IICA on the road towards the Food Systems Summit 2021[1]

On the road to the United Nations' Food Systems Summit 2021, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) has been emphasizing the contribution made by agriculture in the Americas. IICA is a member of the Champions Network, one of the four main supports structures for the global meeting, and has been contributing to the technical and political dialogue from the perspective of farmers in the Americas.

→ The definition of food systems embraces the entire range of actors and their interlinked value adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and food industries, and the broader economic, societal, and natural environments in which they are embedded.[2] **Agriculture**, thought of here in its broadest sense, is a core component of this universe, reflecting its diversity, complexity, and the way in which each area affects the performance of the whole. Given the key role that, from our perspective, agriculture plays in the development of the entire system, hereinafter we will use the term "agri-food systems" (AFS).

1. This technical note was prepared by the Directorate of Technical Cooperation as a general reference document. The editorial and technical coordinator of the document was Federico Villarreal. The authors were Joaquín Arias, Rosario Campos, Karen Montiel, Eduardo Trigo, and Federico Villarreal.

2. As defined at https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/food-systems-summit-2021/.

IICA's commitment to organizing processes for participation, dialogue, and action is based on the **strategic role played by agriculture and farmers in the Americas in achieving the sustainable development of agri-food systems**. The Americas guarantee global food security, and is one of the regions with most quality resources that can be incorporated into production, such as land and water.[3] **Agriculture** is a strategic component of the economies of many countries in the region, not only as a source of exports, but also as a generator of employment and income, contributing to social inclusion and poverty reduction.

In this regard, IICA's member countries share the concerns expressed within the framework of the Summit with respect to nutrition, equity, environmental performance, and climate change. They also stress the importance of adopting an approach that recognizes the specific characteristics of their natural resource base, so they can be mobilized in an effective and sustainable way. At the regional level, sustainable transformations can be achieved by means of strategies designed to make better use of the potential of their wealth of natural resources and biodiversity, harnessing the opportunities currently offered by advances in science and technology.[4]

In this document, the authors provide answers to ten general questions related to important issues that will be addressed at the Food Systems Summit. They explain the general characteristics of food systems, the role of agriculture, the region, and IICA in the general dynamics.

1

What are the background and objectives of the United Nations' Food Systems Summit?

Amid concern at the lack of progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set for 2030, the United Nations Secretary General has convened a **Food Systems Summit** in 2021. It is hoped that the Summit will launch "bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems," for which global reflection is needed in order to "transform the way in that the world produces, consumes and thinks about food."[5]

3. OECD/FAO (2020). OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2020-2029, FAO, Rome/OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/1112c23b-en.

4. IICA (2019). "Agriculture and Rurality in a Future of Permanent Change." Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas—2019 Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), San Jose, Costa Rica. http://repositorio.iica.int/bitstream/handle/11324/8291/%28WD-394%29%20Agriculture%20and%20rurality.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

5. See https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/about

The preparatory process for the Summit was designed to bring to the table "key players from the worlds of science, business, policy, healthcare and academia, as well as farmers, indigenous people, youth organizations, consumer groups, environmental activists, and other key stakeholders,"[6] so that the agreements adopted reflect all points of view and are feasible to implement. The Summit aims to bring about tangible, positive changes in the world's food systems by focusing on the delivery of four outcomes:

(i) Generate significant action and measurable progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

(ii) Raise awareness and elevate public discussion about how reforming our food systems can help us achieve the SDGs.

(iii) Develop principles to guide governments and other stakeholders seeking to promote the development of their food systems as a key element towards the achievement of the SDGs.

(iv) Create a **system of follow-up and review** to ensure that the Summit's outcomes continue to drive new actions and progress.

2

How is the Summit being organized to achieve its outcomes, advance technical and political dialogue, and ensure the subsequent implementation of actions?

In purely operational terms, the Summit is being organized by the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, Agnes Kalibata, supported by an **Advisory Committee** that assists her with political matters, and a **Scientific Group** that is in charge of the content of the meeting. This group is comprised of world experts from disciplines such as the natural sciences, agronomy, ecology, natural resources, nutrition and the social sciences. There is also a Champions Network, made up of a group of individuals and organizations committed to the Summit's objectives and the promotion of actions aimed at achieving them.

Within this framework, on 28 January 2021 Agnes Kalibata invited the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Manuel Otero, to form part of the Champions Network, as the representative of the agricultural and rural sectors of North America, Latin America and the Caribbean.[7]

6. See https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/about

7. https://iica.int/en/press/news/iica-director-general-be-member-one-un-food-systems-summit-support-networks

IICA also organized a conference on 26 February with the participation of its Director General, the Special Envoy, journalists from the region, and Rattan Lal, the renowned scientist and recipient of the World Food Prize-2020. During the event, Agnes Kalibata underscored the importance of making science-based decisions with respect to food systems, and the impact on food security of non-science-based barriers to international trade. Manuel Otero spoke of the need to listen to the voices of farmers in the Americas, given the key role they play in guaranteeing the world's food security.[8]

3

What are the Summit's Action Tracks?

The technical aspects of the Summit are organized around five **Action Tracks**[9] that will allow the participants to share their ideas, learn from others, and take advantage of the expertise of actors drawn from all of the world's food systems.

(i) Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
(ii) Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
(iii) Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
(iv) Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
(v) Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shock, and stress.

4

What levers of change and game-changing solutions will be proposed at the Summit?

Four levers of change have been identified that cut across all the Action Tracks[10], These are areas of work with the potential to deliver positive changes beyond their immediate focus, in order to meet the Summit's objectives:

8. https://iica.int/en/press/news/un-secretary-generals-special-envoy-food-systems-summit-underscores-role-latin-america

9. https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks

10. https://www.un.org/es/food-systems-summit/levers-of-change

(i) Gender
(ii) Human rights
(iii) Finance
(iv) Innovation

An open set of ***game-changing solution*** is being proposed to implement transformation processes aligned with the principles of the Summit. Each one is linked to a problem that has been identified and proposes a "theory of change," with flexible rules and criteria, and with a broadly democratic and participatory process of identification and implementation. The Scientific Group has prepared documents for each Action Track, and summaries of a first series of game-changing proposals are contained in a number of documents available at https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/documentation. The Champions (and their networks) have been invited to assist with this stage, particularly the transition from the theoretical to the practical.

5

What is IICA's objective in the run-up to the Summit, and what is its strategy for supporting the effective participation of Latin America and the Caribbean?

IICA organized a conceptual and political discussion from the perspective of agriculture in the Americas as a means of contributing to the preparations for the Food Systems Summit. The results of this contribution are summarized in the document ***"Food systems: an outlook from the perspective of agriculture in the Americas,"*** which is based on a draft prepared by IICA that was then enriched and approved by all the sector's key actors, who participated fully in the process. The ministers of agriculture of the member countries are expected to endorse the document.

For the region to participate in the Summit effectively, work is required on two fronts. The technical efforts should target a better understanding of the processes involved, while at the political level, all stakeholders–from farmers to policymakers–should be afforded the opportunity to participate in the design of actions to be implemented to transform agri-food systems (be they local, national, regional or global) in line with the objectives proposed for the Summit.

6

How is IICA supporting the technical dialogue designed to optimize agriculture's contribution to food system development?

At the technical level, IICA's contribution addresses 11 issues at the local, national and international levels, focusing the discussion on how to optimize the development of agri-food systems, and maximize their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals, and particularly to the proposed Summit objectives related to nutrition, health, equity and inclusion, the environment, and climate change. In this regard, the proposed process is directly linked to the ministerial consensus reached at the Ministerial Conference of Agriculture of the Americas 2019— that is, the need to design strategies that tap the potential for transformation implicit in the new science and technology scenarios, in order to improve agriculture's contribution to tackling the challenges at the local, national and global levels.[11,12]

Therefore, the work is organized under the following areas of intervention:

1. Research and development
2. Soils
3. Digital agriculture
4. Tropical agriculture
5. Sustainable livestock
6. "One health" approach
7. Cooperatives
8. International trade
9. The bioeconomy
10. Gender and youth
11. Caribbean agriculture.

The work in each area is focused on:

(i) How to engage in dialogue with, or contribute to, each of the Summit's Action Tracks, and

(ii) Exploring the transformation pathways, i.e., the policies and specific actions that should be used to lever the required change.

11. http://jia2019.iica.int/en

12. https://iica.int/en/press/news/western-hemisphere-ag-leaders-unite-support-science-based-standards

In carrying out this work, full use is being made of the technical cooperation actions implemented under IICA's five Hemispheric Action Programs and Cross-cutting Issues, and of a broad process of dialogue with the key actors in each case, who are organized under the rules for dialogue established for the Summit.[13]

7

How is IICA supporting the political dialogue in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Given the objective of contributing to the Summit from the perspective of agriculture in the Americas, the aim at the political level is to place the discussion on the ministerial agenda, by means of a two-step process:

(i) First, early contributions will be identified and presented at the pre-Summit due to be held in July 2021. These early contributions will be discussed at a working meeting of ministers of agriculture convened during the second quarter of 2021.

(ii) The second political action involves the inclusion of the transformation of agri-food systems in the work of the Ministerial Conference of Agriculture of the Americas scheduled for September 2021.

The document ***"Food systems: an outlook from the perspective of agriculture in the Americas,"*** which synthesizes the entire process of technical consultations, is being prepared and will be used as the basis for the discussions at the conference.

8

How are "food systems" defined?

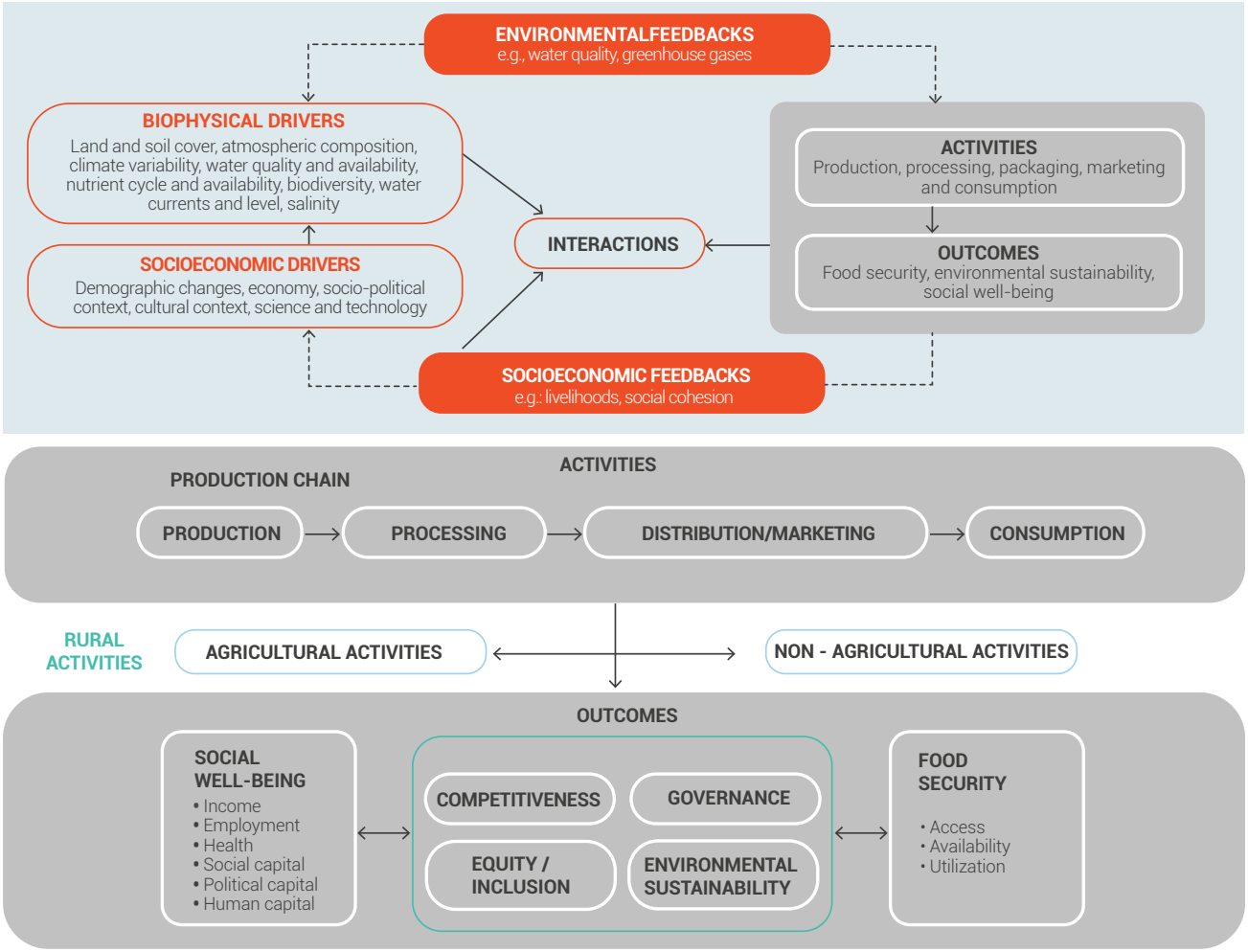
Agri-food systems (AFS) encompass the entire range of actors, processes and value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture[14]. Figure 1 shows the different components of which they are comprised: activities and outcomes, and their interactions, influenced by the biophysical and socioeconomic

13. See https://www.un.org/food-systems-summit/dialogues

14.FAO. 2017. Nutrition and food system. A report by The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutritio (online). Rome, Italy. Available in: http://sa.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/file/Nutrition%20and%20food%20systems.pdf

dynamics[15]. The analysis and development of AFS should include the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded, including links to other systems and recognizing that the transformation of the agri-food system is essential but not enough to ensure sustainable development[16]. Furthermore, AFS belong to, or are rooted in, a given territory: their characteristics and performance are determined by specific, interrelated spatial scales, be it at the global, regional, national, or local level.

FIGURA 1. THE AGRI-FOOD SYSTEM AND ITS COMPONENTS



15. ECLAC; FAO; IICA. 2017. The Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Americas: A Perspective on Latin America and the Caribbean. (online). San Jose, Costa Rica, IICA. 267 p. Available in: http://repositorio.iica.int/bitstream/handle/11324/6143/BVE17109365e.pdf;jsessionid=1EF4B9B3AA13182B-3F15314AF873444E?sequence=1.

16. Joachim von Braun et. al. 2020. Food Systems – Definition, Concept and Application for the UN Food Systems Summit (paper for discussion)

9

How are the agriculture and food systems of Latin America and the Caribbean contributing to the goals of the 2030 Agenda?

Agriculture, including livestock farming and agri-food systems, plays a key role in feeding a growing population and conserving the natural resources on which it depends. Agri-food systems have a two-way impact: on the one hand, they bring about transformations in ecosystems, the environment, and production systems, and, on the other, they are key to achieving the objectives of sustainability, food and nutrition security, and the prosperity of present and future generations.

The AFS of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) make strategic contributions not only to the development objectives of the region, but also, and to a significant degree, to those of the rest of the world. On the one hand, as the biggest net food exporter, it plays a key role in guaranteeing the global food supply and stabilizing international prices. On the other, LAC is the planet's biggest provider of ecosystem services, making the role it plays essential for environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation.

In more general terms, AFS should be thought of as a core component of economies at every level (i.e., the regional, national and local levels), given the contribution they make to the generation of employment and investment, and to economic activity in general[17]. In this regard, it is important to recognize the key role being played by AFS and rural spaces in achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[18, 19]

17. Michael Morris et al. 2020. Future foodscapes: Reimagining agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean (online). World Bank, Washington, DC. Available at http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/159291604953162277/Future-Foodscapes-Re-imagining-Agriculture-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean

18. ECLAC, FAO, IICA. 2019. The Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Americas: A Perspective on Latin Americaand the Caribbean. (online).. San Jose, Costa Rica, n.p. 144 pp. Available at: https://www.agrirural.org/.

19. DeClerck et al. 2016. Agricultural ecosystems and their services: the vanguard of sustainability? (online). Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability 23:92-99. Available at https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S1877343516301075

10

How is the development of food systems linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)?

Agri-food systems are a key, intrinsic component of any strategy designed to achieve sustainable development and, as such, are closely linked to the 17 sustainable development goals (SDG). The achievement of 132 of the 169 goals—126 targets and 43 means of implementation—must be observable in agri-food systems and rural territories[20]. Rural territories and agri-food systems are most directly and clearly linked with SDG 1: No Poverty, SDG 2: Zero Hunger, SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 13: Climate Action, and SDG 15: Life on Land.

Agriculture contributes to poverty reduction by providing work for a large number of people, many of them with limited economic resources. Therefore, it is also important that production activities promote livelihoods resilient to climate change, and that agricultural practices be more sustainable and have greater regenerative capacity—i.e., they facilitate increased biodiversity, the improvement of watersheds, and water availability and soil enrichment.[21]

Challenges such as climate change and natural resource degradation call for the promotion of multisectoral, collaborative initiatives targeted at various levels and encompassing issues not traditionally addressed by the agriculture sector, including the health of plants, animals, and human beings, and the link between ecosystems and public health. Furthermore, these actions should get firmly to grips with issues very much of this era, such as the productive capacities of a world interconnected by trade, and rapid technological change, which is creating many areas of opportunity for making more efficient, productive and sustainable use of natural resources.[22]

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20. ECLAC, FAO, IICA 2019.

21. In the particular case of soils—a key component of intergenerational relationships—the impacts related to the SDG have to do with food security, water security, land management (including land rehabilitation), climate change, the preservation of biodiversity and, ultimately, human health, which means they deserve special attention (Keesstra et al. 2016. The significance of soils and soil science towards realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. (online). SOIL 2(2):111-128. Available at https://soil.copernicus.org/articles/2/111/2016/). Agriculture and soil health have a direct bearing on human well-being, since, when they are managed appropriately, they are the solution to the environmental problems that affect humankind (Lal, R. 2018. Digging deeper: A holistic perspective of factors affecting soil organic carbon sequestration in agroecosystems. (online). Global Change Biology 24(8):3285-3301. Available at http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/gcb.14054).

22. IICA (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture). 2019. Agriculture and Rurality in a Future of Permanent Change (on line). Prepared for the Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of the Americas—Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA) 2019. San Jose, Costa Rica. Available at: http://repositorio.iica.int/handle/11324/8291.