



# Harvesting Bold Solutions

## Ten takeaways from the Policy Lab

### "Serving-Up Solutions for Agenda 2030" at the UN HLPF



***The clock is ticking and 2030 is just around the corner. Globally, more and more people are questioning whether we can reach the SDGs and the Paris Agreement without addressing unsustainable and unhealthy food consumption patterns. Can gastronomy and food culture change offer new approaches to achieving Agenda 2030? This is precisely the question that the Government of Sweden and the Nordic Food Policy Lab asked at the dialogue Serving-Up Solutions to Agenda 2030: Food as a Golden Opportunity, during the 2018 High-level Political Forum in New York.***

Representatives of 13 country delegations, United Nations agencies, philanthropic organizations, chefs, civil society, media and the food industry sat down at the dinner table to explore tangible solutions together. These solutionists elaborated on various examples of how the transformation of food culture can simultaneously address the SDG goals of zero hunger (#2) and responsible production and consumption (#12).

This brief summarizes the co-production of new food policy insights over the course of the evening. In summary. Each take-away is backed by statements from the different Policy Labs held during the event. Moving beyond just talk, the document identifies important areas of focus and policy action for food and climate.

The 10 takeaways are:

1. Dare to address food consumption patterns in the 2030 Agenda
2. Reinvent a modern sustainable diet by looking to 'vintage-food'
3. Dream up innovative ways of changing the default options
4. Unlock the power of cities and youth to address systemic challenges
5. Harness the power of food – and chefs – to transform society
6. Recruit unconventional actors to achieve greater impact
7. Be creative and employ a range of policy approaches
8. Pass chefs the microphone
9. Use the momentum created by 'disruptive' chefs
10. Support gastronomic initiatives as antidotes to global challenges.

**#nordicsolutions  
to global challenges**

## Setting the table: Food policy tools for change

Host of Serving up Solutions for Agenda 2030, Karolina Skog, Swedish Minister for the Environment, spoke about the need to shift consumption patterns and the importance of looking to food policy for solutions to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals and the power that food and mealtimes have in bringing us together.

### TAKEAWAY 1: DARE TO ADDRESS FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN THE 2030 AGENDA

"Food has been politically sensitive. Food touches on personal choices, values and traditions. But this mustn't stop us from talking about it. As the world is convened here in New York to discuss the implementation of Agenda 2030, we have to start seriously discussing food because it is related to every single one of the Sustainable Development Goals."

– Karolina Skog, Swedish Minister for the Environment

"We must acknowledge the relationship of food with tradition and values. But at the same time, we must acknowledge that our food consumption has a big environmental impact and that the choices we make do matter. For example, we all know that in our part of the world we will need to reduce the consumption of red meat. It is not good for our health and it is not good for the planet."

– Karolina Skog, Swedish Minister for the Environment

### TAKEAWAY 2: REINVENT A MODERN SUSTAINABLE DIET BY LOOKING TO 'VINTAGE-FOOD'

"What can replace red meat in our diets? If we look back in history, a lot of the protein that was consumed in the Nordic region was based on legumes grown in our countries. Taking this up again can be an important way to blend traditions with the modern need for more sustainable diets."

– Karolina Skog, Swedish Minister for the Environment

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## Policy Lab: Tackling multiple Sustainable Development Goals with food

The evening's first discussion – led by Joe Fassler of The New Food Economy – discussed how food policy offers an integrated way to address some of the major global challenges that we are all currently facing. Food is tightly intertwined with complex issues like environmental degradation, climate change, cultural identity, animal welfare and health. This means that there are no quick fixes.

### TAKEAWAY 3: DREAM UP INNOVATIVE WAYS OF CHANGING THE DEFAULT OPTIONS

"In general, vegetable proteins are still relatively more expensive in their production. Sometimes higher than animal proteins because they are not produced on the same scale yet. We are subsidising innovation to allow companies to scale-up so that plant-based foods become more attractive both in price and variety."

– Stientje van Veldhoven, Minister for the Environment of the Netherlands

"The [Costa Rica National Programme for Healthy and Sustainable Food](#) started in 2012. We broke the traditional thematic silos by getting the Ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture and Environment to work together with local government, the private sector, producers and consumers to create a new narrative on food. The narrative, sustainable gastronomy, is the incorporation of social, environmental and economic aspects as well as the cultural side of food. We wanted people to see Costa Rica as a destination also for food and we wanted to support agrobiodiversity by encouraging the development of new and traditional products."

– Diego Padilla, Minister Counselor to the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations

"In New York, we have taken the approach to help citizens make informed choices about their food. For example, we have a salt reduction initiative where we are requiring restaurants to [place a symbol of a salt shaker on their menu next to items that have more than the total daily recommended limit for sodium.](#)"

– Barbara Turk, Director of Food Policy, New York City

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**A major arena for change in cities is through public meals. One of our programmes helps to boost public spending on fresh foods grown in New York State.**

– Barbara Turk



#### TAKEAWAY 4: UNLOCK THE POWER OF CITIES AND YOUTH TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

"A major arena for change in cities is through public meals. One of our programmes helps to [boost public spending on fresh foods](#) grown in New York State. We are now beginning a program that was started in Los Angeles called [Good Food Purchasing](#). The idea is that we can use our purchasing power as a city to affect what kind of products food producers develop. We know that this is possible: take the example of the [Urban School Food Alliance](#), which has committed to buying only antibiotic-free chicken. We want to continue to use the consumer monopoly to affect change in what is available to us nutritionally, but also to ensure that our food is sustainably sourced, locally produced and ethically-sourced. This 'procurement reform' can help us become a disruptor on a serious level."  
– Barbara Turk, Director of Food Policy, New York City

"There are new sets of demands coming from youth in our country. The Costa Rican government wants to harness that by creating education and awareness in how this demographic can influence the development of a new food economy in years to come."

– Diego Padilla, Minister Councillor to the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations

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– Diego Padilla



## **Policy Lab: Investing to meet the demand for healthier and more sustainable food**

We are all aware of the difficulties of healthy living, especially in societies that are dominated by the marketing of unhealthy foods, where sedentary behavior is the norm and where sustainable foods are often more expensive. But a growing body of research shows that we can nudge people towards healthier and sustainable choices. In fact, there are multiple opportunities where financial and social incentives can have a positive effect on human health and the environment. Implementing such programmes and initiatives requires support from both the government and the private sector.

### **TAKEAWAY 5: HARNESS THE POWER OF FOOD – AND CHEFS – TO TRANSFORM SOCIETY**

"We spend most of our lives dealing with symptoms of problems rather than the problems themselves. The way that we feed ourselves is of fundamental importance to our environment, economy, war and peace. There are not many other areas you can dedicate your time and money to that can be more transformative than focusing on what we eat. Food has such a profound impact on the quality of peoples' lives. If we do not fundamentally change, we are going to continue on a path where we are going to leave our children with a future that is so much worse than that which we have been handed. That is just not acceptable. Chefs have an important role to play here.

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– Sam Kass

For a long time, we have been asking chefs to make food that is flavourful, but not food that is good for us."

– Sam Kass, Former White House Chef and Senior Policy Advisor for Nutrition

### **TAKEAWAY 6: RECRUIT UNCONVENTIONAL ACTORS TO ACHIEVE GREATER IMPACT**

"Let's take breastfeeding as an example. All the evidence in the world says that it is highly nutritious, it is highly sustainable and it has a zero-carbon footprint. You can just go on and on about its benefits. Yet, in some parts of the world, we frown upon breastfeeding in public places. We need to look to unconventional actors like chefs to help us find new ways of making healthy and sustainable practices a part of our cultural norms."

– Meera Shekar, Global Lead, Health, Nutrition & Population, World Bank

"The tools that governments have on hand to shape culture – especially when it comes to food, one of the deepest expressions of culture – are limited. We should acknowledge that it is also a private sector endeavour to feed people. This includes businesses producing food, chefs, farmers, processors, retailers. I think that food is grossly undercapitalised, but there are a lot of investment opportunities sitting right in front of us."

– Sam Kass, Former White House Chef and Senior Policy Advisor for Nutrition



## TAKEAWAY 7: BE CREATIVE AND EMPLOY A RANGE OF POLICY APPROACHES

"While in some contexts it is true that we should not let the government tell us what to eat, we must consider all of the governments who have actually put in place different policies. Consider [soda taxes](#): the UK has done it, Hungary has done it, and so have France, Slovenia, Mexico and Saudi Arabia. We can and should encourage governments to be bold since we can learn and innovate based on both policy successes and failures... Of course, there is a multiplicity of policy interventions at hand; there is no one silver bullet. Regulation is one option – we learned this from the fight against the tobacco industry – but that doesn't mean that we don't need to work for more holistic ways of tackling obesity at the same time. We also need to use all of the other tools at our disposal to change behaviour, such as campaigns and communication."

– Meera Shekar, *Global Lead, Health, Nutrition & Population, World Bank*

"I agree that the government should not tell you what to eat. I also think that in the short-term, effects of what governmental intervention can do are limited. At the same time, we cannot limit the instruments that the government has to its disposal to direct intervention alone. It's about using the large variety of tools that the government has at hand to use its organizational, awareness building and long-term educational capacity to enable people to make the right choices and stimulate the private sector. The private sector cannot tell us where we want to go, but they can help create the solutions."

– Stientje van Veldhoven, *Netherlands Minister for the Environment*

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***We are subsidizing innovation to allow companies to scale-up so that plant-based foods become more attractive both in price and variety.***

– Stientje van Veldhoven



## Policy Lab: The changing role of chefs

We are experiencing increased willingness to develop innovative ways of working with food to solve some of the greatest global challenges. This is not only an effect of the mounting evidence that the detrimental impacts that our food production and consumption patterns have on human and planetary health, but also because new voices are joining the global debate. Chefs and other gastronomic frontrunners are becoming increasingly recognised as effective translators, helping consumers to understand the impacts associated with the food on their plate. This discussion, led by Mitchell Davis, Chief Strategy Officer of the James Beard Foundation, explored how to harness the role that food culture and gastronomy can play in policymaking processes and drew out some of the most promising and practical solutions from around the world.

### TAKEAWAY 8: PASS CHEFS THE MICROPHONE

"We spend an awful lot of time around food – celebrating it, talking about it, and dissecting it. We kept asking ourselves 'why are we not seeing progress?' The conversation around nutrition was too scientific; the conversation about agriculture was all about inputs and outputs; and food was absent from both. But I think that we haven't managed to bring this into people's lives. This is where chefs come in. They play a key role in connecting tradition and ingredients, and they set trends. They are often absent from key international events such as HLPF or they are not handed the microphone. The purpose of the [Chefs' Manifesto](#) is to ask them what we can do to help them get more involved in these global debates and bring their perspectives to the forefront to be a part of this narrative."

– Paul Newnham, Coordinator of the SDG2 Advocacy Hub

### TAKEAWAY 9: USE THE MOMENTUM CREATED BY 'DISRUPTIVE' CHEFS

"Over the last 7 years we have developed a programme, the [Chef's Bootcamp for Policy and Change](#), to cultivate a community of chefs who care about political issues to give them skills to advocate, create campaigns and to recognise the power that they have to make change in their communities. We wanted to take this 'rockstar' moment that chefs are experiencing and turn it into serious action. This idea that chefs can advocate not just for better ingredients or tastier products but also some serious and substantial food system change has now become a global movement."

– Mitchell Davis, Chief Strategy Officer of the James Beard Foundation

### TAKEAWAY 10: SUPPORT GASTRONOMIC INITIATIVES AS ANTIDOTES TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES

"We opened a fine-dining restaurant in Bolivia because we knew that if we could first grab people's attention we could then shift to addressing other larger issues like poverty, malnutrition and unemployment. Getting international attention can be a positive force for the community that we were working with because they became proud of what they were doing."

– Kamilla Seidler, Former Head Chef of Restaurant Gustu in Bolivia



# Food policy moving forward: Recommendations based on Serving up solutions to Agenda 2030

Based on the evening's discussions, five specific recommendations can be drawn out. The New Food Economy Journalist, Joe Fassler, summarises how to create more ambitious, inclusive and holistic food policy solutions.:

- 1. It's about people.** When we talk about food policy it is crucial to think about culture as a vital force. It can, in some cases, be a force against change; but when harnessed properly, it can also facilitate and expedite change. We need to remember to think about people as people when we talk about policy and not just impose top down solutions.
- 2. Connect people through a sense of shared stakes:** Finding ways to make big imposing heavy ideas foreboding concept approach- able and digestible is key. Chefs stand out as amazing popularizers and teachers. They are able to take something like food and not talk about inputs and outputs and not reduce it to calories - but connect us to what's spiritual about, culturally vital, and delicious – all of those things that we love and connect with.
- 3. Find (or create) policies where everyone has a mutual buy in and where there are mutual synergies.** For example, the New Nordic Food movement and the Costa Rica National Gastronomy Plan share some important commonalities: if we can find the links and shared values between actors, such as tourism industry, agriculture industry and food industry this can be a really be a robust and interesting approach to get things done.
- 4. Harness the power of youth.** Young people see the possibilities that exist, and they seem to understand the ways that our world can be better. And we haven't beaten them down yet to accept the way things are. That's why we need to do as much as we can to harness the power of youth.

- 5. Share a meal!** During the evening we talked about the degree to which food can connect all of us, and that's well known. Anyone who has sat down for a meal with a stranger has experienced the unusual ways that food connects us. We must acknowledge what we don't know and acknowledge that we have a lot to learn from one another. If you sit down for a meal with people from another culture that is an acknowledgment that you want to learn something, and you will.

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## ABOUT NORDIC FOOD POLICY LAB

*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, the Nordic Food Policy Lab disseminates and curates examples of Nordic food policy for health and sustainability, with the aim of highlighting solutions that can help achieve the UN Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.*

[www.norden.org/foodpolicylab](http://www.norden.org/foodpolicylab)

*Interested in learning more about Nordic food policy? Download the Solutions Menu: A Nordic Guide to Sustainable Food Policy. [www.norden.org/solutionsmenu](http://www.norden.org/solutionsmenu) And get further updates by following us on Twitter: [@nordicfoodpol](https://twitter.com/nordicfoodpol)*

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*This brief was prepared by Afton Halloran, External Consultant to the Nordic Food Policy Lab, and Marie Persson, Project Officer of the Nordic Food Policy Lab.*