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**SUSTAINABLE FOOD  
SYSTEMS**

**MAXIMISING IRISH IMPACT**





***Sustainable Food Systems – Maximising Irish Impact, Roger Middleton, June 2023, Sabi Insight Ltd.***

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All views are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Sabi Insight Ltd., or of Dóchas.

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## Executive Summary

The global food system is not working, hundreds of millions of people are under fed and even more are overweight. Nutritious food is not easily accessible - even in the richest countries in the world. Small producers struggle to access markets where they can sell their food, while large commercial interests influence policy and donor spending decisions in their own interests. Our environment and climate are suffering as we continue to produce food in ways that damage the long-term viability of the planet.

But the seeds of a way forward are there. The world has committed to ending hunger by 2030, and governments across the world are adopting policy positions that commit them to sustainability in the food system. Food systems thinking offers a way to navigate that journey.

Ireland has justifiable pride in its role in combating hunger in the global south. Coming from its own tragic history successive Irish governments, and the Irish people, have shown consistency in supporting those least well off. Government policy articulated in the 'A Better World' international development policy, and in 'Food Vision 2030', puts Ireland in a strong position to transform its own food system, and help lead global change.

As President Higgins said at the opening of the 2023 International Conference on Agriculture we need to move to:

“a new model of balanced social, economic and ecological practice that can connect with a diversity of peoples and circumstances as necessary. Adjusting what has failed, I suggest, is not an alternative, and the assumptions of what has failed must at least be critiqued if space is to be made for alternatives.” (Higgins, 2023a)

This report commissioned by Dóchas, the network of Irish international NGOs, offers ten recommendations that can help the Irish Government and wider society (including private sector and civil society) support the transition to a sustainable global food system.

The path to a sustainable global food system requires action in all countries and in multiple sectors.

The report makes ten recommendations:

1. Improve coherence across Irish Government departments,
2. Strengthen coherence of Ireland's food systems focus in international bodies,

3. Align Overseas Development Spending with ambitions (achieve 0.7% as soon as possible),
4. Address trade fairness,
5. Encourage local and regional markets,
6. Build the architecture to support small scale producers,
7. Emphasise environment and justice,
8. Make the global local,
9. Open up global dialogues,
10. Build alliances.

The scale of the challenge facing Ireland and the world is significant, but it is not insurmountable. Policy already adopted points the way, and a reformed system where people have access to healthy nutritious food, produced in an ecologically sensitive manner by a thriving agriculture sector is possible.

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## Introduction

Global environmental and conflict shocks have brought home the urgent need for a food system that is resilient and sustainable. The conflict in Ukraine saw shortages of basic foodstuffs such as cooking oil – where supply shortages saw a 23% rise in prices at the start of the war (WEF, 2022). In supermarkets across western Europe shelves were empty and sales restricted, while countries with weaker trading and social protection systems continue to suffer from the disruption of exports from these major producers (Bello, 2023; UN, n.d.-a: 2)

For a long time it may have seemed to consumers and governments in the global north that challenges in the food systems were problems for people living in less economically prosperous parts of the world (Aboa & Bavier, 2022), but recent challenges have shown that we live in an economically and socially connected world where problems cannot be isolated (IPES Food, 2022). As the table below shows the combined shocks of the COVID pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, have led to very significant increases in food costs.

### FAO Global Food Price Index (average of 2014-16 prices - 100)

<b>2017</b>	<b>98.0</b>	<b>100.8</b>
<b>2018</b>	95.9	94.2
<b>2019</b>	95.1	95.6
<b>2020</b>	98.1	99.2
<b>2021</b>	125.7	125.1
<b>2022</b>	143.7	140.6
<b>2023</b>	127.8	122.9

(FAO, 2023)

It is important not to lose sight of the reality that while for consumers in Ireland shocks to the global food system can bring inconvenience, and for those on lower incomes significant challenges, for some in other parts of the world they can be a matter of life and death. “Maize and rice prices are 19% and 2% higher, respectively, than in January 2021” (World Bank, 2023a)

meaning that despite month on month decreases in prices these staple foods remain significantly more expensive than only a few years ago. And the prognosis remains volatile with continued impacts from Ukraine, a strong US dollar, challenges in the fertilizer market, and the impacts of climate change all pointing to a long term challenge (Baffes & Mekonnen, 2023).

When countries with fertile soil, deep histories and experience of food production, and a willing workforce struggle to feed themselves it shows a system that does not work. Food prices (and their impact on people’s ability to eat enough) are just one indication of failings in the food system, in Ireland at least 60% of people are overweight or obese (Department of Health, 2015), and globally food systems are contributing around one third of global greenhouse gas emissions (Crippa et al., 2021).

Dóchas, the network of Irish international NGOs, commissioned this report to inform their internal understanding on the issue of sustainable food systems globally, and to support the advocacy work of Dóchas and of Dóchas members.

Based on the terms of reference the report had two objectives:

*“Outline the steps needed to develop and implement sustainable food systems at a global level and to identify how Ireland can support this through Official Development Assistance (ODA) and influence the policy change needed as envisaged by SDG 2.4.*

*To develop and identify the solutions needed to ensure food security at a local level for the communities Dóchas members work with (for example small holder farmers, women, pastoralists).”*

To that end, the report looks briefly at what we mean by a sustainable food system, it then assesses the state of the global food system, before providing some background on Ireland’s role in achieving a sustainable food system globally. The report focuses on the role and work of the Irish Government, NGOs, and society internationally rather than within Ireland, although it recognises that these domains are intricately linked. The report then presents a set of recommendations.

## Methodology

Research for this report was conducted in line with the terms of reference agreed with Dóchas. It utilised a mixed methodology comprising a review of academic, policy, and programmatic literature, interviews with practitioners, academics, and policy experts, and brainstorming and

concept testing with IFIAD and Dóchas members at two workshops where initial findings were discussed.

The research team spoke with over twenty individuals from academic, government, and NGO backgrounds for this study. Interviews were conducted under the Chatham House rule and ideas from those interviews have been incorporated throughout the report without citing their sources. The bibliography attached shows the sample of literature that was consulted.

## **Limitations**

It is important to note some limitations of this report.

This report was conducted as a review exercise and does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis. The research team relied on a literature review and on interviews with practitioners and experts to gain an overview of the topic, but no new qualitative or field research was conducted.

This report is focused on Ireland's contribution (via ODA spending and influence) internationally, while it recognises the vital role of Ireland's own food production and consumption, it is not focused on that element.

The focus of interviews was on Irish participants which has led to a significant underrepresentation of interview subjects from countries in the global south. Coupled with a preponderance of literature on this topic being produced by authors from the global north, or by northern institutions, this presents important representation and interpretation challenges which those following up on this research should aim to redress.

The report author is not a food specialist, hopefully this brings new perspectives without missing important nuances in this large and complex field.



## What is a food systems approach?

Food systems thinking asks us to consider all that goes into the food that we consume, it recognises the way different elements of the systems affect one another and calls for careful consideration of the whole (What is a Food Systems Approach?, 2021).

If we use more chemical fertilizers to increase yields what does that mean for soil health, what impact on society does the introduction of industrial-scale farming have? Every element and actor of the food system is impacted by the others and we must consider a food system as more than tractors, seeds, and shops. It is also about politics and power relations (Anderson et al., 2023), and about societies and communities (Dekeyser & Rampa, 2021).

Food systems thinking requires us to consider the hyper local, and the global. Fertilizer prices are unlikely to be moved by a small community in rural Malawi, and that same community will have made a less than negligible contribution to greenhouse gasses, but both factors will be highly relevant to their local food system.

In a world increasingly suffering the devastating impacts of climate change (Pörtner & Roberts, 2022), and with populations growing and urbanising at speed, the need for a food system that can withstand these pressures is becoming ever more urgent. This is where ideas of sustainability are introduced, to build a system that can deliver the nutrition we need today and into the future, without compromising our environment, health, or society.

A sustainable food system should deliver multiple positive outcomes, a helpful summary is provided by the FAO:

“A sustainable food system (SFS) is a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised.

This means that:

- It is profitable throughout (economic sustainability);
- It has broad-based benefits for society (social sustainability); and
- It has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability).” (Nguyen, 2018)

This description captures the interplay across a complex global system. It points us to the conclusion that while there are clearly negative cycles - conflict in a dominant producer country

affecting supplies of staple foods for example, there is also potential for virtuous cycles - more ecologically sensitive farming methods that can help reduce the carbon impact of food production, protect the long term productivity of agricultural resources, and promote local jobs and local economies.

By adopting food systems thinking and embracing complexity, it is possible to craft a global set of policies and practices that will deliver on the promise (and urgent necessity) of zero hunger, ecological recovery, and social progress.

## The state of the global food system

In committing to SDG 2 to “End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” (UN, n.d.-a) by 2030 UN member states made a commitment that appears to line up well with ideas of a sustainable food system that takes account of systems approaches.

However, the world is far from achieving this goal. In the starkest terms to many people are not getting enough food:

**“hunger affected 46 million more people in 2021 compared to 2020, and a total of 150 million more people since 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.”** (FAO, 2022),

And this challenge of food access has been falling most heavily on those in the least economically (and politically) powerful regions of the world.

Globally huge sums are spent on agricultural subsidies, yet this spending is not producing sufficient healthy food for all people. In 2019, the United States spent at least \$22.4 billion directly supporting farmers (Charles, 2019), while the EU spent over €54 billion (EU, 2021).

This is not to say that subsidies have no role to play (the EU claims that “For every euro spent, the farm sector creates an additional €0.76 for the EU economy.” (EU, 2021)) but rather that they need to be used in a smarter manner to achieve what is needed (Tanentzap et al., 2015). In many locations subsidies distort markets and create incentives for types of products that are damaging to the environment (such as incentivising excess water use in India (Clay, 2013)), or to consumer health. But that money could be used in a manner to promote better and more sustainable choices (FAO, UNDP and UNEP, 2021).

Food has become increasingly industrialised in the global north (and parts of the south). So, while access to sufficient calories has improved for many, the industrialisation of food systems has contributed to growing challenges of obesity (Department of Health, 2015). The link between

obesity and highly processed foods (Poti, Braga & Qin, 2017) is now widely recognised. But industrialisation, and the move away from smaller producers, has also concentrated influence in the hands of a decreasing number of increasingly dominant players (Howard, 2021). This has important consequences for any attempt to rebalance the global system.

In the Irish context, the influence of agri-business in domestic politics was clearly apparent to most of our interviewees. Outside Ireland, effective domestic lobbying in European and North American markets by large players was taken to the Food Systems Summit (Anderson et al., 2023), while small scale producers and those from the global south still struggle to be heard.

Globally there is an increasing move towards high levels of specialisation. In the EU, the number of mixed Agriculture and Livestock farms declined by 2.6 million farms between 2005 and 2020 (EU, 2022). Specialised farms often rely on heavy use of technical inputs, creating significant environmental challenges (EU, 2022).

A further challenge of the trend to specialisation, which relies on the global market to ensure sufficiently diverse supply locally, is vulnerability to shocks. This was evident in the challenges that emerged when the Ukrainian and Russian grain and sunflower oil trades were disrupted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In Ireland, the remarkable growth of the dairy industry since the removal of quotas has created an agriculture sector with a very high focus on milk (Smyth, 2021). But the resulting decrease in the diversity of Irish agricultural output puts Irish consumers at the mercy of events around the globe.

Over specialisation reduces the resilience of the system, if more than 80% of the world's sunflower oil comes from two countries then there is very little wriggle room if supply is interrupted. Likewise for Ireland – a hugely economically successful agriculture sector contributing 7% of GNI to the economy (Government of Ireland, 2021a) - if trade from the rest of the world is disrupted a local agricultural economy focused on one product is not able to meet the food needs of the Irish population.

And the environmental impacts of specialised and intensive forms of agriculture are also highly damaging. In Ireland in 2017 one third of greenhouse gas emissions came from the Agriculture sector (Wilson, 2019).

In short, the global food system is not working. It does not provide an effective means to distribute sufficient nutritious food to all people across the world. Too many are hungry, or dangerously overweight. We are not producing our food in a way that will protect our soil and water and allow us to feed future generations. Power imbalances in food production, processing, marketing and

sales are increasing, pushing out smaller actors and reducing choice, creating a system that is highly vulnerable to shock events.

The solution is not to reject all elements of the current global system but rather to rebalance, to build resilience, and support the health and prosperity of all people. Diverse production of food, produced as close to where it is consumed as possible has huge environmental, health, and social benefits (Houngbo, 2020). Local markets promote economic opportunity and ameliorate the distorting effects of large-scale agri-business on local producers, and they provide a vital buffer against global supply shocks.

## Ireland's role

Ireland's global approach to sustainable food systems is framed by the cross government 'A Better World' international development policy, which commits Ireland to use its ODA spending to reach the furthest behind first (Government of Ireland, 2019):

“A sustainable food systems approach will underpin all of our work on agriculture, value chains and private sector development.” (Government of Ireland, 2019)

“... refreshing our approach to hunger and undernutrition within sustainable food systems. A systemic approach will consider the interactions between the biological, economic and social systems around food production, distribution and consumption.” (Government of Ireland, 2019)

Domestically Ireland's approach to Sustainable Food Systems is guided by “Food Vision 2030” (Government of Ireland, 2021a). Food Vision 2030 is focused primarily on Ireland's own food system and food production in Ireland. However, there are global ambitions within the vision:

“By adopting an integrated food systems approach, Ireland will seek to become a global leader of innovation for sustainable food and agriculture systems, producing safe, nutritious, and high-value food that tastes great, while protecting and enhancing our natural and cultural resources and contributing to vibrant rural and coastal communities and the national economy.” (Government of Ireland, 2021a)

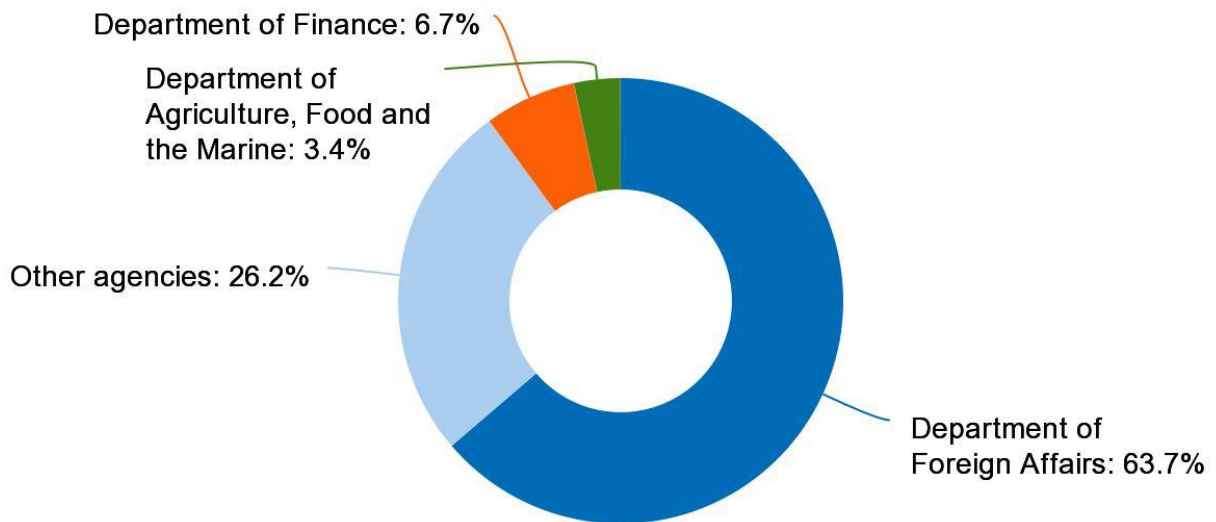
Mission 4, Goal 7 states: “Policy Coherence in Sustainable Food Systems Between Ireland's Domestic Policy and its Development Cooperation and Foreign Policy” (Government of Ireland, 2021a)

The ambition articulated in Mission 4, Goal 7 of Food Vision 2030 is at the heart of delivering both national and global ambitions. Because Ireland’s food system is affected by, and affects, the global food system achieving policy coherence across domestic and international action is vital.

The delivery of Ireland’s commitments on food systems internationally is primarily through the ODA budget administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs. But a not insignificant amount of spending is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM). In 2020, this amounted to €25,700,000 to the WFP and €3,042,000 to the FAO. Proportional to Ireland’s overall ODA spend this is quite small (see chart below) but significant for spending directly relevant to food systems.

### Ireland - Total ODA disbursed through government agencies 2020

Gross disbursements, per cent



(OECD, 2022)

This split commitment is also evident in Ireland’s membership of key international bodies; the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme are handled by DAFM, while the DFA represents Ireland on the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Nominally both departments are committed to the same set of objectives through these international bodies to help the furthest behind first as framed by ‘A Better World’. However, in practice, the strong imperative (which should not be surprising) for the DAFM to focus on its remit

to promote Irish agricultural interests often results in what interview subjects termed a 'lacklustre approach' to pushing for changes that could run counter to the perceived interests of Irish agriculture.

A key part of the success of Irish agriculture and the transition to a, generally, economically vibrant sector has been the environment within which Irish producers have operated (Brouwer et al., 2021). Extension services, marketing, food safety, targeted subsidies, education, a vibrant farm press, and a host of other services that made it easier for farmers to successfully produce and sell. Sustainable Systems Food Ireland (SFSI) operates as a semi-independent consultancy within DAFM providing support and expertise across government departments and embassies. SFSI draws on expertise from Teagasc, Bord Bia, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, and Enterprise Ireland. It provides a practical link between Irish technical expertise and farmers and other elements of the food system in the global south. IFIAD is supported to help share thinking across government, academia, industry, and civil society on this topic.

In 2019, the National Task Team of Rural Africa produced its report (NTTRA, 2019) which led to the establishment of the Ireland-Africa Rural Development Committee hosted jointly by the DFA and DAFM (DAFM, 2021). The committee is tasked to ensure the delivery of the recommendations of the NTTRA report to support "the transformation of African agriculture".

The aspiration for an Ireland Inc. approach, capitalising on expertise from commercial, academic, not for profit, and governmental sectors, is admirable (if some way from being fully achieved) and demonstrates the level of ambition and coherence that is required to address these complex and pressing challenges. Ireland and Irish NGOs have been leading actors in addressing hunger and nutrition for many decades and are well placed to take a lead by their own action, and by encouraging others, in achieving a sustainable global food system.

All these efforts build on a long-standing Irish commitment to work towards the ending of hunger with a special focus on severe malnutrition and wasting. Capitalising on Ireland's own experience and extensive expertise should be highly effective. It points to the beginnings of a government architecture that can take a joined-up approach to the complex issues that arise from food systems thinking. A recognition of the different historical context of Ireland's agricultural development from any future "transformation of African agriculture" would also be welcome.

In terms of limitations around Irelands commitments to promoting sustainable food systems internationally, many interview subjects identified two key challenges:

First that within DAFM there is a lower level of commitment, or expertise outside SFSI, to achieving international change than within DFA. The challenge is to make real the Mission 4, Goal 7 objective to deliver coherent policy nationally, and internationally. As well as differing mandates there is a challenge of matching international development objectives with the interests of a vital, and influential, agriculture sector within Ireland. Many interviewees mentioned the challenges for foreign markets around Irish produced dairy and milk products, including milk powders and non-milk powders (Marks & Livingstone, 2020).

A second coherence challenge was also evident in the fact that efforts on health, environment and trade are still largely outside the coordination structures established. Responsibility for the SDGs lies not with the DFA but with the Department for Environment, Climate and Communities. A food systems approach demands joined up and coherent action domestically and internationally and Ireland, while having made great progress, still has some way to go.

## Recommendations

These recommendations provide ideas for Dóchas members to pursue in their programming and in their policy and campaigning work. They are informed by an Irish context and are targeted at the Irish Government, agencies, and society and are focused on work outside Ireland. They are in no way comprehensive; food systems are incredibly complex and even in small localities there are multitudes of avenues through which they can be improved. These recommendations reflect entry points where our research suggests Ireland and Irish entities (NGO or state) could have significant impact.

If these recommendations have a theme, it is that change requires action across thematic and geographic areas. The recommendations recognise the complexity of food systems, acknowledging the interconnectedness of climate, economy, social dynamics, health, and politics to find an approach that brings positive change in the global south and in Ireland.

### 1. **Improve coherence across Irish Government departments:**

Because food systems require action within Ireland and overseas, and in multiple areas, Ireland should agree and implement cross government objectives to align actions. Three steps could help achieve this goal:

- Bringing representatives from Trade and Environment into coordination mechanisms between DFA and DAFM as a minimal starting point,
- Designate a lead department (DFA or the Department of the Taoiseach) to ensure all policy related to Ireland's international Sustainable Food Systems ambitions is coherent,
- institute statutory Sustainable Food System impact reviews for all areas of government policy with equal focus on domestic and international impacts.

These measures have the potential to ensure real cross government coherence and impact, and would make Ireland a clear thought and practice leader globally.

### 2. **Strengthen coherence of Ireland's food systems focus in international bodies:**

The spilt of responsibility between DFA and DAFM at international bodies (WFP, FAO, IFAD) can lead to some mission confusion or dilution - where DAFM takes the lead there is sometimes a tension between Ireland's legitimate commercial agricultural interests and the need for global reforms. Ireland should clarify that the mandate of any representatives at WFP,



FAO, IFAD is first to follow policy set by 'A Better World' for achieving a globally sustainable food system.

### **3. Align Overseas Development Spending with ambitions (achieve 0.7% of GNI as soon as possible):**

Ensure that Ireland's overseas development spending aligns with the 0.7% of GNI target, as soon as possible (Food Vision 2030 recognises the important role that food and nutrition will play in achieving the 0.7% target (Government of Ireland, 2021a)). The Government should urgently move to ensure that spending is only included in this target when it is spent on overseas assistance and not when used to subsidise domestic obligations. Earmark a portion of new funds to support the transition to a sustainable global food system, target these additional funds to support producers in the global south, and ensure that they operate in an environment (infrastructure, regulation, extensions services, certification etc.) where they can succeed.

The delegation of authority to embassies over spending decisions is a welcome, bringing local understanding and nuance to spending decisions. To deliver a coherent approach to food systems the DFA should ensure that all embassies in the global south are spending a proportion of their ODA funds on locally suitable projects to support a sustainable food system. This will help to build Irish leadership in Food Systems and ensure a multiplier effect of Irish spending in multiple locations.

### **4. Address trade fairness:**

Ireland should advocate within the EU, and at global fora, for fair and equitable trade arrangements that do not disadvantage global south producers, especially small-scale producers. A fair-trade system should take account of the economic and political power imbalances between the global north and south. Ireland should push for a trade system that ensures fair access to the most lucrative markets for all producers, and which allows local producers (in the global south but also in Europe and elsewhere) to serve their local markets. Such an approach must recognise and take account of the hidden advantages that producers in the global north receive (though government subsidies, research, marketing, etc) and consider how that affects markets and producers in the global south.

Imaginative approaches to breach those imbalances could include; environmental and human rights impact assessments of Irish (and EU) food exports - especially to sensitive and vulnerable markets such as those in west Africa, and targeted support to local industries facing competition from well supported northern suppliers (such as supporting west African

milk producers develop local value chains). Targeted support should also support farmers facing trade challenges arising from South-South trade, such as cheap imported rice from Vietnam, Pakistan and Thailand, or cheap palm oil from Malaysia and Indonesia into Africa (Bello, 2023). By redressing political and economic power imbalances in global food trade Ireland will show a real commitment to balanced trade and sustainable food systems that supports secure food and nutrition supply, and helps achieve global economic growth.

#### **5. Encourage local and regional markets:**

Irish policy should seek to strengthen the global food system by supporting vibrant and resilient local and regional markets. This approach should include promoting local and regional markets in Ireland and Europe as well as in the global south. Stronger local markets in Ireland and Europe, and stronger local markets in the global south, will contribute to resilient food supply, reduce carbon impacts, promote biodiversity, and protect livelihoods of producers. It is vital that this approach takes place in the global north and in the south to create virtuous circles.

#### **6. Build the architecture to support small scale producers:**

Ireland and Irish agencies should build on their existing work to support the governance and technical frameworks (food safety, information, etc) in the global south.

In conjunction with Irish NGOs who have long experience working with producers, this can help states and regional organisations build strong and effective systems around local producers. An effective eco system of support will allow producers to take full advantage of appropriate technologies and market opportunities.

Ireland's (and the EU's) relationships and focus on Regional Economic Communities in Africa should also be a focus for food systems work to open up regional markets.

#### **7. Emphasise environment and justice:**

Irish policy and campaigning should centre on environmental sustainability within the food system, including and going beyond food miles and carbon footprints. Promote awareness of soil health, sustainable production methods, and other environmental factors related to food production. This is important in and off itself but it also taps into a wider public awareness of environmental factors and can help build support for necessary changes in production, trade and consumption patterns.

In a similar way, policy and interventions that target the most vulnerable, the furthest behind, has a moral clarity as well as being a highly effective way of achieving more sustainable food

systems. Work with women's cooperatives, with marginalised producers, with those living outside of formal government-controlled areas, all have high benefits for food systems and have great potential for wider societal benefits in terms of social cohesion and stability.

### **8. Make the global local:**

The Irish Government and Irish NGOs should take care to explain that a reformed global food system is not just about changes in Africa and Asia, that there are changes in consumption, trade, and production that will be necessary in Ireland as well to achieve reliable, nutritious food supply without environmental and social damage. Policies and campaigns should make clear that diversifying production in the global south will benefit Irish consumers and that local consumption in Ireland can feed into virtuous cycles in the global food system.

This must include more difficult discussions, that certain economic activities, including some Irish agricultural exports, may run counter to sustainability and fairness in the global food system. But there is a win-win situation that promotes both Irish food security and global food security, as well as economic growth at home and abroad.

### **9. Open up Global Dialogues:**

The Irish Government should continue to actively engage in and lead global discussions on food systems. Ireland should advance participatory and inclusive food systems governance by working to promote the role and decisions of the UN Committee on World Food Security. Ireland should intensify efforts to promote the inclusion of small-scale food producers and ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes, such as the Food Systems Summit.

The reality of power and influence imbalances between small scale producers and large agribusiness should be recognised and measures taken to redress this by supporting ongoing and continuous engagement by farmers representative bodies. This may require sponsorship of representatives of global south farmers at global and regional negotiations, and for their ongoing advocacy and engagement between events (lobbyists working for large firms are active not only around summits).

### **10. Build Alliances:**

Irish NGOs and campaigners should capitalise on Ireland's desire to be a leader in nutrition and sustainable food systems. They should leverage the country's recognition as an important player in the field and utilise Ireland's experience in transitioning from food insecurity to a prosperous agricultural sector, and to a leader in sustainable agriculture. Nutrition, farming,

and food security have a deep resonance that creates an opening for constructive dialogue with government and the public.

At the same time NGOs, and campaigners should recognise the importance of global alliances to drive change. So, collaboration outside Ireland is vital. First and foremost, with those in the global south most impacted by an unsustainable and unequal food system. Irish NGOs and campaigners should work with them to influence policy at the Irish, EU, and Rome level. Irish agencies may be able to provide the full-time cover and relationship in Brussels and Rome that producer bodies in the global south are unable to do. EU officials were very open to collaboration with Irish NGOs.

## Conclusion

Food systems thinking offers a path to achieving a sustainable global food system, one that can deliver for all people. Global leaders are aware of the challenges we face, and of the solutions that will bring us closer to the goal of eliminating hunger while protecting health, economies, societies, and the environment.

Some of the choices that must be made may be politically challenging, or appear economically risky for wealthier and politically influential states, but the benefits of a truly sustainable world far outweigh any short-term costs associated with the transition.

Ireland has a noble ambition to be at the fore front of global change. In both domestic (Government of Ireland, 2021a) and international policy (Government of Ireland, 2019), the Irish Government has committed itself to achieving sustainability and ending hunger. Much has been achieved by the Irish Government, private sector, academics, and civil society to make the case for the necessary transition. But this report has found that there are some blockages to fully achieving this ambition, some of them are technical (around coordination and silo breaking) and some are more political and economic (around trade policy).

This report has had a focus on the international elements of Ireland's contribution to a sustainable food system, but it should also be clear that because of the interconnected nature of our world that change abroad is not sufficient. Systems within Ireland will also need to change to ensure healthy and sustainable diets. There is a strong case that a more diversified and resilient domestic food system will have positive knock-on effects for the global food system. None of this negates

the ongoing reality that international trade in food stuffs is a necessary and positive part of our future, but it must not happen at the expense of local markets, or the environment.

Achieving a sustainable food system is vital for the success of humanity and requires action across the globe. The idea that Irish interests are best served by one economic model misses the vital importance of that connection. It is in Ireland's, and Irish peoples', interest that markets around the world function well and that producers and consumers in all countries have access to nutritious and varied diets.

Ireland's own painful history with food insecurity and the catastrophic consequence of political, and economic failure has been followed by the building a highly successful state and a prosperous agriculture sector. While times and conditions are different for many countries in the global south, Ireland has much to offer in terms of example and support to countries hoping to make that same transition.

Commitments need to continue to translate into spending, and into policy shifts at home and in international fora. We are still far too far from achieving the goals of SDG 2, but by capitalising on Irish spending, expertise, and leadership, Ireland can help turbo charge the change towards a more sustainable global food system.

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