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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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Sustainable pathways to engage food and agriculture for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Executive Summary

Since adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, countries have been progressively reviewing their national policies, programmes and monitoring capacities to set national objectives and plans that are aligned to the ambition of the SDGs. In 2016, COAG adopted the five principles of Sustainable Food and Agriculture to promote integrated approaches to transform food and agriculture systems and mainstream the agriculture sectors more fully in national plans aimed at achieving sustainable development. The interlinked characteristics of the SDGs are an opportunity for COAG, COFO and COFI to strengthen integrated approaches, decisions and actions to promote integrated policy approaches review progress and provide guidance on the direction of additional FAO support to countries in implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda.

FAO has incorporated 40 SDG targets in its results matrix to measure the impact and consistency of its work on the SDGs. It has developed practical guidelines for decision-makers to mainstream the agriculture sectors in the 2030 Agenda. As a custodian agency for 21 SDG indicators, FAO is developing and piloting the use of SDG indicators to establish baselines and track progress on several key targets, including productive and sustainable agriculture. Going forward, FAO will support countries to build an enabling policy environment to accelerate SDG implementation and achievement, promote partnerships, investments and innovative solutions on the ground, aimed primarily at smallholders and the rural poor but extending to all actors in society.

Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- Welcome FAO support to countries in mainstreaming agriculture in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the related FAO guidelines to “Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs”.

*This document can be accessed using the Quick Response Code on this page;
an FAO initiative to minimize its environmental impact and promote greener communications.
Other documents can be consulted at www.fao.org*



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- Request FAO to strengthen its assistance to countries to ensure the effective contribution of agriculture, including forestry and fisheries, in achieving the SDGs through integrated policy support, capacity building and collaborative partnerships.
- Request FAO to enhance its support to smallholders in adopting and scaling up productive and sustainable solutions, particularly by promoting their access to resources, decision-making, and new technology and agricultural innovation.
- Support FAO efforts to develop a set of SDG indicators relevant to sustainable food and agriculture and encourage their use by countries to measure progress.

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I. Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the centrality of food and agriculture in overcoming the challenges the world faces today. Sustainable food and agriculture addresses the root causes of poverty and inequality, and can unlock the potential of hundreds of millions in rural populations while protecting the natural wealth of the planet. This integrated focus aims at leaving no one behind and contributes to multiple goals across the 2030 Agenda.
2. FAO has reviewed its Strategic Framework and the Medium Term Plan (2018-21). The Organization has harmonised its expected results, identified by Strategic Objectives, to those of the 2030 Agenda, and aligned monitoring with SDGs. The results framework consequently incorporates 40 SDG targets and impact is measured through 53 SDG indicators.
3. At its 25th Session, the Committee on Agriculture recognized the key role of agriculture in achieving the SDGs and stressed the need to promote integrated approaches across agriculture, forestry and fisheries that support the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The Committee endorsed the five principles of the Common Vision on Sustainable Food and Agriculture (SFA), supported a greater role for FAO in building capacities in countries and for providing the necessary data and information, with due consideration to regional specific challenges, agreements and priorities. It invited other FAO Technical Committees, the Rome-based Agencies, and other stakeholders, for a stronger and more effective contribution of agriculture, forestry and fisheries to the 2030 Agenda.
4. The paper provides an overview of FAO's ongoing actions to support the integration of sustainable food and agriculture in national plans to achieve the SDGs, and seeks guidance on ways to further strengthen assistance to countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

II. Main activities in 2016-2018 in support of sustainable food and agriculture

5. FAO has strengthened its work to promote approaches that engage agriculture sectors and their stakeholders, together with fisheries and forestry, in the 2030 Agenda. The five principles of SFA were used in FAO's work at country level to enhance policy dialogue on more integrated, cross-sectoral and multi-objective approaches with the participation of concerned stakeholders. The principles helped map gaps and opportunities, identify priorities, identify relevant stakeholders, and set institutional and policy frameworks conducive to integrated approaches across food and agriculture sectors.
6. This was complemented by work on value chain, trade, food loss and waste reduction performed under FAO's sustainable value chain development framework, to ensure sustainability across the whole food system, from production to consumption. Country requests for support in food systems approaches were reiterated at all Regional Conferences in 2018. The work done advances implementation of the five principles for SFA, and applies interventions that simultaneously address real on-the-ground issues, the multiple constraints and potential trade-offs across the entire food system. At national level, this support included assisting the public sector in setting the enabling environment and promoting collaboration across sectors. At the global level, it involved strengthening strategic partnerships through platforms such as the Sustainable Food Systems Programme of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP).

A. Building awareness at regional and national levels

7. As the 2030 Agenda progressively shapes national policies and programmes, many food and agriculture stakeholders, including line ministries, still lack a thorough understanding of the 2030 Agenda, and its implications and opportunities for the agriculture sectors. FAO has helped build the capacity of national decision-makers through workshops at regional and national levels to raise awareness on the potential of SFA, and mobilize action in countries across relevant ministries.

Regional meetings were organized in Africa, Europe and Asia, followed by similar workshops at subregional and national levels. These workshops have been successful in sharing experiences, improving awareness, planning, and implementation of actions on the ground, as well as facilitating dialogue and building consensus across sectors and among stakeholders, and in identifying needs for financial and non-financial resources.

B. Development guidelines on mainstreaming agriculture in the 2030 Agenda

8. Mainstreaming SFA to support national objectives in achieving the 2030 Agenda requires sharing knowledge and driving innovation, leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships, and promoting an integrated, more inclusive approach. It requires an enabling environment for effective problem-solving supported by robust political and institutional commitment to inter-sectoral collaboration.

9. Applying the five principles for SFA, FAO has produced guidelines that are informed by country experience to support the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda¹. Directed to national policymakers and other relevant actors, these guidelines, were launched at a side-event of the FAO Council in June 2018. The guidelines present a coordinated approach, a step-by-step implementation pathway and practical solutions through 20 interconnected actions, each describing approaches, policies and tools that contribute to multiple SDGs. They identify synergies, help understand trade-offs and outline incentives in confronting the real issues that countries face in moving towards sustainable development.

10. The guidelines offer concrete information on the extent to which each of the 20 actions contributes to different SDG targets, and help decision makers focus their programmes in relation with expected results.

11. By fostering a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach, the guidelines also integrate the key recommendations of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 2017/44/Report) on Sustainable Forestry for food security and nutrition, which stresses that sustainable agriculture, food security and improved nutrition cannot be achieved at the expense of and without forests, and which calls for better coordination of land use policies to promote sustainable agriculture that benefits from healthy, sustainable and productive forest and tree ecosystems.

C. Recent initiatives towards more integrated approaches in agriculture

12. Based on the five principles of SFA principles, FAO, working with partners, has helped developed and facilitate a set of concrete tools for countries to prioritise SFA in an integrated way. The most recent of these initiatives include the following:

- The Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors, which took place in May 2018 in Rome. The establishment of the Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform at FAO is expected to facilitate the adoption of practices that will support the conservation and sustainable use and management of biodiversity across all agricultural sectors in an integrated manner.
- The 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology, which took place in Rome in April 2018, supported by an agroecology knowledge platform. It reported on the growing set of public policies that support agroecology and promote integrated approaches to agriculture.
- The Joint initiative “Research and Investment on Agriculture and Rural Development for Achieving SDGs 1 and 2”, initiated in 2016. FAO, IFAD, the World Bank’s Center for Development Data and the Independent Science and Partnership Council of the CGIAR are

¹ The document "Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs – 20 interconnected actions to guide decision-makers" is available at <http://www.fao.org/3/I9900EN/i9900en.pdf>

collaborating to achieve a common understanding of priorities and actions to support the achievement of SDG 1 and SDG 2.

- The Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture (WASAG), launched at the UNFCCC COP 23 in 2016. It is currently gathering 55 member organizations partnering to develop and implement solutions to the growing issue of water scarcity in agriculture.

13. In addition, a series of global knowledge products (GKPs) are being developed by FAO as tools promoting, across countries, integrated approaches to the production of crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and aquaculture, while simultaneously improve natural resources management, agro-biodiversity, income, livelihoods and adaptation to climate change.²

III. Looking forward: strengthening implementation pathways

14. Accelerating SFA will require actions in terms of policy, investments, skills, innovations, and the development of tools and methods to identify priorities, interlinkages, synergies as well as mapping and addressing trade-offs. Mobilizing the wide set of needed capacities, knowledge and resources would be greatly facilitated by establishing robust and long-lasting partnerships, a concrete shift in behaviour to sustainable-only practices based on good practices on the ground, and by the scaling up agriculture innovations, with progress measured through the SDG monitoring framework.

15. Alliances and coalitions across sectors are needed to strengthen impact, with already emerging innovative approaches most appropriate to accelerate and increase results. Of particular relevance is the need to mainstream nutrition and food systems approaches in sectoral work, improving outcomes such as nutritious and healthy diets, the sustainable use of natural resources and an adequate living standard for all.

A. Mainstreaming agriculture in the SDG in an integrated way

16. Further efforts are needed to raise awareness among key stakeholders to ensure that SFA is reflected in policy, with appropriate allocation of resources and investments supporting national planning on SDGs. FAO intends to strengthen its support to countries and provide technical assistance as required, including for better cross-sector and inter-ministerial cooperation on strategies and programmes, increase capacities of line ministries and other relevant stakeholders, broaden partnerships to involve private sector and civil society, with special attention to the policies, investments, capacity development and inclusivity.

17. The guidelines produced by FAO will be used as entry point to establish the necessary dialogues, offering a framework for an integrated and comprehensive discussion, and working out concrete solutions, based on well-established knowledge and expertise.

18. Support will also include focused assistance to countries in drafting their Voluntary National Reviews (VNR), reporting progress at the High Level Political Forum. This will allow countries to better incorporate food and agriculture to national, regional, and global follow-ups and review of the 2030 Agenda.

² These products include the Sourcebook on Climate Smart Agriculture, published in 2017, as well as the following Global Knowledge Products that are currently being developed by FAO: the Global Farmer Field School Platform; the Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform; Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) Implementation Support; The Global Platform on Integrated Management and Restoration of Landscapes and Seascapes; the Agroecology Knowledge Platform; the Water in Agriculture and Food Systems Knowledge Platform, and the Global Report on Progress toward Sustainable Agriculture.

B. Strengthening Partnerships on sustainable food and agriculture

19. The ambition, complexity and multidisciplinary nature of the 2030 Agenda, requires an equally broad involvement of all stakeholders at all levels. Exchange of knowledge, information and good practices among stakeholders, the development of common understanding of priority issues and solutions, and related investments play a fundamental role in accelerating the transition towards sustainable food and agriculture.

20. At international level, there is a need to develop further knowledge and broaden consensus about sustainable agriculture. Central to this work is the need to acknowledge that trade-offs exist and need to be managed, and that solutions are mostly context-specific. At local level the principles of the common vision for SFA need to be swiftly translated into concrete actions and tools for immediate use by countries.

21. The recent past has seen the development of negotiated sets of recommendations and concrete policy frameworks, often recognized as important tools in the follow-up and review documents of the 2030 Agenda. The Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT), the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI), and several other thematic CFS recommendations offer a starting point to develop shared views of SFA. These principles and recommendations offer concrete elements to establish national policies, investments, incentives and practices on the ground.

22. FAO will seek to build and strengthen efforts towards collaborative partnerships on SFA to address these issues. Such partnerships will offer public officials, civil society, private sector and academia a forum to advance knowledge and share expertise on SFA, and could help in the development of criteria and standards for progressive transition towards sustainable agriculture and food systems. They will offer opportunities for discussions among the RBAs, CGIAR, and Development Partners, harmonize plans and programmes at national as well as regional bodies, and foster joint and more coordinated actions and investments. They will capitalize on and add value to existing platforms and multi-stakeholder networks. The COAG could be the opportunity for a biennial meeting of such partnerships to analyse and take stock of results.

C. Scaling up sustainable practices through agriculture innovation

23. As stated above, lots of good knowledge, practices and experiences already exist on SFA. Scaling up these innovative approaches and practices will be central to transforming agriculture and food systems, and accelerating achievement of the SDGs.

24. Innovation is a main driver of agricultural and rural transformation. It refers both to technologies and practices such as improved crop varieties, agroecological practices, biotechnologies, and the use of new ICT or financial instruments, and to processes and organizational forms such as public-private partnerships, farmers' organizations, or performance contracts.

25. Research and extension play a central role in these innovation pathways. Investing in agricultural research and development and rural advisory services is essential for boosting productivity in a sustainable way, and to make innovation available to the ones who need it.

26. Recent decades have seen the emergence of more pluralistic agricultural extension and advisory services. Top-down and technology-oriented systems of extension are progressively being replaced by integrated, market-oriented and farmers-driven, multistakeholder processes. Rural advisory services are being delivered to farmers from a variety of sources, including the public sector, private agents, farmers' and non-governmental organizations.

27. The role of the public sector is evolving from a direct provider of services to a neutral and proactive enabler of and promoter of successful innovations, aligned with sustainability in all its dimensions, and with the participation and contribution of relevant stakeholders. It must create the

conditions that will enable innovation to flourish, fostering the capacity of farmers and other stakeholders, and providing incentives for them to innovate and for the private sector to support innovative and sustainable practices. Public advisory systems also should complement private and other systems and provide the type of advisory services that others do not provide.

28. It is also important to recognize that innovation is not a goal per se, recognizing that some forms of innovation may contribute to environmental degradation, be disruptive of livelihoods or exacerbate inequalities. It is important to understand which kinds of innovation need to be encouraged, where and for whom and how innovative approaches and innovation in general are conducive to the achievement of SDGs. SFA call for innovation that benefits smallholders by improving resilience, raising incomes and reducing risks, including by creating new market opportunities and encouraging diversification, or by reducing natural resource depletion and degradation should receive particular attention.

29. The FAO Agricultural Innovation Symposium for Family Farmers (to be held from 21-23 November 2018) will address these questions. It is conceived as a forum aimed at understanding the socio-economic potential of innovation, its key drivers and processes, and impact pathways, and is expected to encourage increased and better targeted investments in agricultural innovation at all levels, including the development of appropriate innovation strategies in support of countries' efforts to achieve the SDGs.

D. Measuring progress on SDGs

30. Monitoring of progress is an essential component of the 2030 Agenda. Selecting effective monitoring systems and make evidence and data available appears one of the biggest challenges in the 2030 Agenda. As work towards mainstreaming food and agriculture in the 2030 Agenda intensifies so must the capacity of countries to measure and report on progress. FAO is the custodian agency for 21 SDG global indicators and partner agency for additional 6 SDG indicators across six Goals. The Organization has strengthened its coordination capacity in this domain by creating the Office of the Chief Statistician, allocating specific resources to develop monitoring methodologies and provide capacity development to countries, primarily through training workshops and the development of e-learning modules on SDG monitoring. FAO is increasingly supporting National Statistics Offices, particularly in view of their expanded role of coordinating SDG monitoring at national level in the context of the 2030 Agenda, and support countries in reporting and analysing progress.

31. With the new SDG indicators framework in place, and increased capacity of countries to report against those, FAO will also be in a position to report and analyse progress and trends in more details at regional and global levels. For instance, SDG Indicators 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 (productivity and income of small scale food producers) and 2.4.1 (proportion agricultural land under productive and sustainable agriculture) are being submitted for endorsement by the U.N. Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs (IAEG-SDG). All three indicators are measured through farm surveys, and together with the other indicators of which FAO is custodian agency (such as women access to land 1.4.1), they will offer the evidence to map progress and tailor interventions. These are expected to be crucial to informing countries in building integrated policies.

32. FAO is consolidating information and developing platforms to make knowledge and evidence better available. The Global Knowledge Product "Global Report on Progress toward Sustainable Agriculture" is a first step towards periodic reporting on agriculture sustainability. It is expected that when data will be available, such a report will offer the international community a tool to track progress towards sustainable food and agriculture and inform policies accordingly.