

Food, Climate & Farming

A deep dive into citizen-informed
directions for food systems transition



 Global Citizens'
Assembly



Food systems are often approached through efficiency and supply chains. The [Global Citizens' Assembly's] framing, connecting food to climate, health, equity, and livelihoods, should be prioritised because it reflects a more accurate understanding: food systems are deeply interconnected systems that shape and are shaped by human and ecological relationships.



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About this Deep Dive

This Deep Dive is part of a series from the Global Citizens' Assembly exploring different dimensions of food systems transformation in the context of the climate crisis.

Food systems are the focus for 2026 because they cut across climate, health, equity and livelihoods. They are where planetary pressures and everyday realities meet, from extreme weather and rising costs to trade disruption, energy shocks and growing concerns about food security. This makes them a powerful entry point into climate governance.

Its central insights are drawn from 22 Calls to Action developed through the 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate, where 105 people from 60 countries and territories deliberated on food systems and climate change over seven weeks. These insights are situated within a wider ecosystem of participation through analysis of more than 7,000 participatory processes worldwide, contributions from local assemblies and exchanges with practitioners, researchers and experts working across food systems, climate, governance and systems change, including Ertharin Cousin, former Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme; Sandrine Dixson-Declève, Former Co-President of the Club of Rome, Executive Chair of Earth4All; Kirsten Dunlop, CEO of Climate KIC; Wakanyi Hoffman, writer and African Indigenous Knowledge scholar & researcher; Dr. Bonny Ibhawoh, professor of History and Global Human Rights at McMaster University; Sir Geoff Mulgan CBE, professor of Collective Intelligence, Public Policy and Social Innovation at University College London; and Otto Scharmer, Senior Lecturer at MIT and founder of the Presencing Institute.

Together, these sources help identify emerging public priorities, tensions and directions on how food systems need to be transformed and governed to ensure they are more resilient, equitable and sustainable.

This Deep Dive should not be read as a technical policy blueprint or statistical survey. Its value lies in what emerges when people from very different realities are given the time, information and space to work through complex questions together, exploring what food-system transformation could look like in practice and what it may require from governments, institutions, communities and citizens.

For the full framing, methodology and sources, see [Appendix A](#), [Appendix B](#) and [Global Citizens Assembly website](#)

Why this matters now

“ With climate shifts, they were losing their corn harvests — and that harvest was what sustained them, often for the whole year.¹

—
Amanda, organizer of a community assembly
of women agricultural producers, Pernambuco, Brazil

Food systems are responsible for roughly a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet agriculture and food governance remain comparatively underdeveloped within international climate governance.

At the same time, farming communities are increasingly being asked to navigate the transition to more sustainable food systems while already living with the impacts of climate change.

Across the Global Assembly on Food and Climate and wider participation ecosystem, people consistently connected farming to much more than agricultural output. They spoke about livelihoods, land, culture, sovereignty, health, identity and resilience. Participation functioned not simply as consultation, but as a practical tool for navigating these questions collectively, helping communities work through trade-offs, identify shared priorities and build the legitimacy needed for collective action.

Taken together, these participatory processes point towards a clear message: **the challenge is not simply knowing what needs to change, but building the legitimacy and collective mandate needed to act.** The question is no longer whether food systems will change, but how and who gets to shape that transition.



Public priorities emerging



Farmers are the most crucial decision makers in this system. They connect policies, technology, and land with the active participation and independent decisions of farmers.

— Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (China)

1. Farming starts with people and communities

Across the Global Assembly on Food and Climate and wider participatory ecosystem, people consistently framed farming as a human and community issue, not simply an agricultural or economic one.

Discussions repeatedly returned to livelihoods and dignity, local economies, community resilience, cultural identity, and the ability of communities to shape their own futures. Participants often spoke about food as culture, memory, livelihood and connection to place, reflecting the many roles food plays beyond nutrition or production alone.

This matters because food and climate policy often treats farmers primarily as implementers of transition. What emerged here was a different perspective: farming communities are not simply stakeholders in transition — they are central actors in shaping it.

For policymakers and institutions, **this suggests that agricultural transition is likely to be more legitimate and durable where communities have genuine agency, rather than being positioned only as recipients of policy or technical guidance.** Putting farmers and their communities at the centre of transition may be one of the most important conditions for building long-term food-system resilience.

2. Food systems are inseparable from land, sovereignty and identity

When people discussed farming and food systems, questions of land surfaced repeatedly. Across the participatory processes globally, some of the most common themes related to land use, land management and land tenure. This was particularly visible in processes involving Indigenous peoples, rural communities and small-scale farmers.

Many examples pointed to a strong relationship between food systems and struggles over land access, territorial rights and rural autonomy. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, a community assembly surfaced strong support for Indigenous land demarcation and territorial protection. The assembly organiser summed up:



The government only thinks about building the economy, capital, in some way. Forgetting the value of territory, of peoples.²

What emerged across the participation mapping was that food-system governance is often inseparable from wider questions of power, territory and community self-determination.

Yet debates about food systems are frequently framed around production, efficiency and consumption alone. Across the Assembly and wider participatory processes, people repeatedly connected food systems to questions of ownership, governance, identity, and who has the power to shape the future of land and livelihoods.

3. Farmers need fairer conditions for transition

“ **One of the hardest challenges that we are facing in today’s world, that farmers face on a daily basis, is the lack of support they get, and the lack of access they get to land, seeds, and resources.**

—
Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (Syrian Arab Republic)

Participants repeatedly recognised that farmers are already carrying enormous pressure: climate volatility, debt, unstable markets, rising costs, changing environmental expectations, and unequal bargaining power within global supply chains.

Across the Global Assembly on Food and Climate and wider ecosystem, there was a strong sense that transition will fail if farming communities are expected to absorb these pressures alone.

To build sustainable and resilient food systems, people consistently prioritised stronger support for small and medium-sized farmers, regenerative and sustainable farming practices, fairer access to markets and land, investment in infrastructure and storage, training and knowledge-sharing, and stronger local and regional food systems.

Participants also questioned subsidy systems that reward scale and intensive production, often at the expense of soil health, ecosystem resilience and long-term food security. Many felt that current arrangements leave farmers carrying disproportionate levels of the risks associated with transition, while providing insufficient support for the environmental and social outcomes societies increasingly expect them to deliver. Rather than reducing public support for agriculture, they advocated redirecting it towards long-term resilience, environmental stewardship and the wellbeing of farming communities.

Community assemblies illustrated how these priorities play out in different contexts: In Maputo, Mozambique, participants highlighted the importance of government support for family farmers³ and in Bangalore, students emphasised local university gardens as a way of strengthening food literacy and self-sufficiency.⁴

For institutions and governments this suggests that **agricultural transition is not only an environmental challenge. It is also a question of fairness, legitimacy and whether farming communities are given the tools and support needed to adapt and thrive.**

4. There is no single farming reality

One of the clearest patterns across the Assembly and wider participation mapping was the diversity of actors involved in food-system governance.

References to small farmers, women farmers, family agriculture, Indigenous governance, cooperatives and rural community organisation appeared repeatedly across regions, reflecting very different relationships to land, markets, labour and political power.

In Latin America, for example, participatory processes connected food systems to Indigenous territorial governance and land rights. Elsewhere, women-led farming cooperatives and rural organising initiatives surfaced questions of labour, representation, credit and care responsibilities. Examples ranged from women farmers' mobilisation in Argentina and cooperative initiatives in Nicaragua, to women-led agricultural organising in Ghana.⁵

This matters because “farmers” are often treated as a single political category despite major differences in scale, vulnerability, land access and influence.

What emerged across the participation mapping was that food-system participation works best when it acknowledges this diversity rather than assuming uniform interests. Young farmers, women farmers, Indigenous communities and smallholders often face distinct barriers that require different forms of support and representation.

For policymakers, funders and institutions, **the implication is important: participatory processes must be designed in ways that reflect unequal realities and power dynamics.** Otherwise, transition risks becoming shaped primarily by those actors already best positioned to influence policy and participatory processes risk becoming instruments that legitimize decisions already made, rather than genuinely redistributing the power to shape them.

5. The transition depends on more than farmers

“ We need to change the rules, pay farmers for healthy soil, clean water, keeping nature alive, not just for growing a ton of stuff.

— Participant, 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate (China)

Participants consistently recognised that farming communities cannot transform food systems alone. The wider systems surrounding farming — from subsidies and procurement to consumer information, markets and regulation — play a significant role in shaping what forms of agriculture become possible, profitable and sustainable in practice.

Across the Global Assembly on Food and Climate and wider participatory processes, people repeatedly highlighted the importance of creating stronger incentives for sustainable production and consumption. This included clearer food labelling and certification, public procurement policies that favour sustainable agriculture, and efforts to build consumer awareness about how food is produced. Participants saw these as important ways of creating market demand for more sustainable farming practices and helping farmers make the transition with confidence.

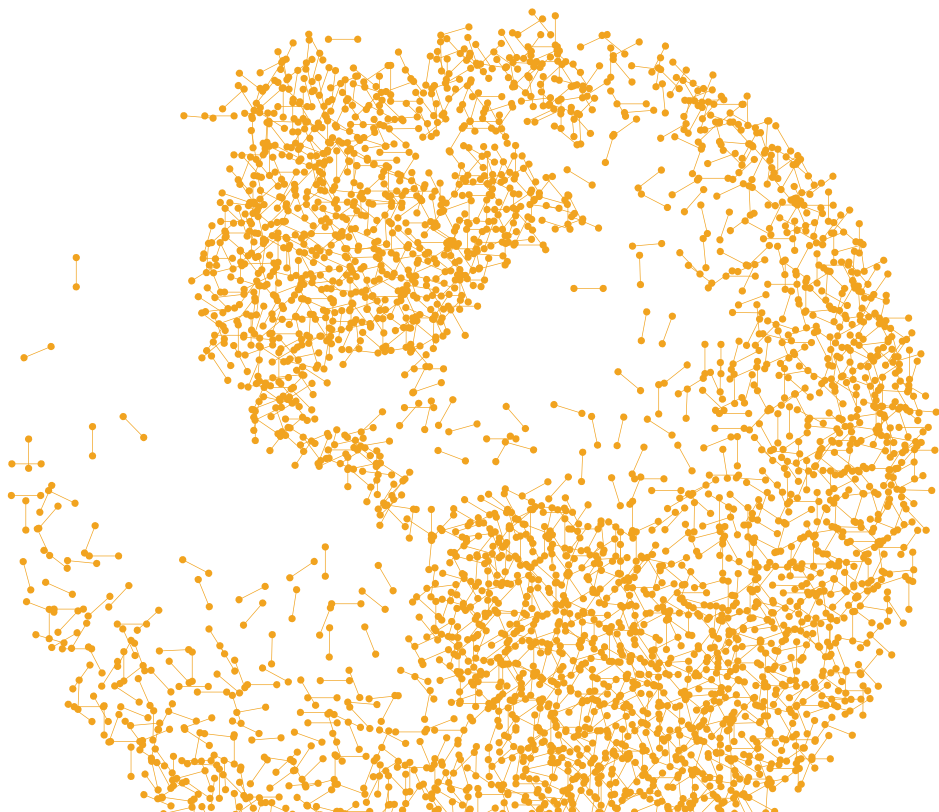
Food waste also emerged as a significant concern. Participants pointed to waste occurring throughout the food chain — from production and storage through to retail and household consumption. Alongside reducing waste through better infrastructure, regulation and planning, there was support for treating unavoidable waste as a resource through approaches such as composting, biogas and animal feed.

One particularly strong signal concerned agricultural subsidies and public investment. Participants repeatedly questioned systems that reward scale and industrial production over environmental restoration, resilience and long-term food security.

Across the Global Assembly on Food and Climate, there was strong support for redirecting a greater share of agricultural subsidies towards sustainable and regenerative farming, with Assembly Members calling for around 75% of subsidies to reward sustainable methods.⁶ This echoes a long-standing debate over subsidy systems⁷ that are often seen as rewarding production volume and scale over environmental stewardship, resilience and public value. Achieving such a shift would require significant investment, political will, and changes to the incentives that shape agricultural funding. For Sandrine Dixson-Declève, the leader of the resilience Action Track for the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, “people have unequivocally reached the same conclusions as scientists, experts and policymakers and endorsed the conclusions of a number of international processes, such as the UN food Systems Summit. They would now appreciate to see leaders listen, and lead”.

Participants also recognised that many farmers face structural barriers to transition. Access to finance, legal recognition, infrastructure and markets were repeatedly identified as important conditions for enabling smaller-scale farmers to invest, innovate and thrive. Across the discussions, there was a strong sense that transition will remain difficult unless the economic and political incentives surrounding agriculture are aligned with long-term environmental and social goals.

Agricultural transition is shaped not only by the decisions of individual farmers, but by the incentives, institutions and economic structures that determine what kinds of farming are economically viable, politically supported and socially valued.



ASSEMBLIES IN ACTION: Land, climate and traditional farming in Roraima, Brazil

In Raposa Serra do Sol, in northern Brazil near the Venezuelan border, the traditional roça — an Indigenous farm plot — has produced manioc for generations. From one crop, communities make nine distinct products.

The roça is more than a farm. It is a food system, a knowledge system and a form of territorial sovereignty.

But the system is under pressure.

Industrial soy farms are moving closer to Indigenous territory. Water sources are being affected by pollution. Industrialised food is entering daily consumption. Political decisions and legal changes are weakening protections Indigenous communities fought for over generations.

In 2025, Aldenicia — an educator and Indigenous movement leader — brought together women coordinating several of the territory's 14 ethno-regions to deliberate on these pressures. With limited internet, a broken printer and phones running out of battery, they worked through the links between land, food, water, climate and political power.

One participant described the challenge simply:

“ **Our traditional roças have endured centuries. Today they are still alive — but we must ask what we will have in fifty years if we do not reforest, if we do not protect the water.** ”

The assembly explored the connections between land, food, and climate. Soy monocultures on the territory's edges change water quality and soil conditions downstream. Population growth inside the territory, without active reforestation and water stewardship, places mounting pressure on the very resources that sustain the roça.



The assembly surfaced practical proposals, including:

- Support for the election of an Indigenous woman to Congress
- Stronger compliance with Indigenous territorial management plans
- An expanded assembly across the territory's 14 ethno-regions
- Community-led documentation of environmental impacts using mobile phones

The case illustrates something that surfaced repeatedly across the wider process: food-system transition is not only about production. It is about land, power, culture, memory and the ability of communities to shape their own futures.

Directions for action

The following recommendations call for decisive action across food systems governance:

1

Put farming communities at the centre of transition

Agricultural transition is more likely to succeed where farmers and rural communities are active participants in shaping change.

2

Treat land governance as part of food and climate governance

Food systems cannot be separated from questions of land rights, territorial governance and rural power.

3

Build fairer conditions for transition

Farmers need practical support, fairer markets, infrastructure, finance and long-term policy stability if transition is to be viable.

4

Recognise different farming realities

There is no single “farmer” perspective. Policies and participatory processes need to reflect differences in scale, gender, geography and power.

5

Change the wider systems shaping food systems

Subsidies, procurement systems, market structures, research funding and regulation all shape what forms of farming are economically and politically supported.

6

Treat participation as governance infrastructure

Participation is not simply about consultation. It can help build legitimacy, surface practical knowledge and support collective problem-solving during periods of systemic transition.

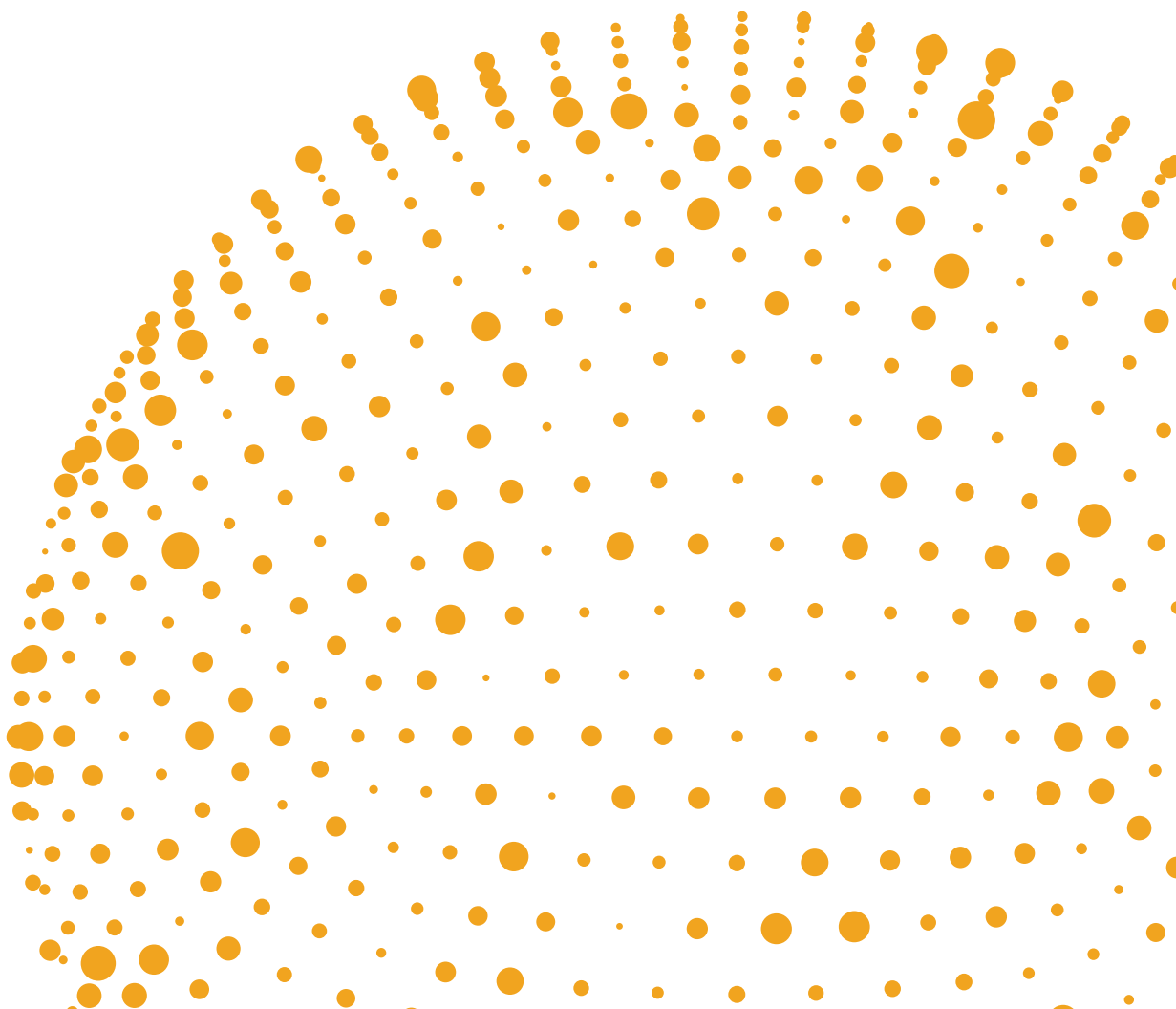
Closing reflection

Across the 2026 Global Assembly on Food and Climate and the wider landscape of participation, a consistent message emerges: food system transformation will only succeed if the people asked to steward that transformation are supported to thrive within it.

Participants recognised that farmers are expected to deliver many of society's most important goals simultaneously: producing food, adapting to climate change, protecting biodiversity, restoring ecosystems and supporting rural economies. Yet many farmers continue to carry disproportionate levels of risk while receiving limited support, recognition or influence over the systems they operate within.

The discussions suggest that resilience is not only a question of technology, productivity or land management. It is also a question of fairness, dignity and whether farming remains a viable and valued way of life for future generations.

At a time when climate change, food insecurity and social pressures are becoming increasingly interconnected, participation offers a way to navigate complexity collectively. Not simply to improve decisions, but to build the understanding, trust and legitimacy needed to shape resilient futures.



Endnotes

1

Organizer reflection, Community Assembly of Women Agricultural Producers on Climate Change and Food Security, convened by Saúde em Clima, Caruaru, Pernambuco, Brazil (2025). The assembly brought together eight women farmers and food producers from the semi-arid interior of Northeast Brazil to explore the impacts of climate change on their livelihoods, food production, and health. Original Portuguese: “Com as alterações do clima, elas tavam perdendo as safras de milho, e isso era o que sustentava elas muitas vezes na época de São João, pelo ano inteiro.” Translation by the authors.

2

Community Assembly of Indigenous Students on Climate Change and Food Security, convened by Coletivo de Estudantes Indígenas da UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2026). The assembly brought together Indigenous university students living away from their territories to explore the impacts of climate change and food insecurity on their lives and communities. Original Portuguese: “O governo só pensa em fazer economia, capital, de alguma forma. Então assim, esquecendo a valorização do território, dos povos.” Translation by the authors.

3

Local assembly ‘Segunda Assembleia Comunitária Piloto de Maputo’, Mozambique, October 2025
<https://assemblis.org/assemblies?assembly=e980a803-4822-4aa6-947b-860f2cfe2b6d>

4

A local assembly run by [Foodwize](#) in June 2025

5

[Appendix B](#)

6

[Appendix A](#)

7

A joint FAO, UNDP and UNEP report found that around 87% of agricultural producer support globally is price-distorting or environmentally and socially harmful, and called for support to be redirected towards public goods, sustainability and resilience:
<https://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/1640479/>



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