

Action Brief for and with Cities



Shaping the everyday food realities of more than half of the world's population, cities are critical drivers of food system transformations. They have become essential food system nodes with significant influence, creating demand through control over procurement, spatial planning, and design of food environments, social services, and public infrastructure.

This Action Brief emphasises specific actions to be taken by cities while also inviting collaboration from other actor groups to enhance collective impact.

This brief was developed by the CfA members as a reflection on their contributions to an urgent transition to healthy, safe, and just food systems. As a community we are committed to regularly updating this brief in line with our commitments, contribution and ambitions.



SECTION 01

Calls to Action

What this community must start, strengthen, or transform to drive change from within.

01.1

Lead by example: Transform public meals with the Planetary Health Diet (PHD).

Align public procurement standards with the PHD to advance healthy, sustainable, and just diets while respecting regionally and culturally diverse food traditions and preferences. Depending on the type of mandate and level of control over public food procurement, leverage the city's purchasing power in schools, hospitals, canteens, and other public spaces to prioritise plant-rich, locally sourced meals and reduce food waste. Collaborate with private and public food service actors operating in public institutions, including local producers. Set a strong example by investing in nutritious, culturally appropriate, plant-rich daily meals for all school and pre-school children, supporting child health, improving education outcomes, strengthening local economies, and modeling sustainable diets.

01.3

Integrate sustainable food systems into city-wide planning.

Align city strategies and action plans on food, climate, environment, and biodiversity, taking a nexus approach, and coordinate engagement across city offices in areas such as transportation, energy, health, and infrastructure. City planning should consider food actions that address health and food security, as well as environmental adaptation and mitigation measures, such as community gardens and urban agriculture to dampen urban heat islands. Integrate targets, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for accountability and transparency.

01.2

Build local multi-sector partnerships to design and promote locally rooted, systemic solutions that span the entire food chain, from production to consumption, disposal, and waste.

Invest in physical infrastructure and digital platforms that facilitate collaboration across the value chain on PHD-based targets. Proactively building partnerships can effectively bridge demand for and supply of healthy and sustainable foods. This includes enhancing access to urban markets, where local (small-scale) farmers can strengthen shorter supply chains with local, sustainable and healthy foods.

01.4

Strengthen inclusive multi-actor food governance and food literacy initiatives.

Empower communities through local food literacy programmes, shared governance, and support for community-led innovations that promote equitable access and informed food choices, while recognising and protecting food sovereignty in the multicultural contexts of cities. Establish or support participatory food policy councils, partnerships and initiatives that mobilise diverse food actors, including urban and peri-urban entities, businesses, civil society, informal food sector actors and marginalised groups, to collaboratively create and implement policies for sustainable and equitable food systems.

01.5

Support and protect urban and peri-urban agriculture.

Promote nature-positive (urban) food production in areas where it can increase green space, improve biodiversity, and advance circular production systems, while also enabling access to markets. Work within and across cities to develop policies that prevent land conversion by combining incentives to protect ecosystems; shifting production to available degraded land; assessing and preventing imported ecosystem conversion; and repurposing existing public finance and subsidies to enable sustainable, deforestation- and conversion-free food production. More importantly, increase habitat within city boundaries setting a minimum of 10-20% green space per km² to ensure accessibility to all city residents.

01.7

Regulate food marketing in public spaces, promoting the positive attributes of nutritious and sustainable foods.

Restrict advertisement of unhealthy foods (including unhealthy ultra-processed foods, and foods high in added calories) in public spaces, especially in child-centred food environments. Promote positive, culturally relevant messaging for, and access to, healthy foods, focusing on the positive attributes of nutritious and sustainable foods.

01.9

Support access to healthy foods in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and low-income areas.

Support (small) food suppliers operating in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods to expand the accessibility, desirability, and affordability of healthy food options, by offering technical and marketing assistance, such as product placement, promotions, and retailer access to healthy and sustainable food (e.g. via local farmers' markets). Enhance the purchasing power of low-income households with healthy food options through online vouchers and financial assistance.

01.6

Strengthen local food infrastructure for resilient markets, including informal contexts.

Prioritise investment in food infrastructure — markets, solidarity markets, community kitchens, food hubs, cold chains, composting, and digital support systems — to expand access to nutritious food, reduce loss while ensuring food safety, and build transparent and effective circular economies that connect local initiatives with regional producers. Embed food, post-harvest, and food-waste infrastructure in urban plans and budgets, while integrating informal vendors through culturally appropriate participatory planning. Recognise their essential role in ensuring access, livelihoods, and climate resilience, and design food environments that reflect local rhythms and cultural traditions.

01.8

Engage with the private food sector to shift demand for healthier and more sustainable foods.

Collaborate with private food actors such as producers, suppliers, processors, distributors, retailers, and service providers, communicating the business case of full-value chain, voluntary, and coordinated initiatives and targets, instead of isolated, incremental actions. Tailor approaches for smaller producers, reducing burdens through partnerships, shared infrastructure, and NGO intermediaries. Mobilise tracking tools, such as the WRI's Coolfood Calculator, to support efficient planning and transparent monitoring.

01.10

Improve food waste reduction and surplus food recovery systems.

Implement city-wide systemic policies that limit food waste and put in place the logistics and infrastructure to support food rescue, recovery, and reutilisation. Engage upstream actors — including producers, processors, and distributors — to reduce waste along the supply chain and channel surplus into recovery systems. Incentivise wholesale and retail actors to adopt food rescue programmes, and reduce consumer-side food loss and waste through waste regulations and infrastructure. Digital tools and platforms can support tracking, target-setting, and effective governance, while making these efforts publicly available.

SECTION 02

Actions to Stop or Do Differently

Actions currently undertaken by our community that hinder progress towards healthier, more sustainable, and more just food systems and should be stopped or done differently.

02.1

Stop one-off interventions and encourage scalable and sustainable solutions that are accompanied by funding.

Pilots have provided valuable learnings from diverse city interventions, helping to understand what works and demonstrate effectiveness. Dedicated complementary efforts are needed to ensure that such learnings are embedded within, and connected to broader long-term strategies through scaling. Scaling requires stable investments and sustainable financing to enable systemic, city-wide food policies that connect health, supply chains, social protection, and the environment—while also strengthening infrastructure and emergency preparedness.

02.3

Stop treating local food as a silver bullet. Recognise it will take multiple solutions.

Stop emphasising local production as the one silver bullet for addressing complex food system challenges, such as reducing emissions. Take a systemic approach that recognises the significant social, economic, and environmental values of local production, but also the limits and capabilities of cities to encourage “healthy, sustainable, and just” national and global production. What people eat and where food is produced both need attention.

02.5

Stop edible food going to landfills.

Food waste accounts for a large portion of methane emissions from municipal solid waste (MSW) landfills (for instance, 58% in United States cities). First, prevent surplus and spoilage through public education, improved food inventory management (e.g. cold storage), and food waste reduction programmes

02.2

Stop using jargon to advocate for food system transformation. Be clear and inclusive.

Using technical or specialised language when promoting food system change can alienate communities and stakeholders essential for action. To build an inclusive movement, communication must be clear, accessible, and framed in local terms, inviting participation rather than reinforcing silos or exclusive expertise.

02.4

Stop one-size-fits-all procurement solutions. Engage with the full diversity of food actors.

Avoid focusing exclusively on big food corporations when designing procurement processes. Engage with a greater number and diversity of actors, including small-scale producers and the informal sector in order to diversify food suppliers and increase social and economic resilience (particularly in low- and middle-income countries). This provides viable opportunities for small-scale businesses to flourish, embraces culturally-appropriate foods, and builds resilience in the food supply chain. These are the actors that give cities their unique feel and flair.

targeting households, businesses operating along the full food chain, and public institutions. Next, redirect edible surplus to people through food recovery networks and donation partnerships. Finally, ensure that inedible food scraps are diverted from landfills through composting, anaerobic digestion, or regulated animal feed programs.

SECTION 03

Unlocks

Asks from this community to other communities that are necessary to overcome systemic barriers to action (“lock-ins”), pointing to opportunities for collaboration.

1. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

- A. **Build policy alignment at scale.** National governments need to adopt nationwide and cross-sector food system strategies to build internal policy coherence. This should include funding mechanisms that support policies, such as taxing unhealthy foods.
- B. **Promote plant-rich diets.** Mobilise education campaigns, policy nudges, and procurement reforms to encourage plant-rich diets, including funding mechanisms that support policies, and the use of financial (i.e. taxation) and legislative tools to reinforce such reforms.
- C. **Prioritize and finance sustainably sourced school meal programmes.**
- D. **Foster inclusive collaborative food governance and data collection** through open-source and accessible, uniform, digital platforms. Digital platforms connect actors’ commitments along food networks, track food loss and waste, map supply chains, develop early warning systems, and monitor progress of collective goals. Participatory and community-led data collection methods enhance both data quality, transparency, and governance.

2. RETAILERS AND MANUFACTURERS

- A. **Secure commitments and action from businesses to shift and transform supply chains** and effectively reduce the environmental impact (e.g. emissions) associated with food production and waste.
- B. **Promote healthy and sustainable foods and beverages** supporting the shift in consumer demand, and reduce placement and promotions of unhealthy and ultra-processed foods.

3. CHEFS, RESTAURANTS AND FOOD SERVICE

- A. **Champion healthy and sustainable menus.** Lead by example in showcasing the business opportunity of transforming menus through sourcing locally, reducing food waste, and prioritising delicious and nutritious plant-rich and minimally processed foods.
- B. **Empower staff and suppliers.** Support training programmes and procurement policies that equip kitchen staff and food buyers to meet sustainability and nutrition targets.

4. HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS AND PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS

- A. **Promote food as a public health priority and investment.** Integrate the PHD into public health strategies and clinical practice. Engage with cities in the co-development of food policies that improve diet-related health outcomes, while lowering their long-term medical costs.
- B. **Collaborate on behaviour change.** Partner with cities in campaigns that promote healthy, sustainable eating and reduce food-related stigma and misinformation. Assist with management and monitoring of diet- and health-related data to effectively leverage public health strategies.

5. CONSUMER GROUPS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

- A. **Raise awareness and build demand for better food systems.** Continue to push for transparency, corporate accountability, and citizen participation in shaping local food environments.
- B. **Co-create community-driven solutions.** Partner with city governments in designing and scaling community-based food programmes—such as urban gardens, cooperative groceries, and food recovery networks—that reflect local needs and empower citizens.

6. FINANCE

- A. **Mobilise investment in support of enhanced physical infrastructure and social innovations.** Investment in markets, community kitchens, food cooperatives, food hubs, cold chains, and composting facilities that improve access to nutritious food, reduce loss and waste, and create economic opportunities.
- B. **Leverage existing infrastructure and successful initiatives as proof of concept.** Leverage viable models to attract long-term public, private, and philanthropic investment—addressing risks and strengthening the case for sustained and scaled-up funding.

SECTION 04

Acknowledgements

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Contributing cities and organisations include:

Amman, Auckland, Baltimore, Barcelona, Belo Horizonte, Bergamo, Birmingham, Bologna, Boston, Bradford, Cape Town, City of Stockholm, Milan, Copenhagen, Eurocities (Brussels), Grenoble, Groningen, Johannesburg, Lagos, London, Los Angeles, Montréal, Nairobi, New York City, Padoua, Paris, Quezon City, São Paulo, Seattle, Sydney, Thessaloniki, Tunis, UN FAO Urban Agrifood System Group, Vantaa, Washington, DC.

C40 is a global network of mayors driving the future of city climate action, including 97 cities representing 920 million people and 23% of the world's economy.

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) is the main legacy of the Universal Exhibition "Expo Milan 2015 - Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life". The Milan Pact is a global commitment of mayors from around the world that considers food as an entry point for the sustainable development of growing cities. It represents the main framework for cities and international stakeholders active in the definition of innovative urban food policies.