

September 13, 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., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Vilsack:

The undersigned organizations write to applaud your departments' participation in the UN Food Systems Summit (FSS) preparations, including the recently released paper "Background on the U.S. Approach to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit" and U.S. leadership at the July Pre-Summit ministerial meeting in Rome. The U.S. delegation, led by USDA Deputy Secretary Dr. Jewel Bronaugh and with the additional leadership of USAID Administrator Samantha Power, clearly demonstrated the United States' commitment to advancing modern, innovative, science- and evidence-based solutions and building diverse, healthy diets as core to sustainable food systems.

U.S. farmers, ranchers, growers, agribusinesses, and manufacturers across the supply chain work every day to turn those types of solutions into action through the use of science and innovation as tools for nourishing more people while conserving natural resources. We are committed to being a positive, consistent solution to the world's food systems challenges and making significant contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global food security. As the Summit approaches, we are eager to continue to support the administration in these shared objectives and welcome the United States' focus on accelerating achievement of the SDGs through investments in agricultural innovation to significantly improve our sustainability and food systems resilience.

As the United States continues to build on its strong investments in the Summit process to date and the global leadership it has shown over the past several months, we remain committed to working with you to accelerate progress on positive FSS outcomes. For example, we welcome the United States' continued leadership in growing the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate and advancing efforts to build a Coalition of Action that highlights the importance of innovation, resource conservation, and productivity growth. We look forward to learning more about how U.S. agriculture and food stakeholders can support and participate in positive Coalitions of Action.

In addition, we continue to prioritize UN FSS outcomes that:

- Recognize that farmers, ranchers, and manufacturers are part of the solution and must have a voice in shaping the future of the global food system;
- Support science, innovation, and technology with flexibility to adopt new opportunities as discoveries are made;
- Promote the benefits of rules-based international trade;
- Reflect existing international consensus established by member statements and respects prior domestic and international commitments;

- Recognize that all production systems should seek to minimize environmental impact without sacrificing economic sustainability, or overall diet quality and diversity; and
- Allow for flexibility to address national, cultural, personal, and other circumstances, avoiding overly-prescriptive or “one-size-fits-all” approaches.

Given its prominence as a summary of the FSS process and potential influence on UN workstreams in the future, the anticipated Secretary General’s statement remains a particularly critical focal point in the lead-up to the Summit. We greatly appreciate the work the U.S. government has undertaken thus far with UN staff and leadership to bring greater balance to the anticipated statement, particularly progress on proposed annexes. However, we urge a continued focus on working with like-minded member states to encourage a UN Secretary General FSS Statement that includes the above priorities and recognizes their important role in meeting food system challenges.

We greatly appreciate that you, your teams and your interagency partners understand the importance of these fundamental priorities. We also recognize the support you have worked to build among other like-minded member states for these principles. While the U.S. has been a constructive voice of reason and forward-looking thinking, others in the FSS process continue to make broad, unfounded characterizations or promulgate proposals that present significant concerns. These include:

- Broadly negative language from the UN Secretary General and other FSS leaders, including the Secretary General’s statement that food systems are part of a “war against nature;”
- Repeated use and amplification of terms with no internationally-agreed definitions that are not consistent with scientific evidence nor with previous international consensus (e.g., “true cost of food”);
- Ongoing attempts to denigrate efficiency and innovation and/or exclusively promote production systems that decrease productivity (e.g., exclusive promotion of agroecological production);
- Recommendations for countries to pursue policies that unjustifiably restrict production/consumption of individual foods (e.g., nutrient-dense meat, milk, and eggs; “processed” food broadly);
- Insufficient promotion of the benefits of rules-based international trade; and
- Continued lack of clarity and transparency about key FSS outcomes, including the creation, status, purpose, and governance of Coalitions of Action.

Following the Summit, we believe it will be critical to ensure that there is transparent, inclusive, evidence-based governance of any follow-up food systems work in the UN system. We support follow-up work and governance centered in Rome and strongly support a prominent role for the multistakeholder UN Committee on Food Security (CFS).

The CFS has successfully crafted balanced food systems guidelines endorsed earlier this year and developed through the inclusive, transparent and science-based approach called for by FSS leaders. Some proposals to create a new UN bureaucracy for food systems modeled after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) would pose strong concerns and raise numerous questions about why a new mechanism needs to be created and funded when a workable forum already exists.

We again thank you for the United States’ leadership on these critical issues throughout the Summit process to date. We remain ready to support continued work and advance outcomes that improve food security and sustainability in the United States and around the world.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Frozen Food Institute
American Seed Trade Association
Animal Agriculture Alliance
Animal Health Institute
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Bayer
Biotechnology Innovation Organization
Corn Refiners Association
CropLife America
Farm Credit Council
FMI-The Food Industry Association
Institute of Shortening and Edible Oils
International Dairy Foods Association
KCoE Isom, LLP
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
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
The Fertilizer Institute
The Sugar Association
U.S. Agriculture Export Development Council
U.S. Dairy Export Council
U.S. Grains Council
U.S. Meat Export Federation
U.S. Poultry & Egg Association
U.S. Soybean Export Council
Zoetis

Cc:

Samantha Power, Administrator, United States Agency for International Development