

Foreword

With only ten years left to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is increasing recognition among researchers, policy makers, stakeholders, and civil society of the crucial role played by food systems. The convening of the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 highlights the growing view that better policies for food systems are needed to deliver progress on all the SDGs

Food systems matter not only for food security and nutrition and for the livelihoods of those involved in these activities, but also for environmental sustainability. Even though these key objectives are interconnected, policy making and policy analysis have historically tended to deal with them in isolation. The concept of “food systems” draws attention to the important synergies and trade-offs that might exist between these different areas, and to the need for increased co-ordination between policy making communities.

The OECD has a long track record of providing data, evidence, and policy recommendations to improve the functioning of food systems, including on topics as diverse as obesity, water use, rural development, and global value chains. Much of this work has considered synergies and trade-offs and the challenges of policy coherence. In this sense, the OECD has worked on food systems for decades, albeit without using this terminology. This report focuses on three sets of questions. What has been the actual performance of food systems, and what has been the role of policies? How should policy makers go about designing policies that are coherent across different dimensions such as food security and nutrition, livelihoods, and environmental sustainability? What are common factors complicating the task of achieving better policies, and what can be done about them? In answering these questions, the report draws upon a wide body of research conducted by the OECD and others.

There is a clear need to reform those agricultural and fisheries support policies that are most distorting and which create negative environmental effects. Beyond that, food systems are highly complex and diverse, requiring the design of tailored and multidimensional policy recommendations. This report emphasises that processes matter for policy design in such circumstances. More specifically, better policies for food systems require robust, evidence-based, and inclusive policy processes. To develop effective policies, these processes must successfully overcome frictions related to facts, interests, and values, as explained in this report.



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From:
Making Better Policies for Food Systems

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/ddfba4de-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2021), "Foreword", in *Making Better Policies for Food Systems*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/ed93d80a-en>

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