



Transfarmation

MERCY FOR ANIMALS

TRANSFARMATION'S ROLE IN THE FOOD-SYSTEM-REFORM MOVEMENT

By Shannon Ray

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines food systems as “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 parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.”¹ According to the FAO, for food systems to be sustainable, they must be profitable throughout, provide broad benefits for society, and have a positive or neutral impact on the environment.²



Currently, the global food system meets just one of these three criteria: It is profitable—but only for some stakeholders. It relies heavily on industrial animal agriculture, which exploits farmers, degrades the environment, and causes profound animal suffering. Building a just and sustainable food system requires policymakers, companies, organizations, and individuals to work together to reform all aspects of food systems to better support people, animals, and the environment. This fact sheet provides an overview of some of the actions needed to reform food systems and identifies the role of Transfarmation™ in this movement.



1. Two important steps we must take to limit the environmental impact of food systems are improving crop yields and reducing food waste.

To build a sustainable food system, we also need reforms aimed at protecting farmers and other food workers from exploitation, providing job security and land tenure, and making farms safe places to work.

Policymakers, companies, organizations, and individuals each have roles to play in food system reform.



But the single most effective action is shifting to **plant-rich diets**,³ thus producing and consuming fewer animal products, whose environmental impacts are **disproportionately large**.⁴ This would also spare billions of animals suffering in industrial farms.





MEASURES POLICYMAKERS CAN TAKE TO IMPROVE THE FOOD SYSTEM INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Mandating that companies put **labels on their packaging** to inform consumers of the environmental impacts of various foods⁵
- Choosing plant-based options **for public food procurement**, such as for school lunch programs⁶
- Investing in research and **development of alternative proteins**⁷
- **Redirecting subsidies** for animal agriculture toward fresh produce or taxing meat to help ensure that the environmental, social, and animal welfare costs of food are **more accurately reflected** in the price of foods and that healthy and sustainable foods are affordable to consumers⁸
- Implementing legislation **aimed at protecting farmers**, food workers, and animals. In the United States, key pieces of legislation involved in food system reform include these:
 - The **Farm Bill**, the primary piece of federal legislation governing agriculture, which is amended every five years
 - The **Farm System Reform Act**, a proposed bill which would direct \$10 billion toward a voluntary debt-forgiveness program to help animal farmers transition to other activities on their land, including growing specialty crops and organic commodities.⁹ The bill would also place a moratorium on new and expanding large concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and require a phaseout of large CAFOs by 2040. The bill has been reintroduced twice since its initial introduction in 2019 but has continued to stall without a vote.
 - The **Industrial Agriculture Accountability Act**, a proposed bill that would establish higher welfare standards for farmed animals¹⁰



MEASURES COMPANIES CAN TAKE TO IMPROVE THE FOOD SYSTEM INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Providing **plant-based options** on menus and in product lines¹¹
- Placing plant-based foods in more visible or **high-traffic areas** of stores¹²



INDIVIDUALS CAN ALSO PLAY A ROLE IN FOOD SYSTEM REFORM:

- **Purchasing power:** Our choices at grocery stores and restaurants directly influence production through supply and demand.
- **Social norms:** As people see others they know reducing their consumption of animal products, they will often follow suit.¹³
- **Political activism:** Citizens can tell their representatives the changes they'd like to see in the food system. Organizations like the **Agricultural Fairness Alliance** empower people with information about legislation being considered and tools for speaking to their representatives about it.

Many organizations promote a just and sustainable food system. Some focus on helping farmers learn more environment-friendly farming practices, while others concentrate on empowering and educating citizens. The **New Roots Institute**, for instance, works to end intensive animal farming, and the **Socially Responsible Agriculture Project** protects communities from the impacts of industrial animal farms on public health, the environment, and local economies. Other organizations, such as Transformation, help farmers transition out of industrial animal agriculture.



Transformation works alongside other programs, as well as individuals, policymakers, and companies, to build collective power sufficient to realize a just and sustainable food system.

Transformation creates models of **alternative economic opportunities for animal farmers**, building solidarity with other movements and shifting societal narratives to change culture.

TRANSFORMATION PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN THE **FOOD-SYSTEM-REFORM MOVEMENT**:

- Provides research and innovation **grants** to help farmers transition out of animal agriculture, which can cost up to \$500,000. Transformation grantees have used funds to repurpose chicken houses, purchase greenhouse materials and supplies, and turn grazing pasture into sanctuary space for rescue animals.
- Offers one-on-one support to farmers, including guidance on infrastructure conversion, technical assistance, and access to experts
- Creates crop-testing facilities and learning centers
- Partners with policymakers to help shift state and federal funding, programs, and other resources toward transitioning farmers to plant-focused agriculture
- Shares success stories, lessons, and resources to help farmers who aren't affiliated with the program in their own transitions—and help new farmers avoid animal agriculture altogether by highlighting other ways to use their land to support their families and communities

Facilitating a shift toward a sustainable plant-based food system will require funding and support for programs like Transformation so they can scale up their activities to reach more farmers and expand into new areas. Future areas of opportunity include farm-transition assistance for feed-crop producers, legal assistance for contract farmers, and guidance on obtaining public conservation funding.¹⁴



ENDNOTES

- 1** Hanh Nguyen, *Sustainable Food Systems: Concept and Framework* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2018), 1.
 - 2** Nguyen, *Sustainable Food Systems*, 1.
 - 3** Michael A. Clark et al., "Global Food System Emissions Could Preclude Achieving the 1.5° and 2°C Climate Change Targets," *Science* 370, no. 6517 (November 2020): 705–8.
 - 4** J. Poore and T. Nemecek, "Reducing Food's Environmental Impacts through Producers and Consumers," *Science* 360, no. 6392 (June 2018): 987–92.
 - 5** Elisabeth H. M. Temme et al., "Demand-Side Food Policies for Public and Planetary Health," *Sustainability* 12, no. 15 (July 2020): 5924.
 - 6** Lisa Roque et al., "Plant-Based School Meals as Levers of Sustainable Food Transitions: A Narrative Review and Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Agriculture and Food Research* 10 (December 2022): 100429.
 - 7** Josephine Mylan et al., "The Big Business of Sustainable Food Production and Consumption: Exploring the Transition to Alternative Proteins," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120, no. 47 (November 2023): e2207782120.
 - 8** M. Springmann and F. Freund, "Options for Reforming Agricultural Subsidies from Health, Climate, and Economic Perspectives," *Nature Communications* 13, no. 82 (January 2022): 1–7.
 - 9** Farm System Reform Act of 2023, H.R. 797, 118th Congress (2023).
 - 10** Industrial Agriculture Accountability Act of 2023, S. 272, 118th Congress (2023).
 - 11** Niki A. Rust et al., "How to Transition to Reduced-Meat Diets That Benefit People and the Planet," *Science of the Total Environment* 718 (May 2020): 137208.
 - 12** Filippo Bianchi et al., "Restructuring Physical Micro-environments to Reduce the Demand for Meat: A Systematic Review and Qualitative Comparative Analysis," *Lancet Planetary Health* 2, no. 9 (September 2018): E384–97.
 - 13** Rust et al., "How to Transition to Reduced-Meat Diets."
 - 14** Shannon Ray, "Identifying Pathways, Barriers and Solutions to Enable a Just Livestock Transition in the United States" (unpublished master's dissertation, University of Oxford, 2023).
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