

The Vegan Society: Building Resilient Food Systems

A critical missing element in the scope for the 'Building Resilient Food Systems' investigation and report is:

Consistent Global North leadership in the transition to plant-based food systems.

At every level of Government and policy-making, this must now be explicitly, constantly emphasized:

There is an urgent, overdue necessity for consistent leadership in the Global North in making the vital, rapid shift towards sustainable, fair, plant-based food systems and away from our dependence upon industrialised exploitation of animals (The Vegan Society 2022).

The stated aim of the "Building resilient food systems" process is help achieve the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) vision – 'for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all' – as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 – 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture' - and an array of other SDGs, including SDGs 8 (economic growth), 10 (inequality), 12 (sustainability), 14 (marine environment) and 15 (terrestrial environment).

Transitioning to plant-based agriculture, aquaculture and food systems in the Global North is crucial for achieving all these aims, alongside the many other valuable elements of resilient food systems which are proposed in the report draft scope.

Research in the UK suggests that many current farmers of animals are open to transitioning to plant-based methods to create a more sustainable food system, with the right support (Thriving Beyond the Protein Challenge 2022, Planting Value In Our Food System 2021).

In response to some of the specific guiding questions of this consultation:

Q1c: What kind of inequities and power imbalances are present in food systems and how do they affect resilient FSN and especially for those groups facing multidimensional and intersectional aspects of inequality and vulnerability?

The Global North and especially, our animal farming industry lobby, has disproportionate influence in our current food system.

For example, InfluenceMap demonstrates how reveals the the European animal use industries are investing heavily in lobbying to disrupt EU policies attempting to transition to sustainable food systems less reliant upon industrial-scale farming of animals (InfluenceMap 2024). Similar tactics have been revealed by studies in the USA (Lazarus 2021).

They use their power to directly work against fair, sustainable, culturally appropriate plant-based food security, which would benefit us all but particularly those facing 'multidimensional and intersectional' food insecurity. Yet, it is rarely acknowledged that amongst the many 'inequities and power imbalances ..

present in food systems', the power of leaders and influencers in the Global North - policy-makers, large company owners and executives, large farmers, and animal farming industry lobbyists - vastly exceed the power of plant-based food system practitioners, of people in Global South, of non-human animals, and of their would-be allies.

The evidence to support plant-based global food security has been accumulating over decades. This evidence has been documented from at least 1971, when Frances Moore Lappé in 'Diet for a Small Planet' argued that basing global food policy on large-scale farming of animals was causing both hunger and environmental damage, to 'Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems' in 2019. Industrial-scale farming of animals, which relies upon feed grown on land that could grow food for human consumption, arguably causes the greatest range of harms including to people living with food insecurity, free-living animals and animals in farming (Hampton et al. 2021).

Yet, the disproportionate power of industrial farmers of animals and their supporters continues to drive expansion of their model, eroding the resilience of our food and nutrition systems, especially for those 'living with multidimensional and intersectional' food insecurity. The 2023 Global Hunger Index - a peer-reviewed annual report, jointly published by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe - concludes that global hunger remains too high, and progress on reducing hunger has largely stalled.

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At the same time, Global North countries need to be systematically reducing demand for unsustainable food, by supporting the transition the sustainable, healthy, culturally appropriate plant-based diets. This can be, for example, through improved Global North public procurement policies and public health campaigns, and re-targetting subsidies. Denmark for example is showing leadership in this area with The Danish Action Plan for Plant-based Foods (2023).

Transitioning away from industrial-scale farming of animals will reduce both the reliance of Global North countries upon food imported from regions already experiencing serious food insecurity, and our contribution to the accelerating climate crisis. The UK Food Security research network emphasises that - because we currently import over 10% of our food from Global South regions - we are decreasing their food system resilience due to the embodied water, fertility, finance, labour and energy resources as well as the food value (BBSRC 2024). In temperate zones, we will then be able to revert former extensive woodlands back from pasture to managed tree cover and use all the arable land to grow food instead of feed for industrially farmed animals. This could sequester carbon equivalent to up to 12 years of temperate country carbon dioxide emissions, based upon the UK case study (Harwatt & Hayek 2019). Both through sparing Global South food resources, and reducing our contribution to carbon dioxide emissions, this will reduce the stress upon those already living with food insecurity and extreme climate

events.

Policymakers must resist the power and influence of Global North industrial-scale farming of animals and its supporters, and instead, urgently promote the transition to a plant-based food system and stop blocking the Global South and plant-based food system practitioners who are already reducing inequality and food insecurity.

Q1f: How can resilience be evaluated and/or measured at different scales (household, community, national, regional)?

Industrial-scale farming of animals always tends to reduce resilience and cause disproportionate harm, as is currently the case in the Global North (Hampton et al. 2021).

This is, firstly, because of the disproportionate use of land, soil fertility, water, energy, finance, food and other vital resources. This use should be evaluated as waste, since we could produce significantly more food calories, protein and other nutrients, in a more resilient plant-based food system, if we moved away from industrial-scale breeding of animals for farming. The United Nations Environment Programme has estimated that, by 2050, in cereal calories alone, we could be losing sufficient to meet the needs of 3.5 billion people per year (UNEP 2009) in this way. Secondly, industrial-scale farming of animals causes disproportionate pollution of air, water and land, and damage to ecosystems. Thirdly, industrial-scale farming of animals is a significant cause of potentially epidemic and pandemic serious diseases such as COVID19, for example due to habitat destruction and over-crowding of animals in industrial farming.

Some key measures we can use to measure resilience are the proportion of calories and protein from, and funds allocated to, industrial-scale farming of animals (including fish) vs. plant-based food at each scale in the Global North.

For example, we need to track how much protein and calories are produced and imported by Global North countries such as the UK, accounting for plant-based protein and calories, industrial-scale animal farming-based protein and calories, and other sources. This will reveal how much protein, calories, and other vital nutrients such as dietary fibre, are lost to the food system at each scale because they are used to feed farmed animals (UNEP 2009), thus undermining nutrition and food system resilience and security.

We must also track how Global North Governments are shifting funding away from industrial-scale farming of animals, towards sustainable plant-based methods.

Q1h: Which and where are the weak points in global food systems in terms of ensuring the resilience of food security and nutrition?

We must be explicit about how Global North reliance upon industrial-scale farming of animals is disproportionately harmful, including to the resilience of our global food and nutrition security (Hampton et al. 2021).

These harms are due, for example, to the harms to ecosystems; the risks of serious zoonotic diseases; the disproportionate use of land, water, food, finance, energy and other resources for industrial scale farming of animals; and the calories and protein lost to the food supply chain.

The loss of calories simply from feeding cereals to industrially farmed animals, instead of using the cereals directly as human food, would add net calories to the food system sufficient for the annual needs of hundreds of millions of people (UNEP 2009).

Research in the UK suggest that many current Global North farmers of animals are open to transitioning to plant-based methods to create a more sustainable food system, with the right support (Thriving Beyond the Protein Challenge 2022, Planting Value In Our Food System 2021).

In Alternatives to Commercial Grazing (2020), experienced plant-based farmer Jenny Hall sets out viable temperate climate options for Global North farmers currently reliant on large-scale farming of grazing animals.

Therefore, these 'weak points' can significantly be addressed by urgent leadership in the Global North to promote a rapid transition towards sustainable, fair, plant-based food systems (The Vegan Society 2022).

Q2d: Are there ways of enhancing resilience to unknown and unforeseen shocks?

Diverse plant-based food systems in the Global North, which rapidly reduce our reliance upon industrial-scale farming of animals, will enhance resilience to as-yet unknown or unforeseen shocks.

Industrial-scale farming of animals always tends to reduce resilience and cause disproportionate harm (Hampton et al. 2021). For example, the EU-27 ecological footprint is disproportionately due to our food systems, and despite improvements, still significantly exceeds our sustainable regional natural resource capacity (Galli et al. 2023). Plant-based food systems including much increased Global North pulse production for food are vital for resilient global farming and food.

These changes will free up land, water, energy, finance, labour and food resources, including in the Global South, to help provide more options to cope with unforeseen and unknown shocks.

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Q4a: How are countries preparing for food systems resilience today? What are the main policies and documents that can provide information on these national level plans?

There are a few examples of better practice already underway in countries of the Global North, in the necessary shift towards sustainable, fair, plant-based Global North food systems.

Denmark has made significant national policy and finance commitments to a plant-based food plan, for health, environment and food security reasons. This is set out in *Denmark: The Danish Action Plan for Plant-based Foods (2023)* for example: “Plant-based foods are the future. .. Denmark — and the rest of the world — has faced several major crises in recent years that have affected our health, environment, climate and food supply. .. Increasing the production and consumption of plant-based foods will help solve these challenges. ..”

The Netherlands has developed, funded and begun to implement plans to reduce the numbers of animals in farming, to cut nitrogen pollution by 50%. However, this programme is currently paused. Much more work in partnership with farmers – such as proposed by The Vegan Society’s ‘Grow Green’ plant-based farming transition (Planting Value in Our Food System 2021) – is required to meet the needs of farmers who want to move out of farming animals. Global North Governments need to significantly improve our plant-protein food supply chains, including nitrogen-fixing pulse protein crops. This must include investment for farmers to reskill, re-equip and connect to distribution networks so they can make the plant-based transition smoothly.

Canada has a four-decade track-record of consistent investment in plant protein crops including peas, lentils, beans and chickpeas. Canada had only c. 200,000 hectares (ha) of pulses in 1981, which had been expanded to 3.5 million ha – 10% of field crops – by 2021, predominantly using sustainable no-till growing. Canada is now the largest exporter of pulses in the world, and projects up to 40% more hectares of pulse farming by 2030. This work is continuing, with proven results and plans improve locally viable varieties, farmer livelihoods, and sustainable, healthy, culturally appropriate food supply, as well as reduce greenhouse gases and nitrogen pollution (Pulse Canada 2023). Pulse Canada gives national representation to Canadian pulse growers, traders and processors. Canada’s International Development Research Centre notes that pulses need up to 20 times less water than the farming of animals, increasing protein food supply resilience and sparing increasingly scarce drinkable water supply.

In 2017, Portugal put into law a requirement for vegan-friendly plant-based meals in all public sector catering (Portugal Lei n.º 11/2017). Surveys by the Portuguese Vegetarian Association (AVP) suggest that more work is needed to ensure all public sector caterers are confidently implementing this provision. There are also policies in Germany, France, Sweden and the USA encouraging the inclusion of pulses in school and other public sector menus.

Since 2019, Scotland has been working towards becoming a ‘Good Food Nation’, to create a locally-centred, environmentally sustainable, healthy food system that supports flourishing rural as well as urban communities, and respects their international sustainability duties too. Their first concrete step was passing the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act in 2022. Now, Scotland is developing their Good Food Nation implementation plan. At every step, the Scottish Government is emphasising transparent, collaborative, cross-Departmental work so that everyone with a legitimate interest in food in Scotland can be suitably involved. This working philosophy should reduce historic food systems power imbalances, and allow full weight to be given to locally appropriate plant-based food system techniques.

Q4e: What gaps are there in the current portfolio of country adaptation / resilience policies?

Consistent leadership from the Global North - both collectively and on a country-by-country and region-by-region basis - in the shift towards sustainable, fair, plant-based food systems, away from reliance upon industrial-scale farming of animals, is currently missing from the portfolio of policies (The Vegan Society 2022).

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A rapid transition away from industrial-scale farming of animals is needed to reduce both the reliance of Global North countries upon food imported from regions already experiencing serious food insecurity, and our contribution to the accelerating climate crisis (Harwatt & Hayek 2019).

Sources: Share recent literature, case studies and data that could help answer the questions listed above.

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p 27, "Thus, taking the energy value of the meat produced into consideration, the loss of calories by feeding the cereals to animals instead of using the cereals directly as human food represents the annual calorie need for more than 3.5 billion people."

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