



February 19, 2021

Dr. Seth Meyer
Chief Economist
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Jason Hafemeister
Acting Undersecretary, Trade and Foreign
Agricultural Affairs
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Dr. Meyer and Mr. Hafemeister:

The February 10, 2021 endorsement by the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) of its Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN) represents an important step forward in designing and implementing sustainable food systems that deliver nutrition around the world. It also represents the culmination of a multiyear effort that has delivered a duly negotiated consensus document on food systems that does not undermine science, international obligations, or U.S. agriculture interests.

Given the large and growing importance of exports to the United States dairy industry, the outcome of this negotiation—science-based and balanced guidelines on food systems and nutrition that may be used to implement policies in important markets around the world—is particularly significant to dairy farmers and processors. We commend the U.S. Department of Agriculture for executing a successful negotiation strategy despite challenges along the way and the diversity of views expressed within CFS. While many were involved, the effort of Elise Golan and Paul Welcher are particularly notable. These individuals persevered through many hours of physical then virtual negotiations holding firm to key U.S. priorities while taking the time to engage with stakeholders and consider feedback from organizations like ours. We greatly appreciate their efforts, and believe they deserve recognition for their dedication.

As you know, the food system concept is gaining traction globally as a means to deliver wholistic and lasting change to the way the world produces, consumes, and trades food and agricultural products. This will culminate this year in the UN Food Systems Summit, which is currently administering a process that is not fully transparent and largely driven by a UN appointed secretariat bureaucracy. Affiliations of and statements by certain Summit leaders have raised significant concern about whether Summit recommendations will be science-based among many USDA stakeholders.

The Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition are intended to inform Summit recommendations. The endorsement of science-based Guidelines that are consistent with international obligations, good regulatory practices and do not denigrate specific foods, production systems or sectors provides countries with practical, actionable recommendations to strengthen their food systems. There is significant value in the Guidelines, and we hope they will be reflected robustly in Summit recommendations. Thank you and your staff for your commitment to champion the U.S. dairy industry and U.S. agricultural interests through engagement in ongoing workstreams on food systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jaime Castaneda', written in a cursive style.

Jaime Castaneda
Senior Vice President, Policy Strategy and International Trade

cc:
Katherine Ferguson, USDA Chief of Staff
Acting Administrator Daniel Whitley, USDA Foreign Agricultural Service