

## Let's Fix the Food System

**The global food system is broken. There's enough food in the world to feed everyone, but millions still go hungry, including those who grow the food. Profits come before people, and large-scale commercial agriculture dominated by a few big businesses is accelerating the climate crisis.**

### The Fix the Food System campaign

Climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup> and the rising prices of food and agricultural products such as fertilisers as a result of the Ukraine crisis, have together revealed the fragility of our current global food system.

At a time of crisis these impacts are mostly felt in low-income countries, but they also have serious repercussions at home, where earlier this year it was reported that 9%<sup>2</sup> of the UK population didn't have enough affordable and nutritious food in spite of living in the fifth-largest economy in the world.

Clearly, our current global food system is not working for both people and planet. But together we can play our part in re-thinking it, challenging its imbalance of power and supporting alternative ways of producing food where communities have access to land, can choose what they grow and can make a dignified living by producing food in harmony with nature.

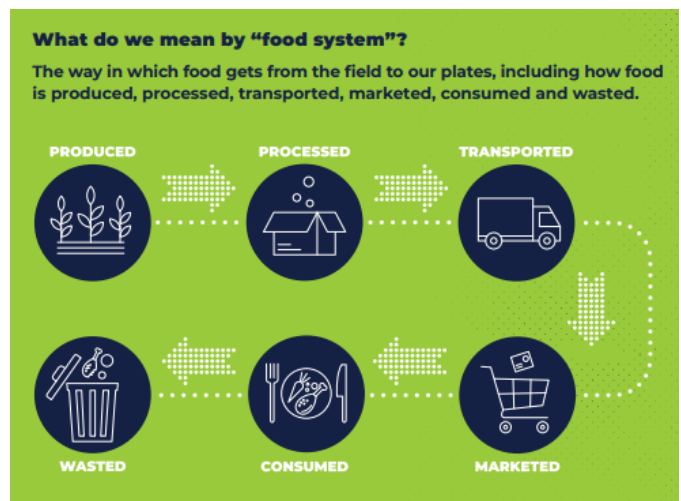
Pope Francis has reminded us that, "**Each of us has a role to play in transforming food systems for the benefit of people and the planet**".<sup>3</sup> And this is what the Fix the Food System campaign is about.

### Why the system is broken

To feed the current global population, we need to produce **3.7 billion tonnes** of food per year. But the world is currently producing much more than this: **4 billion tonnes** per year.<sup>4</sup>

Although there is enough food to feed everyone, the inadequacy and perversity of this system shows itself in the fact that around **800 million people** go hungry every day<sup>5</sup>, and of those, the majority are the ones who are growing the actual food.

This current global food system is dominated by large-scale commercial agriculture which does very little to address the climate crisis. It's also not designed for ensuring long-term food security, as it leaves countries vulnerable to the unpredictability of global markets. The current war in Ukraine has disrupted production and supply chains for exports, leaving low-income countries struggling to buy fertiliser for their farms, or food for their populations.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/online/cb4474en.html#chapter-executive\\_summary](https://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/online/cb4474en.html#chapter-executive_summary)

<sup>2</sup> <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-data-shows-food-insecurity-major-challenge-leveling-agenda>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/food/documents/papa-francesco\\_20211015\\_messaggio-giornata-alimentazione.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/food/documents/papa-francesco_20211015_messaggio-giornata-alimentazione.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-12-15/no-more-hunger-how-to-feed-everyone-on-earth-with-just-the-land-we-have>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/online/cb4474en.html#chapter-Key\\_message](https://www.fao.org/3/cb4474en/online/cb4474en.html#chapter-Key_message)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/30403/food-security-could-be-another-casualty-of-the-ukraine-russia-war?msclkid=7a36902cb41a11eca8e1ed752b9138ae>

This system is also accelerating the climate crisis: **one third of global greenhouse gases** are generated from the ways we grow, process, transport, consume and waste food<sup>7</sup> and 71%<sup>8</sup> of those greenhouse gases come from land use change; forests help to mitigate climate change as trees store carbon and in the soil around them. But in order to fulfil the demands for crops or meat for export, huge areas of forests and rainforests are destroyed to make land available for rearing cattle or for growing crops such as soya to feed the animals that we intend to eat.

Another way in which the current global food system is contributing to the climate crisis is by promoting the over-use of synthetic chemicals such as nitrogen fertiliser. To face the increasing global food demands of the market, those fertilisers are used to excess with a doubly damaging impact on the climate: greenhouse gas emissions are produced when manufacturing the fertiliser but nitrous oxide emissions are also released when the fertiliser is applied to crops.<sup>9</sup>

### Imbalance of power

The root causes of these problems arise from the unequal concentration of power in the hands of a few big businesses and institutions acting in their own interests. Public and private money has flowed to large-scale commercial agriculture dominated by big business. Priority is given to profitable crops for exports primarily geared towards the needs of Western diets, not towards the livelihood or nutritional needs of the local populations from where these crops originate. For example, over 80% of the fruit and 50% of the vegetables that we eat comes from other countries.<sup>15</sup> This imbalance of power affects communities and their local farmers in many ways:

**Community land is taken away.** Between 2006 and 2016, almost 500 such 'land grabs' took place in 78 countries<sup>10</sup>. Nearly half of these had no consultation at all with local communities before the land was taken by a big business<sup>11</sup>. Because big businesses are very powerful, the fight of local communities to retain their ancestral land is highly unfair.

**Communities cannot decide what crops to grow;** a few big businesses, powerful interests and the market do. This is based on what will make the most profit. For instance, as much as 80% of all the soya grown across the world is fed to animals that are being reared to provide meat. The UK imported about 3.5 million tonnes of soya beans in 2019 and over half of that ended up in chicken feed.<sup>12</sup>

**Communities have to buy seeds.** Rather than being able to choose their own seeds to plant each year, due to the way the system operates many farmers have little choice but to buy seeds produced by a few big businesses. Just four of these businesses control over 60% of the global seed market<sup>13</sup>.

**Communities are trapped into using chemicals.** Only four big businesses control 75% of the pesticide market, promoting the overuse of these chemicals, which takes away not only significant amount of small farmers' income but also their health: over a million people per year are killed or have serious health problems from being exposed to these chemicals.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00225-9>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00225-9>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.soilassociation.org/blogs/2020/august/14/the-impact-of-nitrogen-on-the-climate-change-crisis/?msclkid=1edfb33aae7f11ec9612ff742ba90c46>

<sup>10</sup> <https://grain.org/article/entries/5492-the-global-farmland-grab-in-2016-how-big-how-bad>

<sup>11</sup> <https://landmatrix.org/resources/land-matrix-analytical-report-iii-taking-stock-of-the-global-land-rush/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jan/14/feed-supplier-to-uk-farm-animals-still-linked-to-amazon-deforestation>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.etcgroup.org/sites/www.etcgroup.org/files/files/too\\_big\\_to\\_feed\\_short\\_report\\_etc\\_ipes\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://www.etcgroup.org/sites/www.etcgroup.org/files/files/too_big_to_feed_short_report_etc_ipes_web_final.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.pan-uk.org/key-issues/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021-theme-2-uk-food-supply-sources#united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021-theme2-indicator-2-1-3>

## Supporting alternatives

We have good news. Some of the communities who work with CAFOD are already implementing alternative food systems that are good for people and the planet.

Agro-ecology is an alternative way of producing food that works in harmony with nature. It aims to build fairer food systems that empower those who grow food, enabling communities to exercise choice over what they eat, and how and where it is produced. Agro-ecological approaches focus on growing many different crops, reintroducing indigenous species where these have been lost, reforesting land. This not only helps communities to strengthen their resilience through a more diverse diet but it also helps to tackle the climate crisis as greater biodiversity increases greenhouse gas capture.

**‘...We need a new mindset and a new holistic approach and to design food systems that protect the Earth and keep the dignity of the human person at the center; that guarantee sufficient food globally and promote decent work locally; and that feed the world today, without compromising the future...’**

**Pope Francis**

This is in stark contrast to some of the more negative impacts of large-scale commercial agriculture based on overuse of chemicals, which reduces biological diversity and has much higher greenhouse gas emissions.

These agro-ecological approaches need to be supported to tackle the climate crisis and eliminate poverty. As the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations says, “Climate change has severe negative impacts on livelihoods and food systems worldwide. Our future climate according to latest scenarios seriously undermine current efforts to improve the state of food security and nutrition, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. To address this to its full extent, there is an urgent need for transformational change of our food systems towards more sustainability and resilience. Agroecology could play a vital role here....”<sup>16</sup>

## Our call to the UK Government

Small-scale farming goes a long way to reducing poverty as it is two to four times more effective than other sectors in raising incomes among the poorest people. Small farmers are highly efficient too. They produce around **35%** of global food production on just **12%** of the land<sup>17</sup>.

They also usually produce a wider diversity of crops than larger farms. This contributes to a more nutritious diet, but also to ecological diversity which is so important for tackling the climate crisis.

Despite this transformational potential of agro-ecology to tackle the climate crisis and reduce poverty, it does not yet have a central place in UK international development policies nor in its climate strategy. But 2022 is a year of opportunity during which the UK government can support transformational action on food systems as it still holds the Climate Talks COP Presidency until the end of the year. Below are some actions that you and your parish can take:

- Act in solidarity with communities by emailing the Foreign Secretary at **cafod.org.uk/fixfood**. The UK Government should implement its COP26 commitments and support agricultural systems that tackle the climate crisis and put local communities first.
- Raise awareness about the problems generated by the current food system by organising the 7 stations community activity in your parishes: see **cafod.org.uk/food**
- If you met your MP last year as part of our Parliament in your Parish initiative, discussing the global food system with her or him could be a great next step.

**Stay in touch! To join our campaigns this year, sign up at [cafod.org.uk/actionnews](https://cafod.org.uk/actionnews)**

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.fao.org/climate-change/news/detail/en/c/1303752/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1395127/icode/>