

Independent Dialogue Summary
Boosting Nature Positive Agricultural Solutions: U.S. Farmer, Rancher, Grower Perspectives
April 6, 2021

Solutions from the Land convened an Independent Dialogue bringing together a diverse cross section of U.S. farmers, value chain partners, researchers and conservation partners to discuss the role of U.S. agriculture in developing resilient food systems of the future. The dialogue centered around the UN Food Systems Summit's Action Track 3, whose goal is to boost nature-positive production.

The Dialogue attracted a diverse cross section of U.S. farmers, value chain partners, researchers and conservation partners. Participants explored and shared ideas around the sustainable practices taking place on their farms/ranches and in their commodity sectors and discussed ways of further incorporating sustainable practices to reduce environmental impact and achieve outcomes that improve lives.

Key Findings

U.S. farmers, ranchers and other food producers have, for decades, practiced nature-positive agriculture, and they have steadily expanded those efforts – for both environmental and efficiency reasons.

Participants discussed decades of implementation and progress from regenerative agriculture practices in the United States, for example low and no-till practices, use of cover crops, manure management and use (e.g., biodigesters and gas lines for energy from manure, reducing waste by using hulls from one crop to mulch others, more effective irrigation, and many more. Participants are concerned the benefits of such approaches are not adequately reflected in current Action Track 3 or broader FSS preparatory processes and materials.

Scaling up the sustainable production of high quality protein, grains, and fruits and vegetables will be key to achieving the goals of the UNFSS. Producers seek a balance in how agriculture as a whole becomes more sustainable, productive, and profitable, and they envision a more collaborative approach to regulation and progress. That vision also includes promoting a full toolbox that gives farmers a range of options to creatively meet and exceed shared goals.

Producers' decades of knowledge must be incorporated in FSS outcomes, by ensuring that producers have:

- A place at the table for policymaking
- A diverse toolbox and the opportunity to experiment and innovate
- Access to localized food chains, along with broader food chains, to ensure resilience

Discussion group findings

In breakout groups, facilitators posed the following questions to stimulate discussion:

1. What innovative practices are producers currently using to sustainably intensify production, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and deliver solutions to other Sustainable Development Goals?
2. What current incentives are most successful for scaling adoption of sustainable practices and what new incentives may be necessary? What action needs to occur to create those incentives?
3. What role does technology and innovation play in promoting sustainability on your farm?
4. What are some of the regulatory or research constraints or obstacles that need to be addressed to move this forward?
5. What information do you need to understand sustainable goals and how they apply to your farm?

Across the breakout groups, common themes emerged in discussing these questions. Keeping in mind the value of diverse food production for nutrition security (not just “food security”), participants agreed that sustainability, efficiency and adaptability of practices will vary across geographies and farming conditions. Animal agriculture should be viewed as a part of this broad, diversified system – and as a solution rather than a problem, both for its contributions as a unique source of high-quality protein and other critical nutrients and for its role in land management.

Recommendations for nature-positive agriculture need include and be centered on producers but must also reach up and down the value chain, with a focus on increasing communication, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration within value chains and with regulators to find effective, flexible, diverse solutions. Timelines must also be considered, as practices and policies cannot change from one crop year to the next.

Increased investment in holistic agricultural research is needed and should include technical elements (like soil quality, water quality, air quality, renewable-energy generation) and research into changing tastes and variety relevant to specialty crops. Technology and data, for example as in precision agriculture, are driving more and more of agriculture. Technology and broadband access need to be scaled appropriately and made available and affordable to farms of all sizes, with continual outreach to keep farmers abreast of technology changes.

Participants agreed solutions will require:

1. Diversified and sustainable intensification of production strategies appropriate to different geographies, cultures and a wide variety of farm types and scales to produce high-quality protein, grains, and fruits and vegetables and reconnect production processes that reintegrate livestock, aquaculture, and crop agriculture as systems to better recycle nutrients.
2. Private activities and public policies that incentivize markets and food system distribution infrastructure – ensuring food access to low-income households and vulnerable, benefit all scales of production. and provide profitable agricultural livelihoods.
3. Evidence-based and people-centered approaches that reflect the concerns of producers and multiple stakeholder groups to implement solutions and partnerships at landscape scale.
4. 4. Systems-based agricultural research that is energized and integrated with SDG goals. Integrated research agendas should advance a systems approach to ensure health