

Setting the stage for a sustainable food future: Seven takeaways from Nordic Food Day at COP23



Policy and decision-making shapes how we eat, both now and in the future. But for too long food has been the elephant in the room during the climate negotiations at the Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. While food production has been addressed through adaptation and mitigation measures, food consumption and changes to dietary habits have been majorly absent from most discussions at COP. To address this gap, the Nordic Food Policy Lab transformed the Nordic Pavilion at the COP23 into a pop-up think tank linking food production and consumption with bold actions and policies. The event, Nordic Food Day, invited the world to share ideas and experiences about the dynamic topic of food policy and its effect on the greater food system.

At the Nordic Food Policy Lab, we believe that by changing the way that we host and organize events that discuss the most pressing global issues related to food systems, we can, in turn, shift paradigms. Food can be a powerful catalyst and tool for climate action. By creating an open space to share scientific knowledge and practical ways to address wicked challenges, Nordic Food Day sparked an interesting dialogue, giving food the attention it deserves in the climate debate.

This document presents seven main outcomes from Nordic Food Day at COP23, which was held on 9 November 2017. Each outcome is backed by statements from the different sessions held over the course of the day. Moving beyond just talk, the document

identifies important areas of focus and policy action for food and climate on regional and global levels. The outcomes are presented as follows:

1. Systemic change: concerted efforts and concrete political action
2. Defying the status quo: the need for daring, evidence-based policies
3. The new normal: dietary shifts under a changing climate
4. Taking advantage: future proofing the food system
5. Together we can: the power of collaboration
6. Build your own food culture: fostering healthy and sustainable modern diets
7. Forging forward: lessons from the Nordics

**#nordicsolutions
to global challenges**



1. SYSTEMIC CHANGE: CONCERTED EFFORTS AND CONCRETE POLITICAL ACTION

For too long, food consumption has been the elephant in the room at the COP. The topic of food is often split up and put into silos. In order to encourage systemic change in our food system, concerted global and national policy efforts are required.

"If we don't change our food systems, we will never reach the target of 2°C. So, it is simple: we have no choice, we must act... It's interesting because in the beginning of the UNFCCC, we had something saying that we should take care of our food system in the first objective. But in terms of negotiations, it was simpler to target industries such as fossil fuels because it was simpler. For agriculture, it is really complex."

– Martial Bernoux, Natural Resources Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

"I think that the topic needs to have much higher priority on the agenda and there are so many different actors and values being involved. It's a global topic. I really wish that the topic of sustainable food systems will receive much higher priority. But, then again, I would really like to see everything together and mainstreamed because food is really an issue for agriculture, health, labour, private sector investment, financial flows, for public money, and for private money. We need to see food integrated into the current discussions with a much stronger focus and much more decisive outcomes and more commitment from the countries."

– Denise Loga, Co-founder and Director, Sustainable Food Academy

"We need policies that will really bring the agricultural sector into the 21st century. We are still using processes and approaches in agriculture that are over 100 years old. Take for example the fertilizer industry: we are still using an approach that uses enormous amounts of energy when there are other options on the table. There is no innovation when, at the same time, every other sector is doing something. Where is the electric car of agriculture?"

– Marc Sadler, Practice Manager, World Bank

2. DEFYING THE STATUS QUO: THE NEED FOR DARING, EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES

The current scientific consensus is building on what constitutes a healthy and sustainable diet and there are some basic principles that can pave the way for different types of daring policymaking. There is, however, still a great need for strengthening the evidence base linking environmental and human health, as done in the field of planetary health. Here, support for the scientific community is key. Further, it is also important to look to other successfully executed policies from other sectors that could be implemented in the context of food systems and climate change.

"Consumers are readier than politicians on this matter. Let us not underestimate the readiness of the public."

– Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General, Nordic Council of Ministers

"Sustainable food policy should create an enabling and regulatory environment where the private sector can invest, where private money can flow and where climate finance can flow into areas where it is needed to create taxes and subsidies to prevent perverse incentives and to encourage sustainable measures. However, the push factors must come from everyone, from consumers to farmers to companies."

– Denise Loga, Co-founder and Director, Sustainable Food Academy

"Science-led, integrated public health and nutrition approaches for a healthy diet from sustainable food systems are needed. There is no scientific agreement on what a sustainable diet is... But we need to set a definition."

– Dr. Gunhild Stordalen, President and Founder, EAT Foundation

On the lessons learned from banning public smoking in Norway: *"Firstly, I think that working knowledge-based is about setting targets and goals is another important lesson. We set rather bold targets – many people said that they were relatively unrealistic targets – but now Norway is the country in the OECD that has the fastest and most dramatic drop in daily smokers."*



I would also recommend to stay on: don't jump off the train or stop it. Most politicians are pleased with just having initiated something. We need politicians that also dare to go on until the goals are reached."

- Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General, Nordic Council of Ministers

3. THE NEW NORMAL: DIETARY SHIFTS UNDER A CHANGING CLIMATE

As our climate changes, so must our diets. Awareness of the cultural significance and values embedded in food consumption patterns and the many sustainability- and health-related opportunities and challenges that come with shifts in food culture is critical. Some of the most environmentally sustainable foods are those with the longest traditions behind them. Consider, for example, kale, seaweed, wild foraged plants and insects – foods that have been consumed for thousands of years throughout the world. These foods have also taken on a new significance in a modern context as they are not only nutritious but have a lower impact on the environment.

Meat consumption, and the consumption of animal source foods in general and of ruminants like cows in particular, must be addressed. However, careful consideration must be paid to context-specific needs: high consuming countries will need to reduce consumption and some developing countries will need to increase their consumption based on dietary recommendations. Making alternatives to meat more accessible, affordable and desirable is a part of market- and behavioural-based solutions to the reduction of meat consumption in countries where it is overconsumed.

"Do we have the right food, in the right places, for the right people, at the right time? That's the real conversation that we need to be having."

- Marc Sadler, Practice Manager, World Bank

"We shouldn't get hung up on labels like vegan, vegetarian or flexitarian. We need to eat less and better meat (or be a vegetarian or vegan if one takes that choice)."

- Stella Höynälänmaa, Conservation Officer, WWF Finland

"The first priority in changing our food culture should be to cut meat consumption. The second priority should be the consumption of more pulses and legumes."

- Reyes Tirado, Scientist, Greenpeace Research Lab

"Algae do not need to be irrigated or fertilized in the sea, and relatively small amounts of energy are required to grow algae. Algae can replace crops and food grown on land where cultivation requires much more energy. From algae you can also produce materials that bind carbon dioxide for longer periods."

- Dr. Fredrik Gröndahl, Head of Sustainable Development, Environmental Science and Engineering, KTH Royal Institute of Technology

"Chefs: these are the people who have set food culture for us... In Denmark, gastronomy has made foraging the new normal."

- Melina Shannon-DiPietro, Managing Director, MAD

"To change the way we consume meat in high-income countries, we have to acknowledge that it is not going to happen overnight. But by farming insects for animal feed we can reduce the overall environmental impact of livestock and fish production systems. At the same time, we can farm insects as a high-quality animal source food for direct consumption."

- Dr. Afton Halloran, Sustainable Food Systems Researcher and Consultant

"We can't only look at what we eat. We also need to look at what the animals that we eat are eating. So, my way into the new normal is changing the way that we see livestock. We need to move from seeing livestock as just a means of producing food and to seeing livestock as a way to manage the natural landscape and make use of things that we cannot eat. We must



stop feeding livestock food that we as humans can eat."

– Johan Karlsson, PhD Candidate, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

"I think that we need to look to the ocean for our next source of protein. We need more protein in the world and we are only sourcing less than 5% of our food from the ocean, but the ocean covers 75% of the Earth. Let's look at mesopelagic species because we are not utilising them enough."

– Hörður Kristinsson, Chair, Nordic Bioeconomy Panel

4. TAKING ADVANTAGE: FUTURE-PROOFING THE FOOD SYSTEM

Our consumption patterns have a significant effect on the ecology of our food systems. Predicting and understanding the potential knock-on effects of unsustainable production and consumption can help us to future-proof our food systems, prevent the loss of traditional foods and safeguard agricultural biodiversity.

"Agrodiversity is everything that makes up our food system: the diversity of plants and animals; diversity of soil; diversity of pollinators. We know of 5,500 species of crops for food. Right now, we receive 50 % of our calories from 3 crops. And another 12 crop and 5 animal species make up 75 % of all our calories. We are not taking advantage of the hundreds of species that can help us solve our nutrition problems and our climate change problems and our challenges of resilience and livelihood of farmers."

– Ann Tutwiler, Director General, Bioversity International

"Diversity within species is also being lost. We are concerned because one of these varieties may have the traits that we need in the future: for resilience to higher temperatures or more salinity in the soil; for better health; or for better taste. We do not know what we need in the future. The only thing we know is that for

each variety we lose we lose options for the future."

– Marie Haga, Executive Director, Crop Trust

"The way that we currently produce, eat and waste food is the biggest single driver of greenhouse gas emissions. But by getting the food system right, we also have the opportunity to unlock a whole range of other co-benefits, particularly from a human health point of view, in terms of the nutrition crisis that we face, as well as employment, and socio-economic issues."

– Dr. Sudhvir Singh, Director of Policy, EAT Foundation

5. TOGETHER WE CAN: THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

While each country faces its own food system-related challenges, there is one major lesson from the Nordic food policy experience that can benefit everyone: collaboration. The gastronomic community, as well as other unconventional actors, must be included to bring sustainable dietary recommendations and solutions closer to consumers. Including diverse actors in the debate will help us to develop robust and inclusive solutions □ actions that will bring us closer to limiting global warming to under 1.5°C.

"Chefs are so important in valorising indigenous foods and promoting biodiversity in our food systems."

– Ann Tutwiler, Director General, Bioversity International

"Youth are change makers in creating a new, sustainable food culture."

– Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General, Nordic Council of Ministers

"Academia, civil society and the private sector are vital when it comes to food and agriculture."

– Martial Bernoux, Natural Resource Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
On the WWF Meat guide: "We don't only just work



with consumers when we work with the Meat Guide. Another really big part of what we do is bringing together retailers, feed producers, meat producers – the entire value chain – to see what we can do together. This is not a problem that one organization can address alone. What we need to do is reinvent the entire food system and that's a big task. So, a lot of what we do is collaboration."

– Stella Höynälänmaa, Conservation Officer, WWF Finland

"We started to work with all possible stakeholders and today the fight against food waste in Denmark has become an industry. An app like Too Good To Go is actually making money on food waste. They are selling surplus food from supermarkets, from bakeries and restaurants and people are stopping to waste food by buying food for cheap prices."

– Selina Juul, Founder, Stop Wasting Food Denmark

"We are working with institutional food providers and getting them to adopt new standards focusing on sustainability and the idea of reducing food waste. Local communities can establish different standards for procurement focusing on supporting local economies, environment, health and animal welfare. In this way, public school food can contribute to fixing the food system."

– Erin Behl, Senior Program Coordinator, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future

6. BUILD YOUR OWN FOOD CULTURE: FOSTERING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE MODERN DIETS

Food culture is not static - it's a constantly evolving aspect of the human experience. And it's something that we can influence too! We are living in exciting times for food, with more choice than ever before. From start-ups to large multinationals, a sea change is rapidly occurring. Innovation plays an important role in this shift. But the paradigm shift towards more sustainable food systems – and the policy that facilitates it – should also look into changing basic food culture, such as shifts away from foods which

are no longer sustainable or are not part of a healthy modern diet.

"Policy and food together is not the most inviting prospect, but I would argue actually that policy is what has created our food cultures. It shapes our food lives and our food experiences."

– Dan Saladino, Journalist and Producer, BBC Food Programme

"To change dietary habits at scale, healthy sustainable food has to be not only accessible and affordable but attractive to all. Therefore, in addition to more integrated knowledge, new policies and business models, we need creative chefs and culinary professionals to create tasty, delicious plant-based dishes – that are good for us and the planet. Simply better food – a Tesla version of the plate."

– Dr. Gunhild Stordalen, President and Founder, EAT Foundation

"Do we need a new Tesla, or should we rebrand the bicycle?"

– Stella Höynälänmaa, Conservation Officer, WWF Finland

"Peruvian gastronomy is booming, based, in part, on rediscovering old varieties and old techniques. And kids today want to become chefs. They are getting some new options for future work. Gastronomy is both linking food with the biodiversity and environment, but also creating opportunities for future generations."

– Gyacs Gordon, Director, Trade Council of Peru in Hamburg

"We need our food system to change focus away from only delivering calories to delivering healthy foods and environments. Diversity is key."

– Ann Tutwiler, Director General, Bioversity International

"People have been collecting seaweed for a long time, so it is not a new food in that sense. In Asia, they have been cultivating seaweed for generations. But



in Western Europe, it is rather new.... But there is now a big demand from restaurants. And from a Swedish perspective, we can see that the Swedes have been travelling a lot to Asia and bringing this culture back to Sweden."

– Dr. Fredrik Gröndahl, KTH Royal Institute of Technology

7. FORGING FORWARD: LESSONS FROM THE NORDICS

The Nordic region has shown willingness to lead on the world stage and to export Nordic solutions for healthy, sustainable food systems. The model and process of cooperation between diverse stakeholders is a model that can be replicated elsewhere. Food is a complex, multidimensional issue that requires contributions from very diverse actors. Nordic Food Day at COP23 was like a "mini-COP for food". The Nordic countries, therefore, have a unique opportunity to provide an open-source platform for joint action and bold solutions at COP and in other global fora.

"One privilege [of my job] has been to visit different countries around the world, including the Nordic region, and to meet the generation of thinkers and people who are making a change. I've seen ideas ranging from aquaculture through to school food – innovations and ideas are different to the ones that I have encountered elsewhere, which is why I think that the Nordic region has something in particular to offer when it comes to policy, ideas and innovation."

– Dan Saladino, Journalist and Producer, BBC Food Programme

"What we started is a bottom-up initiative. We work with the grassroots and with people on the ground that are influencing the politicians. The Danish Minister of Environment and Food has a food waste partnership that includes all the stakeholders throughout the entire value chain, so it is on the political agenda as well. We do not need laws or regulations or prisons or fines to address food waste, we are doing it because

we really want to do it. And it's going very well!"

– Selina Juul, Founder, Stop Wasting Food Denmark

"Nordic Food Day showed leadership in linking climate and food systems and providing a platform to highlight the importance of food, agriculture and livestock in the climate scenarios."

– Reyes Tirado, Scientist Greenpeace Research Lab

"The [Nordic] region has already shown interest and willingness to take the lead in exporting Nordic solutions to address global challenges related to ensuring healthy, sustainable food for all. I hope that this will be backed by further commitments and concrete, measurable action globally, but equally important, in our own countries."

– Dr. Gunhild Stordalen, President and Founder, EAT Foundation

ABOUT NORDIC FOOD DAY AT COP 23

How can the Nordic countries address pressing global challenges like food waste, unsustainable diets and the loss of biodiversity? This very question was the starting point for Nordic Food Day on the 9th of November. The Nordic Pavilion at COP23 was transformed into a pop-up think tank, bringing representatives from leading organizations and institutions, together to discuss how to put food policy on the climate agenda. The thematic day, Nordic Food Day, was the kick-off of the Nordic Food Policy Lab.

www.norden.org/nordicfoodday

ABOUT NORDIC FOOD POLICY LAB

The Nordic Food Policy Lab is one of six flagship projects under the "Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges" initiative launched by the five prime ministers of the Nordic countries. Through global partnerships, Nordic Food Policy Lab curates and disseminates examples of sustainable food policy in action.

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