



## Why the GEF is investing in transforming food systems

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You may be aware that food plays an important role in human health. Did you know it is also critical to the health of our planet?

Food systems are major drivers of global forest and biodiversity loss, land and soil degradation, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Pressure is also building on food production, processing, transportation, consumption, and waste as the world's population nears 8 billion people and continues to grow quickly. To meet this ever-increasing demand, reduce related stressors, and ensure a safe and healthy planet for future generations, the global food system must be transformed.

This is why the Global Environment Facility has prioritized a financing approach that addresses major changes in how and where the world produces food, what we produce and consume, and how we dispose of food waste.

Since its inception 30 years ago, the GEF has invested in a [wide range of projects in the food and agriculture sector](#) to address the need for sustainability and resilience. This has been largely driven by the recognition that sustainable food production and supply is one of the key solutions to environmental challenges. GEF financing and support through multilateral environmental agreements has focused on helping countries promote and scale up practices that [improve agricultural productivity while protecting and restoring natural capital](#).

This focus has strengthened further in recent years. During the GEF's sixth (GEF-6) and seventh (GEF-7) replenishment cycles, the multilateral trust fund has used an integrated approach to tackle the drivers of environmental degradation on both the spatial and vertical dimensions of agriculture and food systems, [addressing both production landscapes and supply chains](#).

In GEF-6, spanning 2014 to 2018, two major integrated approach programs were piloted: the [Resilient Food Systems](#) focused on fostering sustainability and resilience for food security in the drylands of sub-Saharan Africa, led by [IFAD](#); and the [Good Growth Partnership](#) focused on taking deforestation out of commodity supply chains, led by [UNDP](#). A separate [Coastal Fisheries Initiative](#), led by [FAO](#), was also

developed on a similar basis to improve the management and sustainability of artisanal fisheries in key geographies across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

During GEF-7, from 2018 to 2022, a more ambitious and globally focused [Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Impact Program](#), led by the [World Bank Group](#), was developed. This Impact Program further broadened the GEF's engagement, targeting major commodities and food crops selected for their potential to transform food systems at regional and global scales and to secure global environmental benefits related to climate change, biodiversity, and other areas across multiple geographies.

Together, investments in these programs have amounted to more than \$525 million in GEF grants and an additional \$4.5 billion in co-financing from diverse sources. The initiatives involve more than 50 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and cover production systems and supply chains for major agricultural commodities and global food staples. Each program has mobilized and engaged diverse stakeholders and supply chain actors, from government agencies, large corporations to small and medium enterprises, smallholder farmer organizations, financial institutions, technical and scientific entities, development agencies, and farmer organizations. This collaborative approach and collective action has been key to making progress and delivering impactful outcomes in a complex area.

For instance, in Ethiopia, work with smallholder herders through the Resilient Food Systems program has resulted in dramatic levels of vegetation and biodiversity recovery by preventing cattle from grazing in more than 59,000 hectares of agricultural and forest land. The approach has included planting 9.3 million seedlings to enhance food security and preserve ecosystem services, in a country where food production is hampered by environmental degradation, deforestation, soil erosion, recurrent droughts, and pressures caused by population growth. The resulting vegetation now provides a new rich and well-managed source of livestock fodder. Some 118,000 households are now participating in more diversified production and livelihood activities in different value chains, including community watershed land rehabilitation, reduction of fuelwood and dung demand for energy, and diversification of both on-farm and off-farm livelihoods. Under the same GEF-supported program, 38,900 farmers in Nigeria are adopting climate resilient agricultural practices and improving livelihoods.

Through the Good Growth Partnership program, Indonesia, Paraguay, and Liberia are learning from one another and working to enable producers to adopt more sustainable practices and improve land management. This effort covers nearly 6 million hectares, with benefits for biodiversity and for sustainable food production by smallholder farmers. In Indonesia, national and regional authorities are working to support sustainable palm oil production through action plans and information sharing. Liberia is also moving toward improving palm oil production practices, starting with the development of a National Oil Palm Strategy and Action Plan to protect high conservation value and with carbon stock forests. Similarly, in the Chaco region of Paraguay, a regional multi-stakeholder action plan for sustainable beef was developed and the definition of high conservation value and carbon stock forests is ongoing, and a policy improving conservation of important biodiversity areas was adopted. The three countries have also conducted farmers needs assessments and are developing support system strategies to engage with ranchers and farmers.

Finally, the Coastal Fisheries Initiative Program is helping to deliver environmental, social, and economic benefits to local communities by supporting better governance of small-scale coastal fisheries. The program takes a holistic approach to governance by combining fisheries management and value chain structures and incentives. The program is also supporting the promotion and implementation of international instruments such as the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.

Through these and other initiatives related to food system transformation, the GEF has been working to support meaningful and lasting change. Making further progress will require more collaborative and creative partnerships focused on helping countries to meet the growing demand for increased crop and livestock production, while reducing the risk of further expansion of farmland and inefficient practices that lead to deforestation, erosion of genetic diversity, overexploitation of land and water resources, overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, biodiversity loss, land degradation, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Looking ahead, the Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration program is gearing up to work with 27 countries on such transformative actions, including scaling up of best practices in value and supply chains for major food crops and agricultural commodities; influencing markets to increase the share of sustainably-produced food crops and agricultural commodities; and engaging policy makers, financiers, and private value chain actors to adopt policies, governance structures, and practices that are demonstrably environmentally sustainable. We anticipate that this effort will serve as useful model to encourage and enable others to build food systems that are nature-positive and carbon-neutral.

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