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COVID-19 and the Crisis in Food Systems

“Under-valued and under-protected, the vulnerabilities of health and food systems are laid bare by COVID-19”

Brussels, 14 April 2020 –The COVID-19 pandemic shows that health and food systems, and the people underpinning them, have been “under-valued and under-protected” for years – according to the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems ([IPES-Food](#)).

But while COVID-19 has exposed critical weaknesses and inequalities, “the crisis has given a glimpse of new, more resilient ways of feeding communities”.

In a new communiqué taking stock of 100 days of the pandemic, IPES-Food points to a perfect storm at the heart of the COVID-19 crisis:

- Industrial agriculture is driving habitat loss and creating ample conditions for viruses to emerge and spread – more than **70% of the infectious diseases** that have emerged in humans since the 1940s can be traced to animals.
- Millions of people live permanently on the cusp of hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty. Before COVID-19 hit, **820 million people** were already under-nourished, with 2 billion experiencing food insecurity. A global recession will hit the vulnerable hardest.
- Global supply chains are strained with bottlenecks and export restrictions, revealing multiple vulnerabilities. Shorter chains are also facing difficulties.

Olivier De Schutter, IPES-Food co-chair and incoming UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, said:

“In reality, our food systems have been sitting on a knife-edge for decades. Children have been one school meal away from hunger, countries are one export ban away from food shortages, and farms are one travel ban away from critical labor shortages. Families in the world’s poorest regions are more vulnerable than ever to food insecurity, untenable living costs, and forced migration.”

IPES-Food calls for immediate action by world leaders to protect food workers and farmworkers, secure people’s access to food, and stave off the worst impacts of the crisis. The Panel also calls for three **structural reforms** to build resilience to future shocks:

- **Build agroecological food systems** – agroecology means resilience through genetic diversity, and the restoration of ecosystems and habitats. It reduces exposure to trade disruptions and supply chain bottlenecks. Experts [estimate](#) that, already, 30% of farms worldwide have redesigned production systems around agroecological principles.
- **Food systems for the public good** – a new pact between state and society. What started as a crisis response must turn into lasting governance for wellbeing and sustainability.
- **Reform global food systems governance** – use upcoming international milestones, from the COP26 climate conference to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, to put sustainable and resilient food systems at the top of the agenda.

The **International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems** is an independent, [expert panel](#) with members from 18 countries over 5 continents. The Panel works towards the transition to sustainable food systems worldwide.

Experts available for interview:

<p>Français (FR)</p> <p>Olivier De Schutter Co-chair, IPES-Food Professor at UCLouvain and SciencesPo</p>	<p>English (EN)</p> <p>Melissa Leach Panel Expert, IPES-Food Director, Institute of Development Studies (IDS)</p>	<p>English (EN)</p> <p>Lim Li Ching Panel Expert, IPES-Food Senior Researcher, Third World Network (TWN)</p>
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