

Session 5: Policy in practice

Addressing the key drivers

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Consumer choice is a myth when it comes to food. What we eat is determined by our ancestors' choices, by corporations and governments and by three mega trends: the use of fossil fuels in all parts of the food chain; the commercialization of most part of our lives; and by growth of populations and where they live. Those mega-trends are mutually reinforcing.

Industrial food and farming have been very successful in producing more and cheaper food. But it has come at a tremendous cost. The practices have wreaked havoc in nature and the food system squanders its own resource base, including the most precious resource on the planet - the soil. The very act of eating has been transformed from one of bonding to that of consumption for the sake of consumption. Almost one billion people go hungry. Concurrently, many people eat too much and a great deal of food is wasted.

We need to redefine the roles of food and farming. Food is not primarily nutrient intake and consumption but an expression of culture, a provider of meaning and should be based on relationships between humans and between humans and nature. Food is not primarily a commodity to be sold, but a basic human right. In a similar vein, nature should not primarily be private property but rather commons. Farming should primarily be about planetary stewardship, rooted in the local conditions, rather than a business, as it is our primary tool for managing critical ecosystems.

The transformation of the food system is mainly about economic and social innovation. Measures need to be adapted to local conditions but may include:

- New relationships between producers and consumers
- Non-market, non-competitive distribution forms
- Local and regional food shed strategies
- Increasing use of non-market policy instruments
 - Payment for environmental services
 - Food self-sufficiency targets
 - Public procurement of local and organic (and similar) foods
- Communitisation of resources, including seeds, breeds and knowledge