

From Challenge to Opportunity: New Horizons for the transition of our food systems

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COMMONLAND
4 RETURNS FROM LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

The secret of change is to
focus all your energy,
not fighting the old, but on
building the new.

Socrates

The future is already here –
it's just not evenly
distributed

William Gibson

Introduction to this report

A transition towards sustainable Food Systems will be an essential prerequisite to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

The authors and contributors to this report feel that despite the ground-breaking work that has been done over the past decades, the transition of our food systems is not proceeding fast enough.

In this report we will argue that the food transition is not only a challenge, but offers significant opportunities for businesses, farmers, society and the planet. These opportunities can be captured if we change our core approach to sustainability from 'fragmented, reductionist efforts to combat negative impacts' to 'holistic programmes to capture net positive business opportunities'.

In this report we will sketch a first outline of these holistic approaches. The main aim of this report is to trigger key decision makers in business, government and society to apply such holistic approaches and drive systemic change in our food systems at scale. The authors, and their respective organizations, are prepared to engage with decision makers and make the food transition a reality.

This report has been prepared by a joint team from NewForesight, Commonland and The Boston Consulting Group. They have done this on their own initiative, without sponsorship from any outside organization.

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Fixing our food systems is a fundamental pre-requisite to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);



In doing so, four **'brutal facts'** need to be addressed:

- I. **Poverty**: over 75% of all farmers globally are caught in a poverty trap;
- II. **Environmental degradation**: today's food system exceeds most planetary boundaries¹, and contributes a quarter of greenhouse gases;
- III. **Food waste**: 30 to 40% of all produced food is wasted;
- IV. **Malnourishment**: half the world population is malnourished (hunger, nutrient deficiencies and/or overweight);



We identify tremendous, as-yet **untapped value** from fixing our food systems, 'from the soils up', for all stakeholders as well as for our planet:

- Professional farmers who are willing and able to change can capture a significant part of that value;
- Companies across the food value chain should innovate, invest, and collaborate to capture part of that value and to enable farmers to capture their fair share;
- Actors ranging from government, finance, knowledge institutes and NGOs all have crucial enabling roles to play;
- Significant potential to mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration and GHG output reduction through improved agricultural methods

1. Most notably on land use change, freshwater, nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus), novel entities (pesticides, antibiotics, hormones), climate/GHG emissions and biodiversity

Key messages of this report (II/III)



Fixing our food system requires significantly improved approaches to driving sustainability in our food systems. This entails a shift:

- **From** today's reductionist efforts to fight negative impacts in a piecemeal way...
- ... **To** business-driven approaches across the value chain, with the ambition of developing 'net positive'¹ food systems.



There is a need for a transition agenda across the value chain, at three distinct but interrelated levels:

- I. Production Landscapes:** Drive development of strong rural economies and local communities on resilient landscapes, with 'net positive' and restorative agriculture production models as the foundation;
- II. Value chains:** create 'net positive' business models that compete on differentiated quality (taste, nutrition, ecosystem services²) in the agriculture steps of the value chain;
- III. Consumer end markets:** Enable and incentivize consumers to make healthy and sustainable choices at 'true price'

1. 'Net Positive' means that business puts back more into society and environment than it takes out (source: Forum for the Future)

2. 'Ecosystem services' are "the benefits people obtain from ecosystems" (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2006). A more specific definition defines them as "a subset of the interactions between ecosystem structure and processes that underpin the capacity of an ecosystem to provide goods and services" (TEEB 2010:19), such as sustained production capacity, carbon sequestration, freshwater and biodiversity.

Key messages of this report (III/III)



In recent years, many positive initiatives—from both established and new stakeholders—have got underway, which can underpin these transition agendas. To catalyze the transition and achieve impact at scale, there is a need to form coalitions of frontrunners to drive progress towards net positive food systems.



These coalitions should focus on transforming related combinations of agri-landscapes, value chains and consumer markets. Successful Coalitions will:

1. Bring together a representative set of stakeholders for the agri-landscapes, value chains and consumer markets in scope;
2. Dare to invest in collaborative learning by ‘joining the dots’ across their chosen value chain;
3. Identify and pursue the opportunities for growth and value creation offered by this approach.



Members of these coalitions will be rewarded with faster growth and value creation than stakeholders who do not (yet) feel the urgency nor recognize the far-reaching opportunities to be had from transforming the food system.