

March 9, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Vilsack:

The UN Food Systems Summit (FSS) planned for September, with a pre-Summit event in July, presents an urgent opportunity to demonstrate U.S. leadership and advance two of the administration's top priorities – fighting hunger and combating climate change – while promoting and defending American agriculture. There is a pressing need to increase U.S. engagement at the highest levels to drive Summit outcomes aligned with these priorities.

UN Secretary General António Guterres in convening the FSS said the world must “radically change the way we produce, process, and consume food.”¹ The FSS process is already well underway with this ambitious charge at its core, but current U.S. leadership and technical participation is limited. To ensure the FSS results in transparent, meaningful, science-based, and outcome-oriented recommendations, the United States must urgently increase the level of its engagement and interagency coordination.

U.S. dairy farmers and processors are committed to helping cultivate and support sustainable food systems that are good for people, good for animals, and good for the planet. Our commitments, which we believe the U.S. government shares, reflect the three aspects of sustainability as defined by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – environmental, economic, and social. Our proven track record and ambitious commitments in these areas include:

- **As part of our 2050 Environmental Stewardship Goals and pioneering Net Zero Initiative, U.S. dairy will be carbon neutral or better by 2050, while also optimizing water use and improving water quality.** Modern, innovative farming practices reduced dairy's carbon footprint per gallon of milk by 19% from 2007 to 2017, while using 30% less water and 21% less land.² According to the FAO, North America was the only region in the world to reduce farm-level dairy greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions between 2005 and 2015, even as milk production increased, and has the world's lowest intensity of GHG emissions per kilogram of milk.³
- **Nutrient-dense U.S. dairy products nourish hundreds of millions of people around the world and are critical sources of essential nutrients like high-quality protein, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, iodine, and vitamins B2 and B12 which contribute to addressing all forms of malnutrition.** Nearly all international and country-level dietary guidelines recognize dairy as a critical source of essential nutrients of public health concern.
- **Approximately 95% of U.S. dairy farms are family-owned and operated, and each year farmers and dairy companies support local and national food banks to help all Americans in need.** In 2020 alone, U.S. dairy farmers contributed more than 450 million pounds of milk, cheese, yogurt, and other dairy products to Feeding America.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/leadership>

² [Journal of Animal Science](#)

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/CA2929EN/ca2929en.pdf>

Increasing U.S. engagement and building coalitions with likeminded UN member states is critical. Key Summit inputs⁴ currently mischaracterize modern agricultural production, denigrate efficiency and innovation, wrongly seek to limit consumption of nutrient-dense animal-source foods like dairy, appear inconsistent with international trade commitments, and have the potential to cause serious negative consequences by encouraging shifts to less efficient production practices that could actually increase food insecurity and greenhouse gas emissions. Without further U.S. and likeminded member state engagement these inputs will be reflected in Summit outcomes, both limiting the potential for the Summit to advance administration priorities and potentially harming U.S. agricultural interests.

The Summit's opaque planning process is currently dominated by its Secretariat and a small group of UN-appointed leaders. Active U.S. participation in the current process is to be encouraged. Most importantly, however, it is vital that senior political leaders from the United States and likeminded UN member states gain greater access to and oversight of the process before a planned pre-Summit event in July and the Summit itself in late September.

We ask that USDA and the State Department, working with relevant interagency partners, seek to ensure that all Summit outcomes or recommendations:

- Are agreed by consensus of member states and are consistent with previously agreed outcomes and obligations. The UN Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition,⁵ endorsed just last month after years of painstaking negotiations and intensive U.S. engagement to wrestle with the complexity of food systems, offer a strong starting point to help inform that process.
- Support and expand the positive role of rules-based international trade, including to improve availability and affordability of food.
- Focus on improving diet quality by encouraging consumption of nutrient-dense foods like dairy, not denigrating individual foods or nutrients, and ensuring all information provided to consumers is complete, accurate and not misleading.
- Align with science-based nutrition guidelines and international standards, support dairy's essential role in sustainable and healthy diets, and support modern dairy farming as an environmental solution.

We look forward to partnering closely with your agencies to help ensure a successful Summit. The U.S. dairy community's commitments and initiatives, innovation, and dedication to doing right by our animals and our communities put U.S. dairy at the vanguard of global efforts to create a more sustainable future and should be celebrated as models for global sustainable development at the FSS.

Engaging with the Summit in a manner that advances outcomes such as those above will demonstrate U.S. global leadership in food security and sustainability while advancing solutions that support and promote American farmers and food producers. We are available at your convenience to further discuss U.S. dairy's commitment to healthy, sustainable food systems and U.S. participation in the Food Systems Summit.

Sincerely,



Krysta Harden
President & CEO
U.S. Dairy Export Council



Jim Mulhern
President & CEO
National Milk Producers Federation

cc: Ms. Maria Pagan, Acting U.S. Trade Representative
Mr. Norris Cochran, Acting Secretary of Health and Human Services

⁴ For example, see Action Track 2 discussion paper: <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks>.

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1373942/icode/>