

NUTRITION QUICK TIPS SERIES



NUTRITION-SENSITIVE FOOD PRODUCTION

This note complements Quick Tips: Nutrition-sensitive value chains and Quick Tips: Creating and maintaining consumer demand for healthy diets. This Quick Tips focuses on nutrition-sensitive food production, which is the principal element of the food supply chain. Collectively, the three Quick Tips unpack the food system (Figure 1) and provide practical tips to support the programming and design of EU support for agri-food systems that can contribute to healthy diets, food security and nutrition.

Defined broadly, **agriculture** includes farming on land of both livestock (animal husbandry) and plants (agronomy, horticulture and forestry in part) for food and other products. Similarly, aquaculture is farming of both animals (including crustaceans, finfish and molluscs) and plants (including seaweeds and freshwater macrophytes) in water. Both aquaculture and capture fisheries (often referred to as **blue food production**) contribute with agriculture to generate food supply chains. **Nutrition-sensitive food production** refers to the supply of a variety of affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate and safe foods in adequate quantity and quality to meet the dietary requirements of populations in a sustainable manner.

Every human being has the right to adequate food to ensure both food security and nutrition. This can only be achieved through **functional, sustainable food systems** that are conducive to the environment and climate and provide food to the global population that is healthy, of sufficient quality and quantity, affordable, safe and culturally acceptable¹.

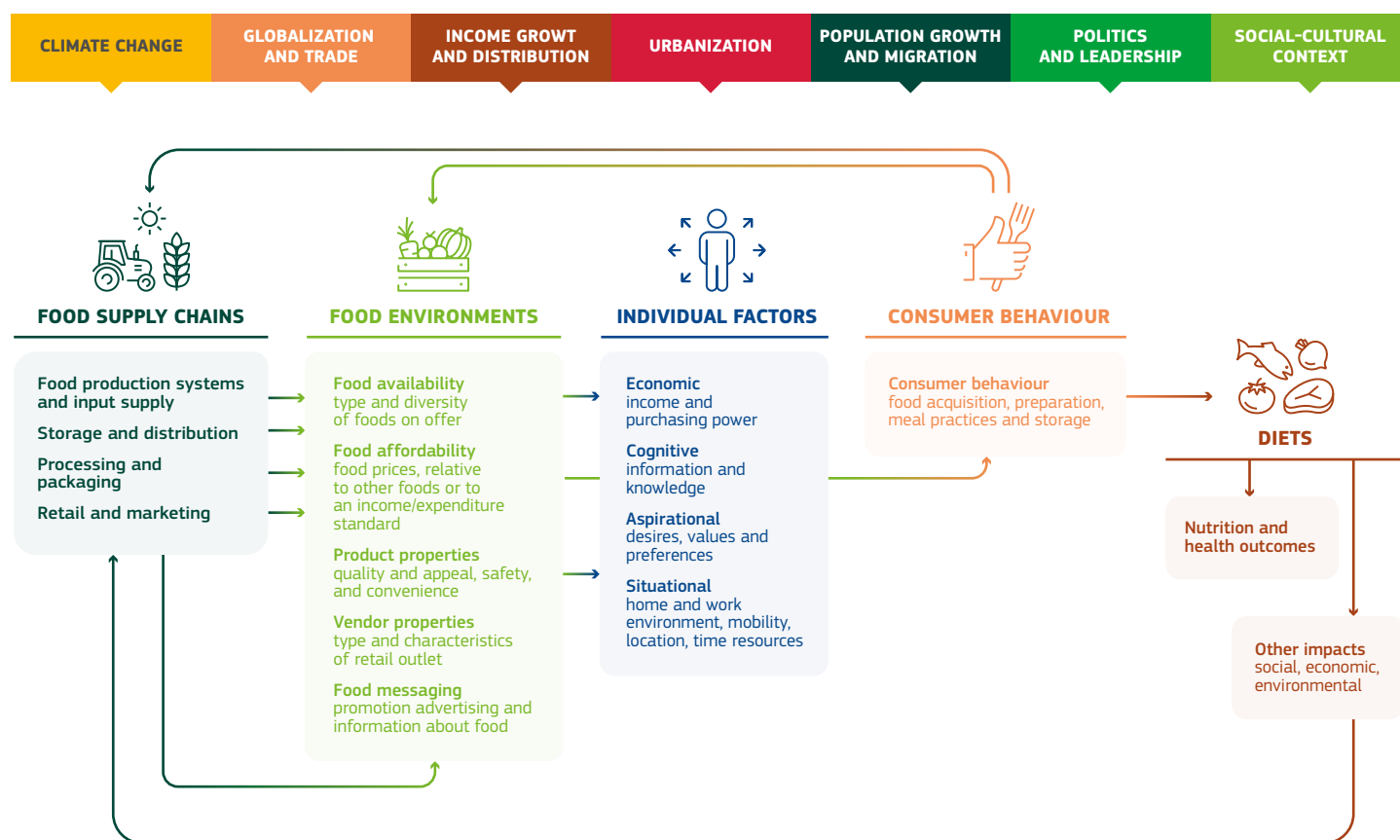
Overleaf is the *conceptual framework of food systems for diets and nutrition* applied by the Committee on World Food Security. This paper focuses on production strategies within food supply chains; other Quick Tips in the series will focus on sequential elements of the conceptual framework post farm gate².

¹ [CFS Voluntary Guidelines for Food Systems and Nutrition \(VGFSyN\)](#).

² Quick Tips on: (i) Nutrition-sensitive value chains; and (ii) Creating and maintaining consumer demand for healthy diets.

Figure 1: Food Systems Framework³

EXTERNAL DRIVERS



Agricultural production is a principal driver of the food system in most contexts, so ensuring that this key element is nutrition-sensitive, as well as generating adequate livelihoods and sustaining the environment⁴, helps determine the food environment, consumer behaviour, diets and ultimately nutrition and health outcomes for future generations⁵. Unfortunately, over the past 50 years, the conversion of natural ecosystems for crop production or pasture has reduced biodiversity and increased dependency on harmful agricultural inputs and on unsustainable farming and social practices in pursuit of more food at lower cost⁶. Enhancing **biodiversity** is a key dimension of nutrition-sensitive food production, ensuring conservation of natural resources, better resilience to climate change and improved dietary diversity and quality. Agro-ecological practices applied to land and water, which are adapted to local contexts and are respectful of the environment, are an important means to achieve this transition.

Also of importance is the need to address **inequities in the food system** from production to consumption⁷. Existing agricultural systems are largely focused on staple crops like rice,

wheat and maize, rather than producing a broader range of more diverse and healthier foods like fruits, nuts and vegetables⁸. More attention should also be given to small livestock and **blue food production**, which is an important source of protein, and generates a lower carbon footprint than animal production on land. Farmers, fishers and all who contribute to food production should derive incomes adequate for a healthy living. Smallholder farmers (increasingly women) should be empowered to diversify production and meet fast-changing rural and urban market demands as well playing a key role in enhancing diets at household level.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** underlines the importance of a resilient food system that functions in all circumstances⁹ and is capable of ensuring the supply of affordable, nutritious food to access a healthy diet, especially the most vulnerable who are most food insecure¹⁰.

3 Fanzo, J. et al., 2020. [The food systems dashboard is a new tool to inform better food policy](#). Nature Food 1:243–246. Adapted from HLPE Report on Nutrition and Food Systems, 2017.

4 The Commission's [Farm to Fork Strategy](#) sets out the inextricable links between healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet.

5 For more information on a healthy diet, refer to the Quick Tips on Creating and maintaining consumer demand for healthy diets.

6 [Food system impacts on biodiversity loss](#), Chatham House, February 2021.

7 Further elaborated in Quick Tips: Equality, equity and nutrition.

8 [Global Nutrition Report 2020](#): action on equity to end malnutrition.

9 The Commission's [Farm to Fork Strategy](#).

10 Refer to Quick Tips: Equality, equity and nutrition; Quick Tips: Nutrition, gender equality and women's empowerment; Quick Tips: Multisectoral nutrition governance; Quick Tips: Social protection and nutrition; and Quick Tips: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and nutrition.

Strategies for nutrition-sensitive food production up to the farm gate¹¹



Supporting diversification

Supporting the diverse production of nutritious foods and applying agro-ecological practices on land and in water that conserve natural resources and contribute to healthier diets and food security in both rural and urban areas.

- Focus agricultural research on the identification and promotion of underutilised and traditional crops which contribute to healthier diets, as well as the development of nutrient-dense crops/foods adapted to climate change rather than high-yielding grains.
- Promote the use of traditional crops that are adapted to local conditions and proven to be resilient and diversify the range of quality seeds accessible to farmers.
- Support the production of more diverse and productive nutritious crops and foods (vegetables, legumes, fruits, nuts, small livestock, fish, animal and dairy products).
- Introduce nutrient-enriched crops (such as the orange-fleshed sweet potato) where there is evidence of cultural acceptance, take-up and impact on nutrition.
- Promote agri-food systems where farmers, fishers and labourers alike work in decent conditions, are socially protected and receive sufficient income to ensure adequate health and nutrition.
- Promote agro-ecological practices, including regenerative farming practices that preserve/restore soil fertility, recycle organic resources, close the nutrients' cycle, conserve water retention and include intercropping.
- Support home gardening of vegetables and legumes for home consumption alongside nutrition education.
- Promote re-afforestation, indigenous foods (forest products, wild fruits, insects and herbs) and/or underutilised species.
- Promote sustainable aquaculture and capture fisheries in contexts conducive to blue food production which is not detrimental to freshwater and sea-based resources and contributes vital nutrients to local food systems.
- Improve farm facilities for storage and food processing/conservation to prevent waste, contamination and nutrient loss and to extend the shelf life of nutritious foods and seeds.



Strengthening capacity

Strengthening the knowledge and capacity of smallholder farmers, aquaculture producers and fishers (especially women) to deliver on nutrition-sensitive food production that will ensure more resilient, food secure and productive rural and peri-urban economies.

- Focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in the rural and productive economies (including equal rights to land tenure and water resources, access to financial services, tools and technologies, training and extension services)¹².
- Ensure a 'do no harm' approach in the design of interventions, through an in-depth understanding of gender dynamics in food production systems, to ensure interventions do not disproportionately overburden women (including disproportionate workload).
- Integrate nutrition into the training of all technical and community level services.
- Mainstream nutrition-sensitive food production through community development agents, extension services and farmer/pastoral/fishery field schools.

¹¹ In this context, farm gate refers to the point where agricultural and aquaculture products leave the farm and are distributed into the market or to be processed.

¹² Further elaborated in Quick Tips: Nutrition, gender equality and women's empowerment and nutrition.

- Promote appropriate technologies such as simple tools for improved tillage (for better soil conservation), terracing (for better water conservation), small-scale aquaculture, solar drying, food preservation and improved seed storage.
- Empower smallholder farmers, fishers and aquaculture producers, particularly women and small businesses, to access markets for nutritious foods by establishing farmer/fisher associations, cooperatives and food hubs.
- Ensure access to relevant financial and technical services in support of small- and medium-sized enterprises (rural and peri-urban), conducive to women farmers, fishers and aquaculture producers.
- Generate and disseminate information on available nutritious foods and relevant market information as a public good.



Frame sector policies in broader food systems strategy

Relevant sector policies need to be framed within a broader strategy and coherent vision of food systems that address inequities, reduce waste, are climate-smart, conserve natural resources, enhance diet and are attributable to better nutrition outcomes.

- Build and support the engagement of nutrition-sensitive agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries in multisectoral platforms, policies and plans at national and sub-national level¹³.
- Redirect agricultural subsidies from staple crops to stimulate higher production of alternative nutritious foods.
- Integrate blue foods for both territorial and aquatic systems into food policy making.
- Place emphasis on reducing food waste and contamination through improved storage, distribution and market infrastructure to smallholder farmers.
- Develop and/or revise food-based dietary guidelines.
- Encourage trade in a range of nutritious farm products.
- Mainstream nutrition in the curricula of agricultural colleges.
- Attribute agricultural and fishery policies and strategies to achieving healthier diets, enhanced food security and better nutrition outcomes.
- Focus on the conservation and restoration of natural resources through the systematic promotion of agro-ecological practices.
- Provide social protection to low-income, food-insecure and nutritionally vulnerable households in the agricultural economy¹⁴.



Further information and support

- [Voluntary guidelines on food systems and nutrition, CFS, February 2021.](#)
- [Nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems in practice, FAO, 2017.](#)
- [Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system](#), European Commission, May 2020.
- [42 policies and actions to orientate food systems towards healthier diets for all](#), Centre for Food Policy Research Brief, December 2020.
- [A New Strategic Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture Production and Consumption in the European Union](#), European Commission, August 2021.
- [EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices](#), 2021.
- [Designing nutrition-sensitive agriculture investments, FAO, 2015.](#)

¹³ In line with [the Scaling Up Nutrition \(SUN\) Movement Strategy 3.0](#).

¹⁴ Further elaborated in Quick Tips: Social protection and nutrition.

Relevant EU-funded actions that represent case studies for nutrition-sensitive food production:

- [Enhance Rural Nutrition](#), Myanmar
- [Agri-connect: supporting value chains for shared prosperity](#), Republic of Tanzania
- [Quality Diets for Better Health in SNNP region](#), Ethiopia
- [Conservation Agriculture Scaling UP \(CASU\)](#), Zambia
- [Building Resilience](#) in Northern Somalia
- [Resilient Fisheries and Livestock Value Chain for inclusive and sustainable growth](#) in Somalia
- Development Initiative for Northern Uganda (DINU)
- Resilience Building and Food & Nutrition Security Project, Zimbabwe
- Post-Crisis Response to Food & Nutrition Security in The Gambia
- Resilient Livelihoods & Drought Risk Management in Kenya.

The actions without a link can be found in the annex of the [6th Progress Report on the Action Plan on Nutrition](#).

The new OECD-DAC policy marker on nutrition was approved by the OECD-DAC for official development assistance reporting in 2019 with the support of the Commission and Member States. According to this marker, 'a project should be identified as nutrition related when it is intended to address the immediate or underlying determinants of malnutrition.' An [OECD-DAC Nutrition Policy Marker Handbook](#) is available.

The EU is a global leader in promoting gender equality as a key political objective of its external action and common foreign policy, aimed at accelerating progress towards the Sustainable

Development Goals. By 2025, 85% of new EU actions should contribute to achieving the objective of gender equality and women's empowerment, with more actions including it as a main objective. Women play a critical role in agriculture and food systems, and it is crucial to create conditions for shared decision-making between women and men, balancing power relationships and overcoming legal impediments, to promote their joint participation and engagement in shaping sustainable agri-food systems to improve nutrition. This is particularly urgent in the face of climate change, which threatens to trigger a dramatic deterioration of nutrition and increases in inequalities and social exclusion. Please refer to **Quick Tips: Nutrition, gender equality and women's empowerment**.

For further information contact INTPA F3 Nutrition and One Health Sector by email: intpa-f3@ec.europa.eu

© European Union 2022

Published by Directorate-General International Partnerships, Directorate Green Deal, Digital Agenda, February 2022.
The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission.

For further information: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/home_en