

# OFFERING — of — LETTERS to Congress



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## A Food System: Farm to Fork and Its Challenges

### Food Systems Are Everyone's Concern

Will there be enough food for everyone? The question has worried the world since the beginning of time. The answer lies not only in the food supply or the amount of food available but in our food system.

And that food system (the path food travels from farm to fork) has been sorely tested since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic—revealing how fragile our food system really is. Farmers struggled to address massive food loss or waste, while at the same time hundreds of millions of people worldwide faced one of the worst hunger crises in our lifetime.

A food system involves the growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming, and disposing of food. This complex web and its challenges are always evolving. Global, regional, national, and local food systems must be synchronized to ensure food gets to the people at risk of hunger.

Thus, public policies, reforms, and legislation that govern complex food systems must be refined to address the challenges.

### Food Systems and Hunger

Faulty food systems can contribute to food insecurity. When proper mechanisms



Farm workers harvesting yellow bell peppers near Gilroy, California.

within a food system and proper policies are not in place, it can result in less access to food and less access to nutrition.

Few images are more horrifying than bodies tortured by famine. Hunger kills, as it does a host of other harms short of death. Food saves people dying of hunger, so you might think of food systems as the infrastructure underpinning the cure, and they are, but sometimes, or perhaps often, food

systems are themselves doing more harm than good to people's health.

Feeding people is about more than putting calories in them. Healthy diets require a variety of nutrient-rich foods. Too much, not enough and not enough of the right kinds of food lead to poor health, making people more susceptible to diseases and their cascading effects. Globally, the leading causes of death are diet-related, and



that is an outcome directly related to the state of our global food system.

Worldwide, food systems are responsible for a significant share of greenhouse gas emissions. Without sharply reducing human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, we will lock in global warming that is sure to bring on catastrophic effects, including more hunger and malnutrition.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, essential food system workers have remained on the job: planting and harvesting crops, working on processing lines, servicing customers on checkout lines, driving, stocking, and delivering food to our tables. Yet these are among the lowest paid workers in any country. In the United States, the food system is the largest sector of employment for low-wage workers, and people of color do a disproportionate share of this work. All work has dignity and that means food system workers deserve a wage they can live on so that they can feed their own families.

It is possible to feed the world's growing population a healthy, diverse, and nutritious diet while practicing good stewardship of the natural resources we depend on.

### Recommendations for 2021 and Beyond

Food systems need to make healthy diets available and affordable to all; ensure that food is produced sustainably; and treat food system workers with dignity. Governments and the international community led by businesses and civil society working in unison must strengthen the web of global, national, and local food systems.

The potential to nourish everyone is real and within our grasp, but not without more of an effort to improve dietary quality when the stakes are highest. Women and young children

should receive the highest priority, beginning with the 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday, the launch pad for improving health throughout the life course.

How we produce food matters as much as what foods we produce. It is possible to feed the world's growing population a healthy, diverse, and nutritious diet while practicing good stewardship of the natural resources we depend on.

2021 is a pivotal year not only to make progress on better nutrition and more sustainable food systems, but also for the U.S. government to enact reforms to ensure food systems are equitable, sustainable, and resilient.

In September, the United Nations is convening the first global food systems summit in New York. This will be an opportunity for the U.S. government to demonstrate its commitment to global partnerships recognizing that all national food systems are linked together in an interdependent food system.

The next high-profile opportunity to move forward on collective climate action comes at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Scotland in November. Food systems are expected to be on the agenda, as they must, or else everything achieved at the food systems summit could at once be in jeopardy. Governments are expected to strengthen their commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector.

Finally, in December, Japan will host the Nutrition for Growth Summit and draw many of the same stakeholders attending the above to commit new resources towards addressing maternal and child nutrition.

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. Moved by God's grace in Jesus Christ, we reach out to our neighbors—whether they are next door, in the next state, or on the next continent. Each year, thousands of churches from many faith traditions take part in Bread for the World's Offering of Letters.



425 3rd Street SW, Suite 1200  
Washington, DC 20024 | 800-822-7323 | bread.org