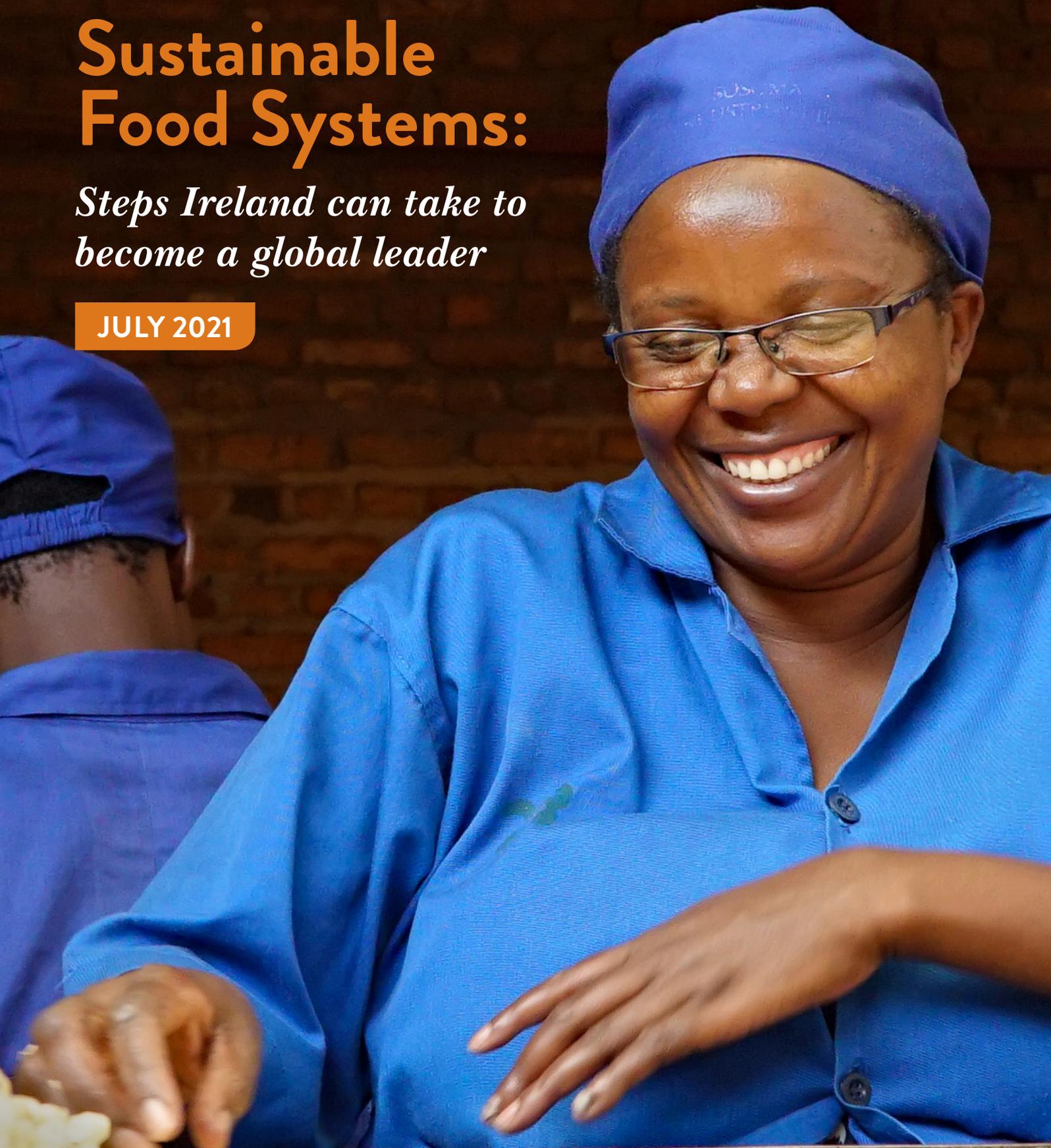


# Sustainable Food Systems:

*Steps Ireland can take to become a global leader*

JULY 2021



This document contains the Summary and Recommendations of the full report Sustainable Food Systems: Steps Ireland can take to become a global leader.

---

**Cover Photo:** Immaculée Mukobwujaha, worker at the SOSOMA factory in Rwanda.  
Photo: Raja Nundlall

# Summary and Recommendations

The growing evidence and appreciation of the complex interactions between agriculture and food systems, with the interconnected challenges of food insecurity, biodiversity loss, and climate change, are propelling debates on the transformation of these systems at all levels. Globally, a consensus may be emerging on the need for transformation, but there is no agreement on what innovative approaches can best deliver social, economic, and environmentally sustainable outcomes.

Both Oxfam Ireland and Trócaire work in contexts where agriculture and food is the main source of employment and income, is small scale and rainfed, and accounts for most of the food consumed within households and in their wider local communities. Countries' sustainable development is intertwined with securing these communities and their futures, building their food security, and strengthening their resilience to climate and other shocks.

The focus now, on food systems' thinking, presents an opportunity to holistically address diverse but interconnected social, economic, and environmental challenges. Underpinned by rights-based approaches, countries' agriculture and food policies must be framed in ways that foster social equity, women's empowerment, economic productivity and prosperity, environmental regeneration, and resilience building at all levels.

The Irish Government has set out the commendable ambition to become a global leader in sustainable food systems over the next decade.<sup>1</sup> Given Ireland's commitments to international and regional agreements, including those related to the right to food, the European Green Deal, and the Paris Agreement on climate change, this report assesses where Ireland is at and what Ireland needs to do, in both the domestic and international spheres, to achieve this ambition.

<sup>1</sup> Draft Agri-Food Strategy 2030, April 2021, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/bd894-public-consultation-on-the-environmental-assessment-of-the-draft-agri-food-strategy-to-2030/>

The sustainable transformation of the global food system presents an immense challenge. The global food system<sup>2</sup> is at the centre of complex, interconnected challenges: including climate change, ecological degradation, land use competition, and conflict. An increasing number of people are facing food insecurity (a trend that has been further exacerbated by COVID-19), with the climate change and biodiversity emergencies further underpinning arguments for agriculture and food system transformation. The world faces the unprecedented challenge of pursuing human development and ensuring the right to adequate food for all on a planet where the population is estimated to increase to over 9 billion people by 2050,<sup>3</sup> in ways that don't breach essential ecological and planetary boundaries,<sup>4</sup> while tackling poverty and extreme inequality.

At a global level, agriculture, forestry, and other land usage accounts for 23% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Add in other emissions from the food chain, from farm to consumer, and the estimate rises towards 34%. In Europe, the agricultural sector accounts for 10.3% of GHG emissions. Irish agriculture contributes more than 30% of the country's national GHG emissions.<sup>5</sup> This figure does not include the emissions related to land use and land use change generated by imports of commodities such as soy and beef. Critically, the great variety in the level of emissions associated with different agricultural approaches and products draws attention to the opportunities for incentivising systems that advance climate mitigation and adaptation objectives.

<sup>2</sup> Please see Chapter Two for an outline of the key elements of food systems.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/world-population-prospects-2019.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

<sup>5</sup> Teagasc: <https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2020/agricultural-emissions--greenhouse-gases-and-ammonia.php#:~:text=Unfortunately%20for%20Irish%20farmers%2C%20agriculture,product%20of%20ruminant's%20digestive%20process.>

The right to adequate food cannot be reduced to a right not to starve. While ‘cheap’ and ‘available’ to some, a significant ongoing failure of the global food system concerns the supply and access to nutritious foods for healthy living. We know that about 9% of the world’s population is undernourished to various degrees,<sup>6</sup> while another 39% of adults, globally, were overweight in 2016, with 13% classed as obese.<sup>7</sup> According to the FAO, 3.5%<sup>8</sup> of the Irish population, or 171,000 people, are severely food insecure,<sup>9</sup> while a Safefood study from 2018 found that 1 in 10 Irish households were in food poverty.<sup>10</sup> According to latest WHO figures, 25% of the Irish population, or 1.22m people, are obese (2016). This is an increase from 16% in 2000.<sup>11</sup>

Over the last few decades, national and transnational corporations in the agri-food sectors have conducted highly successful campaigns to, acquire land (e.g. through large-scale “land-grabbing<sup>12</sup>”), increase their control, and build dependence on proprietary inputs, including seeds and other genetic resources, capture digital data, and control institutional and public narratives about agriculture, food systems, and “development”.<sup>13</sup> The extension of conventional “resource-grabbing” into intellectual, digital and social domains, paired with the increasing political influence that has accompanied corporate consolidation, has enabled industry players to shape agri-food systems to their benefit.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, a survey of the world’s 350 most influential food

and agriculture companies has found that half of the companies assessed do not disclose targets or report on progress to reduce GHG emissions, while over a third do not sufficiently acknowledge their responsibility to ensure that the human rights of workers in their supply chain are respected, nor do they demonstrate any intention of helping to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.<sup>15</sup>

As Dr. Sage (2015) puts it “*How we will feed the world in the decades ahead is becoming a highly contested arena of competing visions but one where sustainability is frequently cited in the discourses of opposing protagonists. On the one hand there remains a hugely powerful status quo that regards the current predicament of global malnourishment as vindication for the rejuvenation of an agri-industrial model that we might label as productivism. This paradigm extols the merits of next generation biotechnology and nanotechnology to deliver greater output (by between 70 to 100 percent) in order to feed a projected population of nine billion by 2050. While the emphasis remains on technological solutions and market-driven innovations, an important strand of this approach (‘sustainable intensification’) argues that greater agricultural productivity could be achieved with reduced environmental impacts.*”<sup>16</sup>

Since the food price crisis of 2007-08, momentum has been gathering around an alternative vision for agriculture and food systems. This *transformative narrative* is focused on pro-poor and pro-environment approaches, hallmarks of the groundbreaking International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, which Ireland endorsed. The IAASTD report highlighted the imperative of transitioning towards agriculture and food systems that are, not only productive, but also advance rural development, and environmental and social justice outcomes. In the intervening years, redesigning food systems in ways that address ecological, economic, and social sustainability has become a greater focus for UN agencies, including the FAO, academic, and scientific research literature. The outcomes of this focus include the development of analytical tools and policy recommendations that are designed as guides to support policy makers and other stakeholders plan, manage, and

<sup>6</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/hunger-and-undernourishment#undernourishment-by-world-region>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/indicators/212/en/>

<sup>9</sup> In simple terms, a household is classified as severely food insecure when at least one adult in the household has reported to have been exposed, at times during the year, to several of the most severe experiences described in the FIES questions, such as to have been forced to reduce the quantity of the food, to have skipped meals, having gone hungry, or having to go for a whole day without eating because of a lack of money or other resources, available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/c-i4830e.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://irishheart.ie/news/many-low-income-families-struggle-to-afford-healthy-diet/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A900A?lang=en>

<sup>12</sup> Simon Hernandez-Arthur, Matt Grainger (2016), Custodians of the land, defenders of our future A new era of the global land rush, Oxfam, available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/custodians-land-defenders-our-future>. Trocaire (2019), Making a Killing: Holding corporations to account for land and human rights violations, available at: [https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/making\\_a\\_killing\\_holding\\_corporations\\_to\\_account\\_for\\_land\\_and\\_human\\_rights\\_violations\\_1.pdf](https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/making_a_killing_holding_corporations_to_account_for_land_and_human_rights_violations_1.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Update: The emerging issue of “digitalization” of agriculture. Angelika Hilbeck & Eugenio Tisselli, in Hans R. Herren, Benedikt Haerlin and the IAASTD+10 Advisory Group (2020), Transformation of our Food Systems-The Making of a Paradigm Shift, Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft and Biovision, available at: <https://www.arc2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/FullTextOfTransformationFoodSystems.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Update: Corporate multilateralism at the UN, Pat Moone in Hans R. Herren, Benedikt Haerlin and the IAASTD+10 Advisory Group (2020), Transformation of our Food Systems-The Making of a Paradigm Shift, Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft and Biovision, available at: <https://www.arc2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/FullTextOfTransformationFoodSystems.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> World Benchmarking Alliance, available at: [www.worldbenchmarkalliance.org/publication/food-agriculture](http://www.worldbenchmarkalliance.org/publication/food-agriculture)

<sup>16</sup> Sage, C. (2015) Food and Sustainable Development: How should we feed the world? In *The Routledge International Handbook of Sustainable Development* (Redclift, M., Springett, D., eds), Abingdon, Oxon, UK : Routledge, pp. 264-277, available at: [https://www.academia.edu/7101864/Food\\_and\\_Sustainable\\_Development\\_How\\_should\\_we\\_feed\\_the\\_world](https://www.academia.edu/7101864/Food_and_Sustainable_Development_How_should_we_feed_the_world)

evaluate transitions based on agroecological initiatives. An enabling environment that supports the scaling up and out of agroecological transitions is a priority for global peasant movements and their civil society allies in the global North and South.

This dynamic contestation represents the context for the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS). The UNFSS was initially characterised as a ‘People’s Summit’ which would address solutions and contain diverse dialogue on topics ranging from nutrition, sustainability, equitable livelihoods, and resilience.<sup>17</sup> However, in the lead up to the summit, concerns about the approaches being taken by the UNFSS have been expressed by civil society, especially those representing small-holders in the Global South and indigenous peoples. In 2020, over 300 civil society organisations<sup>18</sup> signed a joint letter over shared concerns around the lack of human rights approaches and legitimacy and the lack of inclusiveness in preparations for the UNFSS. Since then, the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM)<sup>19</sup> of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the largest international space of civil society organisations (CSOs) working to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition, have voiced their concerns over the proposed operation of the UNFSS and put forward proposals for how these concerns could be addressed. These include a proposal that the UNFSS should have an explicit aim to “reverse the corporate capture of food systems, an additional action track should be established, as part of the formal summit process, to focus on the transformation of corporate food systems.”<sup>20</sup>

### What is a sustainable food system?

For a food system to be sustainable, it needs to generate positive value across all three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. The FAO (2018)<sup>21</sup> elaborates on this:

- On the economic dimension, a food system is considered sustainable if the activities conducted by each food system actor or support service provider are commercially or fiscally viable. The activities should generate benefits, or economic value-added, for all categories of stakeholders: wages for workers, taxes for governments, profits for enterprises, and food supply improvements for consumers.
- On the social dimension, a food system is considered sustainable when there is equity in the distribution of the economic value-added, taking into account vulnerable groups categorized by gender, age, race, and so on. Of fundamental importance, food system activities need to contribute to the advancement of important socio-cultural outcomes, such as nutrition and health, with respect for local and indigenous peoples’ traditions, labour conditions, and animal welfare.
- On the environmental dimension, sustainability is determined by ensuring that the impacts of food system activities on the surrounding natural environment are neutral or positive, taking into consideration biodiversity, water, soil, animal and plant health, the carbon footprint, the water footprint, food loss and waste, and toxicity

Changing the food system to achieve these sustainability outcomes means shifting the conditions that are holding the problems in place. Kania, J. et al. (2018) identify six conditions for systems change, based on structural, relational, and transformative change, as illustrated in the diagram below. This report focusses primarily on the structural dimension and the power dynamics of the relational change dimension.

<sup>17</sup> UN FSS, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>

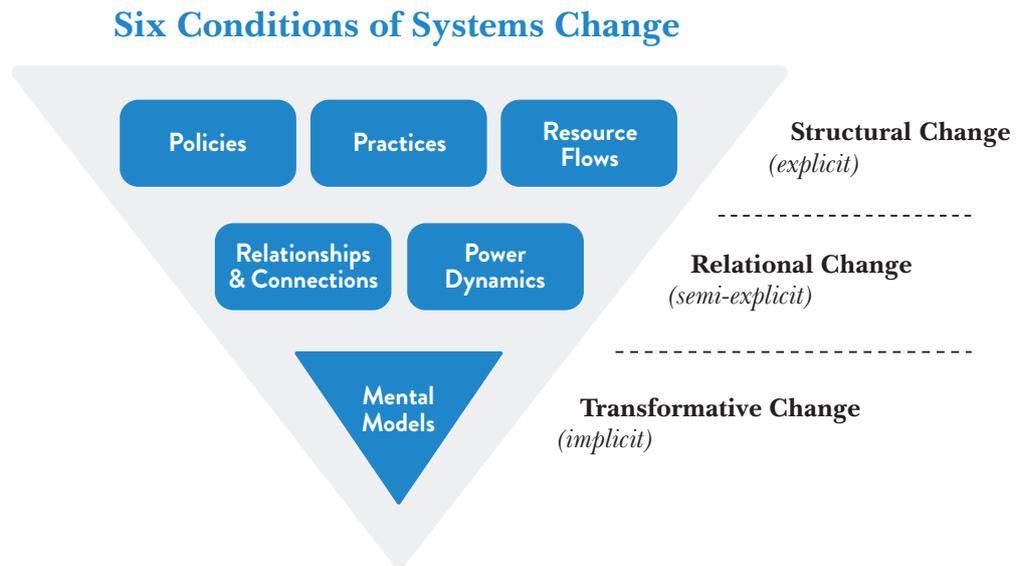
<sup>18</sup> [https://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/EN\\_Edited\\_draft-letter-UN-food-systems-summit\\_070220-4.pdf](https://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/EN_Edited_draft-letter-UN-food-systems-summit_070220-4.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> CSM online – What is the CSM, available at: <http://www.csm4cfs.org/the-csm/>

<sup>20</sup> CSM Letter to the CFS Chair on Food Systems Summit, available at: <http://www.csm4cfs.org/letter-csm-coordination-committee-cfs-chair/>

<sup>21</sup> FAO (2018) Sustainable food systems: Concept and framework, available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca2079en/CA2079EN.pdf>

**Figure S1:** Six Conditions of Systems Change



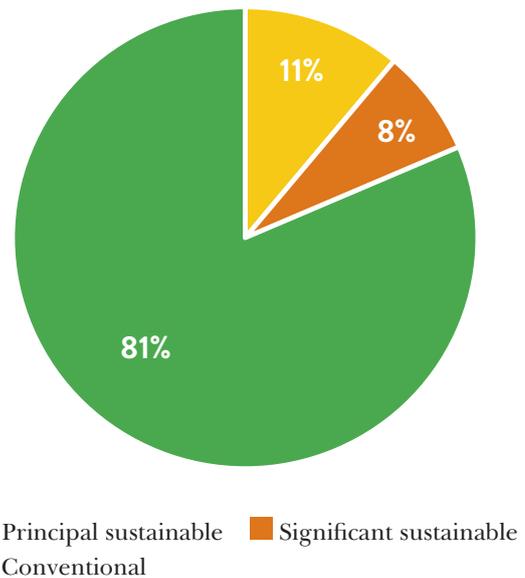
Source: Kania, J., Kramer, M. Senge, P. (2018) *The Water of Systems Change*, FSG

**What Ireland needs to do to become a global leader in sustainable food systems**

- a. **Farmers should be incentivised and rewarded for sustainable food production. Programmes with clear environmental and social sustainability objectives should be increasingly prioritised in the Department of Agriculture’s budget allocations, including, but not limited to, the expansion of results-based approaches. A much larger proportion of ODA spending on agriculture should be spent on sustainable agriculture, especially agroecological initiatives.**

One of the key levers Ireland can use to ensure more sustainable food production is by making national agricultural schemes payments reward sustainable practices by incentivising desirable environmental outcomes. At present, 81% of national Irish funding is directed toward projects that are not described as sustainable agriculture, 8% to ‘significantly’ sustainable, and 11% to ‘principally’ sustainable agriculture. The disproportionate funding to conventional agriculture, with no environmental or social targets attached to it, is also compounded by the fact that, in some cases, farmers are penalised for their efforts to support biodiversity. For example, when hedges and trees are planted, this area can be deducted from the land eligible for grants, so farmers are penalised rather than rewarded by their efforts – efforts that support both wildlife habitat and carbon sequestration efforts.

**Figure S2:** Domestic agricultural Schemes payments 2020

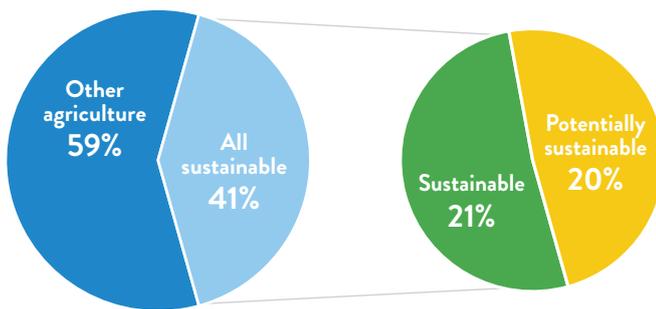


Source: Gov.ie, *Scheme Payments by County September to December 2020*, Published 14/01/2021 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5f0e9-scheme-payments-by-county-september-to-december-2020/>

The same logic, of supporting sustainable rather than conventional agricultural initiatives, should apply to Ireland’s development cooperation strategies, yet the majority of Irish ODA for food and nutrition security is not clearly directed toward sustainable or agroecological initiatives. Figure S3, below, shows that just 21% (USD 23.5 million) of agricultural ODA between 2016-2018

was directed toward projects described as sustainable (e.g. ‘agroecology’<sup>22</sup> or ‘sustainable agriculture’).<sup>23</sup> When combined with projects described in such a way that they could be considered *potentially* sustainable (e.g. projects aiming to increase the diversification of incomes but with no clear sustainable description), this share grows to 41% (USD 45.7 million). The remaining 59% (EUR 64.9 million) was invested in projects with no mention of sustainability, which could comprise industrial agricultural practices.

**Figure S3:** Proportion of agricultural ODA targeting sustainable vs other agricultural approaches (total, 2016-2018)<sup>24</sup>



Source: OECD CRS, 2016-2018 microdata, constant 2018 USD, disbursements, and author's calculations

**Recommendation 1:** Mainstream the pilot Results-Based Programme, with an aim that the majority of agricultural schemes payments will be directed towards sustainable agriculture by 2030. A critical component of this will be ensuring the co-creation of the scoring system with farmers.

**Recommendation 2:** Ireland explicitly recognises the principles of agroecology as a key part of the solution in building sustainable food systems. Ireland should commit to increasing the proportion of ODA spending on agriculture and food systems directed towards the scaling up and out of agroecological initiatives.

<sup>22</sup> Throughout the report, ‘agroecology’ refers to the principles of agroecology as defined by the FAO (2018), which defines agroecology as: ‘an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system’. P. 1 of FAO (2018) Ten Elements of Agroecology, I9037EN/1/04.18

<sup>23</sup> Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) was classified as ‘potentially sustainable’ given that agroecological principles are not foundational to CSA.

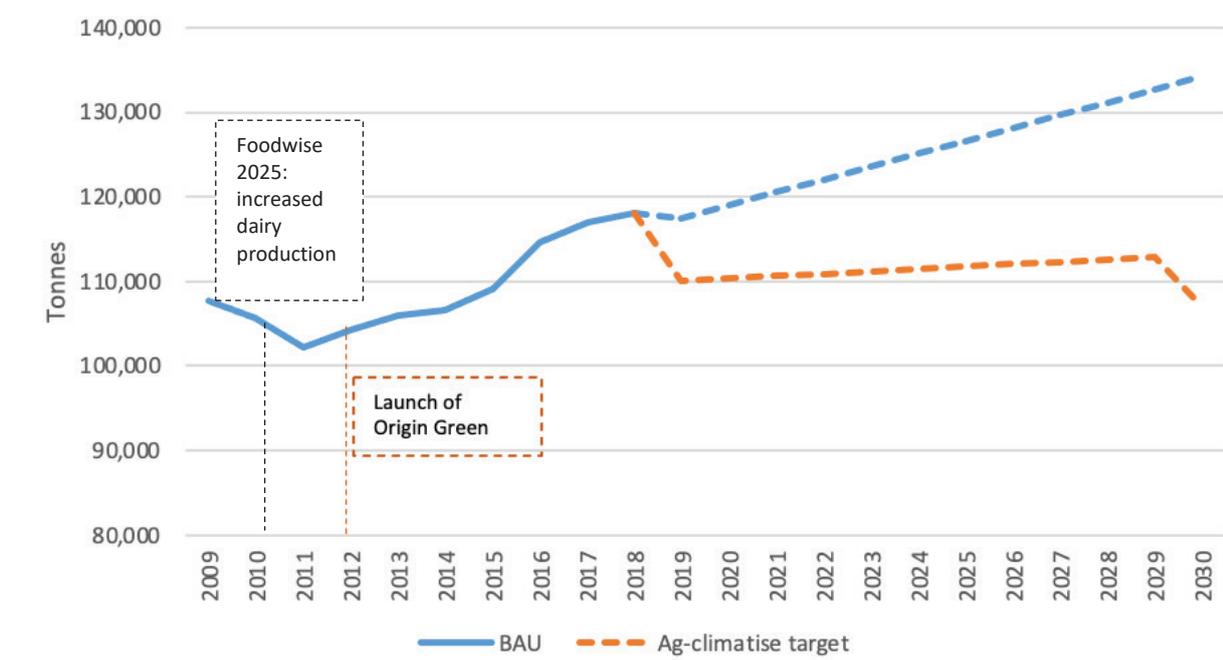
<sup>24</sup> The analysis identifies sustainable ODA investments as those which are described in the microdata as relating to ‘agroecology’ or ‘sustainable agriculture’ (including diversification, seeds, agroecology, and sustainability). Those identified as ‘potentially sustainable’ include investments related to resilience, local food production, ‘improved’ practices or production, integrated approaches, and transformative agriculture. Both classifications are weighted the same.

**b. Ensure Ireland is using appropriate sustainability metrics to monitor sector wide progress and has an independent and trusted mechanism to measure progress on transitioning to sustainable food production**

While Ireland’s agricultural production may be considered less destructive for the environment in contrast to large-scale industrial agriculture in other countries, narratives claiming that Ireland’s food is ‘produced sustainably’ or that the Irish food industry has made great progress towards ‘driving sustainable food production’ are difficult to validate when assessing agri-environmental indicators. This is highly detrimental to establishing trust along the food supply chain and can undermine Ireland’s credibility, therefore putting at risk future trade opportunities, as consumers (domestically and abroad) increasingly demand transparent, ethical food production.

Narratives relating to Origin Green’s role in promoting sustainable agriculture are especially hard to validate, in light of deteriorating quality of water, air, and biodiversity since the programme’s launch. For example, the figure below contrasts the current trends in ammonia emissions (in a BAU approach) with the required trend to achieve the Ag-Climate target. The increasing trend since 2010 does little to suggest that introduction of Origin Green in 2012 led to more sustainable approaches to agricultural production.

In addition, for transparency and substance, Ireland would benefit from harmonising its use of metrics across government agencies; and developing more ambitious and comprehensive measurements of sustainability, for example, moving beyond yield as a primary indicator of efficiency. Further, in light of Ireland’s role domestically and abroad, in terms of knowledge transfer and innovation, Ireland would benefit from underlining all technological solutions with clear and fair data use principles; i.e., ethical practices need to be embedded in responsible data collection and analysis to avoid imbalances of power through asymmetry of access to information.

**Figure S4:** Ammonia from agriculture - Business as Usual vs Ag-Climatise target

Source: Eurostat, Ammonia emissions from agriculture (source: EEA) [SDG\_02\_60]

**Recommendation 3:** Agree appropriate sustainable agri-food metrics following input from national and international experts and relevant stakeholders and located within evolving international norms. These metrics should aim to go beyond the classic measures of agricultural productivity to assess food systems against their contribution to nourishing humans and bolstering environmental outcomes (biodiversity, diverse landscape, healthy habitats). This important task should be under the remit of an independent body with no conflicts of interests – see Recommendation 22.

**Recommendation 4:** Ensure the provision of metadata, methodological notes, and sources for all government publications. Harmonise definitions and conceptualisations of key food systems concepts across government departments. Align with Open Data principles and embed ethical practices in responsible data collection and analysis.

**c. Address power imbalances in policy influence and representation (including southern women smallholders) by ensuring balanced stakeholder representation across the spheres of social, economic, and environmental sustainability in the make-up of stakeholder approaches to developing, implementing, and monitoring the transition to a sustainable food system.**

Ireland has a strong basis when it comes to participative agri-food policy-making processes, with extensive consultations prior and during the development of its strategies. It has also made progress since the consultation process for the former agri-food strategy (Food Wise 2025), for example, in terms of better gender representation.

However, gender imbalances remain and, importantly, private sector and state bodies maintain a much larger presence in decision-making processes than environmental and social sustainability representatives. In addition, greater efforts should be made to ensure the voices of low-income country partners and those impacted by Irish agriculture and food policies are integrated into policy making.

Given the complexities and divergent interests of various groups involved in food systems, mediation mechanisms to maintain the integrity of participative processes could play a role in keeping dialogue open amongst disagreeing stakeholders. This is particularly relevant in light of the criticisms raised on the UN Food System Summit's structure and public engagement. The CSM repeatedly raising concerns related to the Summit's governance, the absence of robust mechanisms to address conflicts of interest and the need to recognise human rights as the core foundational pillar for food systems. Prioritisation of the voices of those who produce most of the food that is consumed in the developing world, small scale farmers,

is deemed inadequate, resulting in the risk of the most powerful and well-resourced participants dominating the agenda.<sup>25</sup>

**Recommendation 5:** Ensure balanced stakeholder representation across the spheres of social, economic, and environmental sustainability in the make-up of future stakeholder approaches to developing, implementing, and monitoring policies for a sustainable food system that is grounded in a human rights framework.

**d. Urgently review national agri-food policies and targets to reflect the new national GHG emissions reduction target and a food systems approach**

A key challenge with the various agri-food and relevant climate action strategies is a lack of clarity around the means of achieving climate change goals, in particular the lack of specificity around sectoral targets, and the subsequent potential lack of ambition of these targets. An important step in defining these targets will be the national carbon budget allocation.

As of 2018, 91% of Irish agricultural CH<sub>4</sub> emissions came from cattle (35% dairy, 56% beef).<sup>26</sup> Agricultural methane in Ireland is responsible for an ongoing contribution to global warming; equivalent to 30 years of current energy CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>27</sup> These CH<sub>4</sub> emissions demonstrated a decreasing trend between 2005 and 2011, at which point a sharp increase occurred. This rise is associated with government policy endorsement of sectoral agricultural strategy, i.e., plans to expand milk production under Food Wise 2025, and is expected to continue rising. During the 2013 – 2018 period, as milk production rose, so did levels of nitrogen by 15.7%.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>29</sup> This ‘national climate policy failure’ since 2010 has ‘undone 20 years of mitigation effort’, seriously undermining efforts for sustainable food systems.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EN\\_CSO-Letter-to-UNSG-on-UN-food-systems-summit.pdf](http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EN_CSO-Letter-to-UNSG-on-UN-food-systems-summit.pdf) <http://www.csm4cfs.org/letter-csm-coordination-committee-cfs-chair/>

<sup>26</sup> EPA (2020) Ireland’s Provisional Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2019

<sup>27</sup> Price, P. & Mullen, B. (October 2020) Assessing methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) from Irish agriculture in climate policy 2005–2020 using the GWP100 and GWP\* greenhouse gas (GHG) equivalence metrics Working Paper, October 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Price, P. & Mullen, B. (October 2020) Assessing methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) from Irish agriculture in climate policy 2005–2020 using the GWP100 and GWP\* greenhouse gas (GHG) equivalence metrics Working Paper, October 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Department of Communication, Climate Action, and the Environment: National Energy & Climate Plan 2021 – 2030

<sup>30</sup> Price, P. & Mullen, B. (October 2020) Assessing methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) from Irish agriculture in climate policy 2005–2020 using the GWP100 and GWP\* greenhouse gas (GHG) equivalence metrics Working Paper, October 2020.

At the same time, dairy farming is more lucrative than other agricultural activities, including beef and, as such, is much more attractive for current farmers and new entrants. There are ample arguments to be made in favour of reducing herd sizes, especially for those focused on achieving reduced GHG emissions; particularly in light of the portion of agricultural GHG emissions that come from these sectors.

In addition, the national approach is heavily reliant on technological innovation to the detriment of social. Social innovation refers to the design and implementation of new solutions that imply conceptual, process, product, or organisational change, which ultimately aim to improve the welfare and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Policies are thus needed to support public, non-profit and private actors to co-construct and implement socially innovative solutions.<sup>31</sup> Social innovation is a prerequisite for solving problems such as discrimination, poverty, or pollution. It relates to changes in social relations, behaviour, norms, and values. Social innovation is considered essential as both an instrument and a process to ensure a transition towards more sustainability.<sup>32</sup> The government’s key agri-food policies would benefit from explicitly including a participative approach to shifting Ireland’s largely herd-based farming toward more sustainable practices. This will support a *just transition* for farmers and support ownership of the transition, thus increasing the likelihood of both immediate and long-term uptake.

Further, more detailed provisions could be included in the AFS 2030; for example, to show how enforceability will be implemented. In addition, other targets could be deemed lacking in ambition, such as targets to reduce ammonia emissions to 2014 levels, rather than the lower levels found in 2010.

In addition, greater emphasis could be placed on regenerative approaches rather than sustainable intensification, as the former provides greater space for the comprehensive perspective required for transformation towards sustainable food systems.

**Recommendation 6 Update:** Ag-Climatise in 2021 to reflect new national commitments to reducing GHG emissions to be set out in the forthcoming climate budgets. Aim to reduce ammonia emissions to 2010 levels. Include a greater emphasis on stimulating demand for organic produce in Ireland.

<sup>31</sup> OECD online, ‘Social Innovation’, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/regional/leed/social-innovation.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Bock, B. B. (2012) Social innovation and sustainability; how to disentangle the buzzword and its application in the field of agriculture and rural development, *Studies in Agricultural Economics* 114(2012), 57-63, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7896/j.1209>

**Recommendation 7:** Include clear mechanisms for accountability and enforcement of targets set out in national policies.

**Recommendation 8:** Immediately invest more resources in research on the feasibility and value of regenerative agricultural practices in the Irish context. Place greater emphasis on social innovation alongside technological innovation.

**e. Ensure Ireland consistently promotes sustainable food systems across relevant international policy forums.**

Ireland can demonstrate food systems leadership beyond the UN FSS: Ireland should acknowledge that the UN FSS's ambition to be a "People's Summit" and "A Solutions Summit" necessitates action on the key concerns that has mitigated against the active participation of the largest international space for civil society organisations working to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition, the CSM. Taking a leadership role on sustainable food systems requires Ireland looking beyond the UNFSS and reinforcing the mandate and role of the most inclusive intergovernmental and international global platform for food security and nutrition, the Committee on World Food Security.

While Ireland has a strong reputation when it comes to tackling hunger, in part reflected in its support for the UNFSS, recent policy documents suggest a risk of diverging from core development principles. Indeed, greater emphasis appears in the narratives (e.g. relating to the AADP) and on the use of development cooperation as a tool to benefit Irish businesses and trade, rather than emphasising support to low-income countries to achieve locally-owned sustainable food systems based on their specific climatic, cultural, and nutritional needs.

Ireland demonstrates global leadership in terms of food safety and ODA disbursements to food and nutrition security – which have remained consistently higher (as a portion of their total ODA) than their DAC peers since 2007. In addition, the data suggest that this ODA prioritises resilience and climate change adaptation, and, importantly, marginalised groups, inclusive policies, and smallholder farmers, thus aligning with at least some of the principles of an agroecological approach.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, Ireland could demonstrate greater leadership by increasing its ODA to agricultural research,

extension, and education. The progressive alignment of investments in these areas can support the scaling up and out of innovative approaches for sustainable food systems, especially those based on agroecological approaches, as highlighted by the recently adopted CFS policy recommendations.<sup>34</sup>

Ireland should ratify the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Protocol is a 2010 supplementary agreement to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity.<sup>35</sup> Ireland must also advocate at global and regional levels for strengthened equity within the WTO system; for example, to deter oligarchic type market control of genetic resources, the privatisation of biodiversity, and the appropriation of knowledge relating to genetic diversity. Engagement with African countries should consider impact assessments that identify mutually beneficial initiatives which prioritise the recipients of ODA, rather than domestic agri-businesses.

**Recommendation 9:** Mainstream a food systems approach in all institutions and organisations involved in development cooperation, including the human rights and food sovereignty components. Specifically, ensure transparency of all public funding to demonstrate the mutual benefits of funding and ensure same is not disproportionately benefitting Irish businesses to the detriment of local markets in low-income countries.

**Recommendation 10:** Increase the quantity and focus of development cooperation flows for agricultural research, extension, and education in low-income countries. Prioritise bilateral and multilateral investments in these areas towards support of indigenous institutions and bottom-up approaches.

**Recommendation 11:** Ratify the Nagoya protocol. Advocate for greater acknowledgement of traditional knowledge as a key part of the evidence-base for decision making regarding food systems. Advocate for more inclusive and fair policy and agricultural trade spaces, including a reform of the TRIPS agreement to eliminate oligarchic type market control of agri-businesses and the privatisation of biodiversity.

<sup>33</sup> HLPE (2019) Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome

<sup>34</sup> Policy recommendations on agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition, available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/nf777en/nf777en.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Nagoya Protocol On Access To Genetic Resources And The Fair And Equitable Sharing Of Benefits Arising From Their Utilization To The Convention On Biological Diversity, Article 1

**Recommendation 12:** Work to ensure Irish agri-business entrench principles of policy coherence in all engagements with low-income countries, especially the principle of ‘do no harm’. Ensure that Irish agri-business undertake a real strategic shift towards collecting locally produced produce from local family farms in export markets. For example, explore mechanisms to ensure Irish exporters reach the ECOWAS target of 25% of local milk collection by 2025. Put in place necessary supports to enable increases in local production within export countries.<sup>36</sup>

**Recommendation 13:** Introduce effective Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence legislation to ensure private sector compliance with sustainable food systems approaches. Such legislation will ensure that companies are legally obliged to fulfil human rights and environmental obligations throughout their supply chain. To this end, Ireland should work to actively support and contribute to the development of an ambitious, effective and binding UN treaty on business and human rights, to regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

**Recommendation 14:** Advocate for changes at EU and global level to relevant policy frameworks to ensure unsustainable food production around the world is phased out and sustainable methods of production are supported.

**Recommendation 15:** Ensure Ireland’s efforts for global leadership extend beyond the UN Food Systems Summit. Ireland can provide leadership, for example, towards the achievement of SDG 2, including building on its strong relationship with the Rome-based agencies to reinforce the mandate and role of the Committee on World Food Security.

**f. Place greater emphasis on local food production and distribution networks for rural revitalisation, bolstered social cohesion, and equity**

There is inadequate attention in the AFS 2030 for the prioritisation of local production and supply of food, yet the F2F strategy clearly states ambitions toward the promotion of shorter supply chains and enabling local

food production. Currently, just 43 large firms account for the majority (84%) of agri-food export wealth in Ireland. While there are numerous food security, availability, and diversity benefits to international trade and exports, more emphasis on the potential for local and shorter supply chains to bolster rural revitalisation through local economies and social cohesion is needed. This is especially pertinent, given the high volumes of imported fruit and vegetables, which could be grown locally, in contrast to the low levels of horticultural production.

More research into the history of food in Ireland, as well as greater investment in local food networks could strengthen the social sustainability of food systems. Although not typically considered in the context of agri-food policies, a barrier to social and economic sustainability remains the poor quality of digital connectivity in rural Ireland, despite the 2020 Programme for the Government’s (and previous) commitments to roll out broadband in rural areas. Further, coherence needs to be established between Ireland’s trade outcomes and the effects on local markets in low-income countries, as outlined in Recommendation 9 (above).

**Recommendation 16:** Ensure adequate investment is made to support rural economies. Urgently implement government commitments to large-scale broadband access. Invest more in programmes that can bolster local supply chains (e.g. LEADER).

**Recommendation 17:** Invest more in fresh, nutritious, and local produce. Increase subsidies for horticultural development, to reduce the reliance on imported fruit and vegetables.

**Recommendation 18:** Invest more in Ireland’s food identity. Increase funding for research into Ireland’s food history. Create a food subject in schools to educate students on healthy diets and cooking options, the links between agriculture and human and environmental health, as well as to promote domestic approaches to reduce food waste at the household level.

**g. Urgently reconsider approaches to nutrition and health in Ireland**

While a healthy diet is largely accessible in Ireland, healthy diets represent a significant portion of spending for certain demographics, such as lower-income groups and some rural households. If Ireland were to demonstrate leadership and apply True Cost Accounting

<sup>36</sup> ECOWAS (2019) Regional Offensive for local milk value chains promotion in West Africa, available at: [http://www.hubrural.org/IMG/pdf/angl.\\_projet.\\_de\\_rapport\\_final\\_ym\\_rev2-3.pdf](http://www.hubrural.org/IMG/pdf/angl._projet._de_rapport_final_ym_rev2-3.pdf)

to the agri-food decision-making processes, then such decisions would need to be accompanied with robust social safety programmes to offset a potential increase in the price of nutritious food.

Some of the current regulatory and health approaches – including self-regulation by industry and reformulated products for healthier diets – are inadequate to tackle rising obesity and non-communicable disease challenges in Ireland. There is a need for greater attention to be placed on national dietary guidelines, particularly with a view to aligning with the UN FAO HLPE’s conceptualisation of *agency* in sustainable food systems, which states citizens should have the capacity to: ‘*make their own decisions about what foods they eat [...] and to engage in processes that shape food system policies and governance*’.<sup>37</sup>

**Recommendation 19:** Establish clear targets to redirect responsibility for regulation firmly in the public sphere. Restrict or ban the (online) marketing of foods high in trans-fat, salt, or added sugars to children and adolescents up to 19 years. Policies that promote this, particularly those that promote ‘plant-forward’ diets, need to emphasise the need for a cap of starchy staple foods (e.g. at 50% of total dietary energy requirements).

**Recommendation 20:** Explore pathways forward to support the increase in the cost of food (e.g. via True Cost Accounting), alongside appropriate social safety net measures.

**Recommendation 21:** Increase funding to nutrition research in Ireland, with a view to the majority of the nutrition-related evidence-bases and research being owned by the public sector.

## h. Improve governance and transparency domestically

Coordination in complex systems can benefit from informality due to their inherent dynamic state. Indeed, informality may provide space for the flexibility required for the efficient consideration of feedback loops within the systems and subsequent adaptive decision-making.

At the same time, informality puts accountability and transparency at risk. If there are no formal mechanisms to track and follow-up on commitments made and decision-making processes, then trust can be eroded. This puts at risk the social sustainability of the policy, which needs buy-in and uptake from all stakeholders.

**Recommendation 22:** Establish a national sustainable food systems body that provides space for the voices of all stakeholders – including the most marginalised in Irish society – to be heard and integrated into decision-making. Ensure adequate mediation processes are in place to manage potential barriers to consensus. This body should have a clear mandate to influence government policy making; be tasked with ensuring adequate representation of all communities and from social, environmental, and economic sectors; ensure coherence across all policies; and develop adequate sustainability metrics for Ireland’s food system components (from agriculture to retail) founded in scientific evidence and social and economic realities.

<sup>37</sup> HLPE (2020) Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome

## TRÓCAIRE

Trócaire, Maynooth,  
Co. Kildare, Ireland  
T: +353 (0)1 629 3333  
F: +353 (0)1 629 0661  
E: [info@trocaire.org](mailto:info@trocaire.org)  
[www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)

Trócaire, 50 King Street, Belfast,  
BT1 6AD, Northern Ireland  
T: +44 (0) 2890 808030  
F: +44 (0) 2890 808031  
E: [infoni@trocaire.org](mailto:infoni@trocaire.org)  
[www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)

ROI Revenue Number: CHY 5883  
NI Revenue Number: XR10431

---

## OXFAM IRELAND

Oxfam Ireland  
Elizabeth House,  
Suite 1, 116-118 Hollywood Road,  
Belfast, BT4 1NY

t: +44 (0) 28 9023 0220  
f: +44 (0) 28 9023 7771

Charity Number  
(Northern Ireland) XN 89651  
Charity Commission for Northern Ireland  
Charity Number NIC100848  
Company Number  
(Northern Ireland) 33800

e: [info@oxfamireland.org](mailto:info@oxfamireland.org)  
[www.oxfamireland.org](http://www.oxfamireland.org)

Oxfam Ireland  
2nd Floor, Portview House  
Thorncastle Street  
Ringsend  
Dublin 4

t: +353 (0) 1 672 7662  
f: +353 (0) 1 672 7680

Charity Number  
(Republic of Ireland) 5988  
Charities Regulatory Authority  
Charity Reg. Number 20009946  
Company Number  
(Republic of Ireland) 284292