



UN
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CONFERENCE

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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Make Water Pivotal in Food Systems

March 24, 2023, 2:00-3:15pm, UN Head Quarters Conference Room 5

Organized by: Wageningen University & Research with partners¹

Background

Water plays a crucial role in our daily livelihoods and food systems worldwide. It has been recognized as an enabler for transformations of food systems. However, it is not yet pivotal in the design of the objectives and goals of our food systems. The goal of the event was to bring the role of water in food systems to the front, to allow food system stakeholders to better understand the importance of water and hence think and act differently on water use and allocation. Solutions pathways were being sought for moving forward both SDG2 as well as SDG6 simultaneously. During this side event user stories from different countries were highlighting the water challenges related to food systems and possible solution pathways. These solution pathways were further discussed with experts in the field and transformed into actions for different sectors. In the process prior to the conference, partners joined together into the Working Group on Water & Food. For details on the programme and names of the speakers, we refer to [the website](#).

Water Action Agenda

The session had a clear orientation towards action. The commitment of the partners is to work together in the coming years as the Working Group on Water & Food. Moreover, together we commit to create a holistic view on food systems and the pivotal role that water plays within these systems, to contribute actively to SDG2 and SDG6. Related to this, multiple commitments are done for the Water Action Agenda by the partners of this event. By Wageningen University and Research, two commitments are done. Firstly, [Water & Food: two year research program](#) in which 7.7 million euros will be used to do research on water & food and the interlinkages between the two. The second is to write a [Chapter on Water and Food in the Water Action Agenda](#). By other partners, like the company Van Der Hoeven Horticulture Projects, the commitment is done on [Feeding the Future; Sustainable and Water-Efficient Food Production](#). In this commitment three goals are listed looking in the Water Use Impact & Life Cycle Assessment, promoting awareness and accelerating cross-sectoral collaboration and to optimize water use within agricultural production. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has

¹ CGIAR, CIP, Clim-Eat, ECDPM, Environmental Defense Fund, Global Resilience Partnership, Global Water Partnership, IWMI, Nature's Pride, Netherlands Food Partnership, Netherlands Water Partnership, Royal Eijkelpark, SeedNL, Van der Hoeven Horticultural Projects, UN FAO, UN World Food Programme, World Bank and countries: Bangladesh, Netherlands, Spain

committed a [Soil Fertility Grant Programme, including the link with water management, climate adaptation and agrobiodiversity](#). Related to agricultural production, the Saline Water & Food Systems Partnership committed to [Develop and Implement a Global Campaign on Salinization](#). SeedNL together with the International Potato Center and the Royal Tropical Institute are joining forces to determine what actions the seed sector can take to support global water- and food security.

Key Issues

1. The agricultural sector and water sector are until today still not working sufficient together. These silos between water and food are delaying progress regarding the transition towards sustainable water and food systems .
2. Prioritization of water allocation incorporating all sectors and reassess the societal value of water for food when assessing trade-offs in water reallocations on the short-, medium- and long-term.
3. The effect of cross boundary consumption and the responsibilities of the effects of this consumption in the sourced country.
4. Food trade can mitigate water scarcity, but geopolitical interest and trade restrictions may dominate water concerns.
5. The water and food security crisis are a collective and global crisis on which we need to act together. Both crises are political and are having the largest effect on marginalised groups including women.

Key recommendations for action

1. Sustainable transformation of the food and water system is needed to improve livelihoods, resilience and biodiversity. This requires collaboration across sectors and disciplines to secure that projects and programs do have impact and work on the cause, not on the symptoms.
2. Build farmers' resilience to climate change and water risks – by using climate-smart interventions, such as drought and salinity resilient seeds, improve the moisture content in the soil, adjust production to local circumstances and use improved agricultural and water management technologies.
3. More attention is needed at the consumer side, in which the question should be answered: what food and water do we need for healthy nutritious diets? To support this each country or region should explore dietary guidelines based on nutrition and on water, where no one is left behind. Research is required here together with local stakeholders and consumers.
4. It is important to design policy frameworks that recognize economic and environmental outcomes in which sustainability is rewarded. Alignment between water, energy, food and trade policies is necessary.
5. The next step is to act, i.e. monitor progress (meeting in September) and involve missing actors in the food systems within the Global Working Group on Water & Food to assure that water is pivotal in the whole food system (e.g., retailers and consumers).