

## Session 1 – Renewing leadership within the food system

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Janez Potočnik, Chair FFA2021 and Chairman RISE Foundation, opened the day's proceedings by welcoming participants to the FFA2021 annual conference where “quality, substance and organisation” aimed to compensate for being unable to meet in person.

Under the overarching theme of Food System Renewal, participants would discuss leadership in the food system, climate resilience, producing healthy food for all at scale, lessons from the pandemic and look to the UN Food Systems Summit in September.

The former European Commissioner emphasised the necessity of strong global cooperation backed by the best possible scientific advice to meet these challenges.

He looked to the day's discussions “for messages that would clearly follow the system change approach, connecting land and food systems, and understanding how important it is to address the drivers and pressures leading to the problems we see and face” with natural resource management at their centre.

Before the first speaker, the conference organisers shared a letter from UN Secretary-General António Guterres, stressing the urgency to transform food systems but not leave anyone behind in doing so. He welcomed the many contributions as inputs into the upcoming September Food Systems Summit, and said that the EU's Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy are important parts of the picture.

During his keynote address, Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), spelled out the scale of global hunger and malnutrition. Over three billion people cannot afford the cheapest healthy diet. The number of hungry people increased by ten million in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to have already added another 132 million.



Current consumption patterns and agri-food systems are generating a severe human, economic and environmental cost. “We urgently need to do things differently and act holistically to transform our agri-food systems,” he said. This means changing “policies, mindsets, behaviours and business models”.

The FAO, with its 194 members, is leading by example, using digital technologies to build bridges across regions and continents to transform agri-food systems and working closely with companies which it sees as key allies in providing the necessary innovative tools, resources, knowledge and technologies.

The Rome-based organisation is using four “accelerators” to advance its agenda for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life where no one is left behind. It is focusing on technology, whose full potential most governments and agri-food systems have yet to harness; innovation and science to shape food production and distribution processes; data to help evidence-based decision-making; and a fourth category of governance, human capital and institutions to ensure an inclusive agri-food system transformation.

The FAO is actively contributing to the momentum towards the UN Food Systems Summit and re-evaluating, through its COVID-19 Response and Recovery Program, how to address the root causes of hunger and strengthen resilience to future threats.

The Director-General shared China’s own experience in eradicating hunger and starvation, which in 1960 afflicted 80% of the population. It relied on an enabling policy to support food and agriculture, strong political commitment to practical help for small farmers, innovation to improve land use, investment for the necessary infrastructure and training for farmers to use technology and market information.

The UN Food Summit is proof that the political drive is there to address food systems, but it is essential to have commitment at all levels with leadership from the top and energetic involvement from the bottom. “You have to build solidarity because food is a basic human right,” he stressed, emphasising the need to respect science, ensure effective governance and give priority to the most vulnerable.

The Director-General had a clear take-away message from his upbeat address: “Let’s be a dreamer and a doer at the same time. Let’s walk the talk.”