

Recommendations from the ICA to the UN Food Systems Summit 2021

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The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), a non-profit organisation based in Brussels established in 1895 and a UN ECOSOC observer since 1946, serves, unites and represents cooperatives worldwide. It presently has 320 member organisations in 111 countries representing more than 1 billion members of 3 million cooperatives around the world. The ICA works with international organisations and governments to create a legislative environment favorable for the creation and growth of cooperatives. It has four Regions (Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia-Pacific) and eight Sectoral Organisations (banking, agriculture, fisheries, insurance, health, housing, consumer, and industry & services).

Cooperatives operate around the world based on a single business model enshrined in the *ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity*. They operate in production, consumption, usage, services etc. in various sectors of the economy. More specifically, they are involved in all stages of food chains (production, processing, consumption) and in all related economic sectors in food systems around the world. They provide scale to small and marginalized groups such as small farmers, helping them access markets, information, technology and finance that they may not otherwise have enjoyed; they market safe and nutritious food at affordable prices promoting sustainable and ethical food consumption; they are involved in food waste management, environmental preservation and water protection; they provide a governance model that allows for the participation and inclusion of all stakeholders; and they redistribute to the latter part of the surplus on the purchase, sales, and remuneration prices, and this also applies to cooperative members involved as producers, users or workers in the food systems. They have significantly innovated in the fields of sustainability, circular economy, pesticide reduction, risk management of natural and man-made disasters. Their contributions in the food systems have been further highlighted recently, as they have had a key role under the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular in limiting the disruptions in the food systems.

Cooperatives in food systems were born out of the desire to empower producers and consumers as well as to shorten supply chains by eliminating unnecessary intermediaries. Throughout their history, cooperatives have been important players in food systems, using a value-based and people-centered business model that promotes sustainable production and ethical consumption.

The cooperative business model allows cooperatives to contribute significantly to sustainable development (economic, social and environmental), this also applying to the food systems. The ICA believes that cooperative members and cooperatives at large are essential for the successful functioning of the food systems, ranging from production to consumption.

On the occasion of the UN Food Systems Summit 2021, the ICA urges UN member states and international organisations to recognize the fundamental role that cooperatives play in improving the functioning of global food systems; to include cooperatives as a partner in the global effort to build a more sustainable food system; and to consider collaborating closely with cooperatives and cooperative organisations in implementing the outcome of the Summit to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

More specifically, the ICA proposes the following recommendations to governments and to cooperatives and cooperative organisations in line with the Summit's Five Action Tracks.

1. Food security in terms of both quality (nutrition) and quantity (supply)

-- Action Track 1: Ensure Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for All.

For governments:

- Considering the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed food security risks, governments should establish and promote basic policies that focus on food security, such as increasing food self-sufficiency and domestic production by fostering diverse farming entities, including small and medium-sized farmers and family farmers, and building a strong supply chain that can ensure stable food supply in any situation.
- In order to establish and promote such basic policies, governments should hold sufficient consultations with a wide range of parties concerned, including cooperatives, and provide policy support that will enable the parties concerned to work sustainably.
- The quantity and quality of food should be ensured by production and regulatory systems that are as harmonized as possible on a global level
- Governments should enhance the role of cooperatives in scaling up production and ensure a better position of the individual farmers and fishermen in the supply chain.
- Governments should promote the role of cooperatives in the role of local and international food distribution, based on the needs of consumers themselves, fostering dialogue with agricultural cooperatives, especially linked to family farming.
- Governments should promote the growth and aggregation of the cooperatives themselves.

For cooperatives and cooperative organisations:

- Cooperatives, organized by producers and consumers to build a better society, shall continue to contribute to a stable supply of food in the supply chain from sustainable food production to consumption.
- Cooperatives should reinforce and scale up their contribution to the sound development of the economy, eradicating hunger and improving people's lives through sharing means of production and marketing, negotiating prices and conditions within value chains, and creating jobs, by bringing together producers, consumers and workers who are vulnerable on their own.

2. Sustainable food consumption

-- Action Track 2: Shift to Health and Sustainable Consumption Patterns

For governments:

- Governments should set a goal to substantially reduce food loss by half by 2030.
- Governments should create a legal framework to build more resilient and sustainable food systems, reduce vulnerabilities and achieve food security.
- Governments should promote the circular economy and the reuse of by-products and processing waste.
- Governments should commit to regulatory changes needed to overcome the obstacles towards sustainable food consumption that are sometimes still present, including from environmental regulations.
- Governments should encourage research to increase the shelf life of products.
- Governments should promote food consumption education, in particular to prepare young people to assume conscious attitudes in the face of the many and different offers of the market, and starting food education already in schools.
- Governments should promote healthy diets starting from schools and educate the population to read and understand nutritional labels.
- Governments should support the efforts of cooperatives to reduce food waste.
- Governments should promote awareness-raising among consumers and businesses to reduce food loss.
- Governments should promote locally produced healthy foods
- Governments should prioritize distribution systems of food produced by cooperatives.

For cooperatives and cooperative organisations:

- Cooperatives will promote the provision of "sustainable food" through traditional food and local production for local consumption, which is rooted in the local climate and natural environment and compatible with sustainable food systems, including organic, in order to achieve healthy diets with fewer greenhouse gas emissions.
- Cooperatives based on food, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, as enterprises rooted in local communities, shall promote sustainable food production, advance agriculture, forestry, and fisheries in harmony with the

environment, and establish a food system which takes into account the needs of consumers and users as well as environmental needs.

- Cooperatives shall promote initiatives to reduce food waste throughout the food chain, including through food waste management. Cooperatives involved in food production or retailing have an important role to play as actors who, in organizing their own entrepreneurial activity are able to reduce food waste in their business, and then promote it and show the example to other enterprises. In addition, consumer cooperatives should raise awareness about the actions which the family of each cooperative member could take into consideration when thinking about the food waste in their own households.
- Cooperatives shall promote campaigns for the correct conservation of the products themselves, inviting consumers to taste food products before throwing them away.
- Cooperatives shall contribute to supporting the needy, correcting uneven distribution of food, and reduce food loss through food banks, food drives, and other activities in collaboration with governments, local governments, NPOs, and others.
- Cooperatives shall promote exchanges between consumers and people in agricultural, forestry, fishery, and food-related businesses through cooperative efforts such as direct marketing, agriculture, forestry, and fishery experience, and local production for local consumption, and will promote dietary education through collaboration among various stakeholders, taking into account the diversification of dietary habits and the characteristics of different generations.
- Cooperatives in which producers and consumers participate shall promote "ethical consumption" that takes into consideration the impact on the environment and society in both domestic and international supply chains.
- Cooperatives shall work more closely together both nationally and internationally on sustainable food consumption.

3. Promote agriculture in harmony with the environment.

-- Action Track 3: Boost Nature-Positive Food Production at Scale

For governments:

- Governments should harmonize internationally management frameworks for the registration and use of pesticides, according to risk assessment based on the latest scientific knowledge.
- Governments should finance research to develop effective and economically sustainable alternative products of organic origin and enhance the use of sources of renewable energy.
- Governments should actively promote the role of cooperatives in the ecological transition.
- Governments should provide policy support to ensure that cooperatives, which play a major role in the sustainable food systems, are able to work in stable partnerships with a wide range of other stakeholders.

For cooperatives and cooperative organisations:

- Cooperatives shall reduce risks associated with the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in each local condition through the recycling of organic resources and the use of smart agriculture.
- Cooperatives shall aim to establish agriculture, forestry and fisheries in harmony with the environment, including sustainable management of fishery resources and forests.
- Cooperatives shall work more closely together both nationally and internationally on promoting agriculture in harmony with the environment.

4. Income Security in Rural Areas

-- Action Track 4: Advance Equitable Livelihoods and Value Distribution

For governments:

- Governments should position cooperatives as important partners in building food systems.
- Governments should revitalize rural areas and to reduce regional disparities, by adopting policies that encourage the introduction of new technologies, the revitalization of local industries, and the participation of women and youth in decision-making and business.
- Governments should promote the empowerment of women and youth in rural area, in particular in vulnerable contexts.

For cooperatives and cooperative organisations:

- Cooperatives, through their business model based on the ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity (comprising a definition, 10 underlying values and 7 operational principles), shall promote sustainable development of local communities based on the needs and realities of each community, in collaboration with other cooperatives and diverse stakeholders.
- Cooperatives shall contribute to the participation of women and youth in local communities and economies and pass on the value of cooperation to younger generations, based on the cooperative principle of voluntary and open membership.
- Cooperatives shall create jobs and stabilize livelihoods in rural areas, help increase farmers' income, productivity and social protection coverage, through cooperation among diverse producers, including family farmers and small-scale producers, and through collaboration with other cooperatives and diverse stakeholders, including the promotion of intergenerational support to young people toward sustainable agriculture practices
- Cooperatives shall contribute to the revitalization of local communities by connecting producers in rural areas with consumers in urban areas through mutual understanding and active exchanges.
- Cooperatives, as active agent of change, shall work towards removing barriers and obstacles which prevent women to have the right of land ownership and be members of cooperatives.

5. Making food systems resilient

-- Action Track 5: Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Stresses

For governments:

- As the prolonged spread of the new coronavirus disease has affected food production and distribution under globalization, governments should strengthen domestic food production infrastructure and food supply chains in cooperation with cooperatives and other stakeholders.

For cooperatives and cooperative organisations:

- Cooperatives shall contribute to building resilient food systems by organizing producers, consumers, and workers, and by training human resources for organizing.
- Cooperatives, as people-centred enterprises, shall contribute to the recovery from damages caused by major natural disasters and conflicts.