

April 22, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Vilsack:

The United Nations Secretary-General has described the September 2021 Food Systems Summit (FSS) as an opportunity for “radical reform” of global food systems. The FSS and a critical pre-Summit ministerial planned for July present a timely opportunity for the Biden administration to reignite the United States’ global leadership and advance top U.S. priorities – including fighting food and nutrition insecurity and combating climate change.

Our organizations, along with the farmers, ranchers, growers, and companies we represent, are highly engaged in the work of the FSS and have a track record of progress and ambitious commitments that align with U.S. objectives and the FSS’ focus on enhancing sustainability. Americans today have access to one of the safest, most diverse, and most affordable food supplies in history, and American agricultural and food products feed millions of people around the world - thanks in large part to the efficiency, productivity, and innovation of the U.S. agriculture and food supply chain alongside the United States’ robust science- and risk-based regulatory system. With your leadership, the FSS can have a positive impact on not only the future of our own U.S. food system but the global system, as well.

As such, the undersigned organizations urge the United States to engage at the most senior levels to ensure that the FSS’ outcomes positively impact the future of the U.S. and global food systems by supporting diverse diets and prioritizing innovation and modern agriculture as key contributors to social, economic, and environmental sustainability – the three components of sustainability as defined by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). We believe that it is critical not only for the United States to play a leadership role in driving the Summit toward practical and implementable outcomes and also for the United States to conduct extensive outreach to like-minded countries to build strong international consensus.

We are concerned that while the FSS’ overall goals are laudable, some current preparatory materials¹ and statements by key Summit leaders mischaracterize modern agriculture; denigrate efficiency, innovation, and technology; wrongly seek to limit the consumption of specific foods (including “processed” foods and nutrient-dense foods like meat, poultry, dairy, and eggs); and could result in recommendations that would be inconsistent with international trade rules.

Most importantly, without sustained, political-level U.S. leadership (in addition to important and ongoing work by career staff), the FSS’s outcomes could miss opportunities to support proven

¹ For example, see the Action Track 2 discussion paper at <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks> and synthesis paper at https://foodsystems.community/?attachment=2287&document_type=document&download_document_file=1&document_file=144.

agricultural practices that must be part of the solution to tackle food insecurity and protect our environment. In fact, encouraging shifts to less efficient production practices could worsen food insecurity and damage environmental outcomes.²

To achieve the goals mentioned above, we believe the United States should help shape Summit outcomes that:

- **Focus on ensuring all foods optimize their environmental and diet quality impacts:** The U.S. agriculture and food supply chain has significantly reduced its environmental impact in recent decades all while reducing waste and increasing production to meet the needs of a growing population. The FSS should take into account trade-offs and synergies associated with producing all foods that make up a diverse, nutritious diet and not seek to denigrate or discourage the production or consumption of specific products or categories of products.
- **Support food systems that are inclusive of science, innovation, and technology:** Modern agricultural and food production/manufacturing practices advance sustainable food systems while efficiently meeting nutritional needs. The FSS should promote rather than discourage scientific and technological advancements in food systems in order to help deliver affordable access to nutrition and support food security.
- **Allow flexibility and adaptation to diverse circumstances and contexts:** There is no single, universal diet, set of farming or production practices, or group of policies that can or should be applied in all contexts. The FSS' recommendations should avoid overly prescriptive or "one-size-fits-all" approaches and should allow adaptation as needed to suit myriad production and manufacturing systems; development circumstances; historical, cultural, and personal contexts; and other factors.
- **Reflect international consensus, respect all domestic and international obligations and commitments, and uphold good regulatory practices:** The FSS process and outcomes must reflect previous international consensus (e.g., the recently endorsed UN Committee on Food Security Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition)³ and must be consistent with domestic and international trade commitments and other legal obligations, including World Trade Organization commitments. The FSS' recommendations should also reflect approaches consistent with good regulatory practices, such as principles developed and endorsed by organizations like the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- **Support and expand the positive role of rules-based international trade:** Rules-based international trade is a major contributor to food security around the world, as it increases access, availability, and affordability of food. The United States should ensure the FSS' outcomes promote rules-based international trade and support access to international markets for agricultural and food products.

Our organizations stand ready to support U.S. engagement and look forward to partnering closely with your agencies to advance U.S. leadership and strengthen global food security and sustainability. We respectfully request to meet you or appropriate staff at your convenience to further discuss the critically important FSS.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
American Feed Industry Association
American Frozen Food Institute

² For example, a November 2020 study conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service found that rejecting modern agriculture as prescribed by the European Union's Farm to Fork strategy could increase the number of food-insecure people by 185 million if such policies are adopted globally. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/99741/eb-30.pdf?v=926.6>

³ <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1373942/icode/>

American Seed Trade Association
Animal Agriculture Alliance
Animal Health Institute
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Bayer U.S.
Biotechnology Innovation Organization
Corn Refiners Association
Crop Life America
Elanco Animal Health
International Dairy Foods Association
KCoe Isom, LLP
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Confectioners Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Milk Producers Federation
North American Meat Institute
Pet Food Institute
SNAC International
Solutions from the Land
Syngenta
The Fertilizer Institute
The Sugar Association
U.S. Dairy Export Council
U.S. Grains Council
U.S. Soybean Export Council

Cc:

Gloria Steele, Acting Administrator, United States Agency for International Development
Katherine Tai, United States Trade Representative, Office of the United States Trade Representative
Xavier Becerra, Secretary, United States Department of Health and Human Services
John Kerry, United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate
Gina McCarthy, White House National Climate Advisor