent spillover of zoonotic diseases.
8. Today, we know biodiversity underlies our recovery efforts from COVID.
9. Damaged ecosystems are fragile and have a limited capacity to deal with extreme events and infectious diseases, in particular zoonotic diseases that can spread more easily.
10. At the same time, the potential influence of climate change on zoonotic diseases is poorly understood and difficult to predict.
11. Therefore, FAO supported the creation of the “One Health High Level Expert Council” launched by Germany and France and tasked with collecting and disseminating reliable information on the links between human, animal and environmental health in the context of the erosion of biodiversity.
12. Live animal markets and regions where there is a rise in wild meat consumption are particularly risky spillover settings.
13. In the context of our work in innovative information tools, we explore alternative data sources to help assess in real-time the impact of the pandemic disruptions on food systems.
14. Satellite imagery is being used to identify and monitor disruption risks on food production and value chains.
15. Machine-learning models are being developed to calibrate and classify crop prospects, and these are integrated with other data sets such as government restriction measures and trends on the impact of COVID-19.
16. All these tools can be available to add to early warning systems and inform evidence-based decision-making.
17. And this is what we have included in our **FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme**.

18. These tools can be extended, based on the One Health approach, to collect information and data on risk factors and environments likely to trigger animal-origin disease events.
19. We have to leverage the exponential growth of geospatial Big Data for disease monitoring and create powerful analytical tools to support decision-making processes in One Health.
20. We will work closely with OIE and WHO and strengthen our efforts to link with OIE's web-based platform, the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS).
21. This brings me to another point: the need for consensus on how to maximize the benefits of digital technology and minimize the related risks.
22. Last year, the Berlin Agriculture Ministers' Conference called upon FAO, to work towards the establishment of an International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture.
23. We are making good progress in establishing this initiative that will improve coordination among multi-stakeholders and will support digital technology adoption through best practices and voluntary guidelines.

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Third Round - Key issues to be addressed regarding innovation and pandemic

Question: In the context of the pandemic, what are the key issues we will have to focus on in the recovery process? Which should be our next steps?

1. Thank you – I really enjoyed this rich discussion on how we have turned a major challenge into an opportunity through innovative ideas and solutions.
2. The pandemic has significantly affected our lives and societies and can simultaneously exacerbate undernourishment, overweight and obesity.
3. Innovations in policy, in business models, in social protection mechanisms and in technology have contributed to resilience and can help accelerate the transformation of our agri-food systems.
4. We will have to continue building the digital world. The pandemic has forced us to speed up, scale up the digitalization of the world economy.
5. We will have to continue working on digital governance and the digital society and the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture will have a key role.
6. FAO is particularly concerned about the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable countries already grappling with hunger and hit by other crises, such as the Desert Locust outbreak in the Horn of East Africa, or climate extremes.
7. Indeed, the pandemic has strengthened the focus on the fundamental longer-term challenges we face: the need to provide adequate, safe and nutritious food to a growing population; the need to fight hunger, poverty and inequality; and, the need to adapt and mitigate climate change.
8. These challenges have to be included in our response and recovery plans. Many agri-food systems are already falling short of the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
9. Our long-term vision for the post-COVID-19 world should place agri-food systems at the center of politics and action.
10. COVID-19 and climate change push the agri-food systems to the center of international and national policy agendas like never before.
11. And we should take the UN Food Systems Summit as a catalyst, as a concrete step forward.
12. What is very important is to first understand the interactions, interdependencies and trade-offs within agri-food systems.
13. For example, how actions to improve sustainability will affect productivity, or how measures to increase productivity will improve food security and nutrition.
14. These complexities lie at the heart of the Food Systems Summit and a systematic approach and holistic design are urgently needed to help transform our agri-food systems.
15. We have an excellent opportunity to change course and shape the agri-food systems to deliver positive economic, environmental, health and social outcomes to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda and to “build back better” from COVID-19.