

**Belize Food System Transformation Pathway**  
**National Task Force (National Convenor, FAO, UNRCO)**  
**(June 2023)-DRAFT 1**

Belize lies along the eastern coast of Central America, with a Caribbean Sea shoreline to the east. Offshore, it has hundreds of low-lying islands called cayes, which host rich marine life. Belize consists of 8,867 square miles inhabited by a population of 432,500 (2021). Fifty-six percent of its land remains forested and 7 percent under agriculture. Small farmers account for more than 75 percent of the farming population. They produce a wide variety of food crops (corn, rice, beans, vegetables, roots) and livestock (poultry, beef) products. The agricultural export sector, with its sugar, citrus and bananas, is an important driver of export earnings, and is central to local livelihoods in the North (Corozal and Orange Walk) and South (Stann Creek and Toledo) districts (four of six districts) of the country. Food availability, measured purely as daily food energy availability (kcal/per capita), is considered adequate as Belize's daily average of nearly 3000 kcal/person exceeds the average recommended level by 30 percent.

Belize is a small and vulnerable economy with a gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 1.786 billion and a per capita income of approximately USD 4,652 (2021). The tourism and agricultural sectors drive the Belizean economy and its food security. The two sectors account for 28 and 10 percent of national employment, contributing 21 and 13 percent to the GDP, respectively.

Belize has a stable food system characterized by agricultural production and processing enterprises producing more than 80 percent of the cereals it consumes, about 40 percent of the total food consumed is imported. Belize has a subtropical climate, with a well-marked dry season from late February to May and a wet season from June to November, interrupted from August to September by another dry season. The mean annual rainfall rises sharply from about 50 inches at Corozal on the northern frontier to 175 inches at Punta Gorda in the south, while Belize City sees rainfall of about 75 inches. There are, however, considerable yearly variations.

**Charting Belize's food systems transformation pathway**

During July – September 2021, a “Food System Profile for Belize” was prepared through collaboration between the Government of Belize, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with support from the European Union and the French Agriculture Research for Development (CIRAD) in support of Belize's sustainable and inclusive transformation food systems. The assessment integrated qualitative and quantitative data analysis with participation of public, private and civil society partners. The “Food System Profile for Belize” has now been accepted by Government of Belize (June 22 2022).

## **Vision**

The vision is for a holistic transformation of Belize's food systems from production to consumption that promotes enhanced food safety, nutrition and diets, improved livelihoods, equitable, sustainable and greater resilience to shocks and stress.

## **The challenges**

- External shock of the Ukraine-Russian war has given rise to rising food prices for farmers but with the irony of a reduced profit margin for Belizean farmers due to the cost of critical inputs and agro-chemicals (fertilizer, pesticides, insecticides etc) increasing by more than 100% and much greater than their product prices
- Access to quality and safe food is a challenge as Belize's relatively high income per capita hides a high level of income inequality and income disparity across its six districts, with territorial inequality most pronounced in the most northern (Corozal) and southern (Toledo) districts.
- Higher cost of healthy diets and increasing unemployment and poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic have further pushed healthy diets out of the reach of a large proportion of the population.
- High levels of poverty (over 50 percent) and unemployment, higher among youth and women, contribute to food insecurity and vulnerable livelihoods.
- Use of traditional methods of production by most farmers result in low productivity as well as inadequate and inconsistent supply of food products. With weak transportation, storage and marketing systems, this reduces the share of national production in food consumption.
- Belize has not made progress in addressing its diet related non-communicable disease (NCD) targets. Obesity and diabetes remain high, especially among women, at 34.6 percent and 17.4 percent, respectively.
- Natural disasters, climate change and poor environmental management increase the vulnerability of Belize's food systems.

## **Food Systems Transformation**

Based on the action tracks of the UNFSS proposed by the Secretary-General, Belize has identified six central goals, to achieve food systems transformation by 2026:

1. Ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all (enabling all people to be nourished and healthy, progressive realization of the right to food). Proposed systemic levers:

- Providing nutrition education through community health initiatives
- Promoting local products linked to better nutrition

2. Shifting to sustainable consumption patterns (promoting and creating demand for healthy and sustainable diets, reducing waste). Proposed systemic lever:

- Targeted educational and capacity development for youth and women
- Empowerment and governance of cooperatives

3. Boosting nature-positive production at sufficient scale (acting on climate change, reducing emissions and increasing carbon capture, regenerating and protecting critical ecosystems and reducing food loss and energy usage, without undermining health or nutritious diets). Proposed systemic levers:

- Strengthening land use plan policy to ensure sustainable land use;
- Promoting sustainable agriculture practices, agroecology and conservation agriculture;
- Promoting integrated farming and circular economic model

4. Advancing equitable livelihoods and value distribution (raising incomes, distributing risk, expanding inclusion, promote full and productive employment and decent work for all). Proposed systemic levers:

- Creating public policy incentives enabling the development of entrepreneurs and microenterprises. Supporting regulations and financial measures that assist rural residents, farmers and non-farm enterprises to invest through local resources and sustainable practices.
- Creating effective partnerships and productive linkages between agriculture and tourism sectors, emphasizing market-driven enterprises that are inclusive and have a dynamic development path.

5. Building resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress (ensuring the continued functionality of healthy and sustainable food systems). Proposed systemic levers:

- Increase development, adoption and promotion of green climate technologies, waste management regulation and enforcement are required.
- Encourage the adoption and implementation of environmental and climate-smart and sustainable development policies in the context of a circular economy.

6. Accelerating the Means of Implementation – Effective implementation of improved policies and programmes is critical for agriculture and food system transformation in Belize. Proposed systemic levers

- Poverty, vulnerability and inequalities should be addressed with targeted policies, including safety nets, which create income opportunities while promoting healthy and sustainable consumption patterns.

- Build a more sustainable and resilient food system following integrated and decentralized, climate-smart food and agricultural system policies and strategies, including scaling up that incorporates the use of digital economy tools and equipment.
- Public and private sector collaboration on credit for investment and promotion of consumption of quality food, supporting increased domestic and regional market opportunities, is essential for greater economic inclusion and territorial balance.
- Increased collaboration between the public and private (including cooperative) sectors is essential to achieving the food and nutrition goals of Belize.
- Improved governance at the national, district and community levels is essential to the integrated and multi-sectoral approaches necessary for sustainable food and agriculture systems transformation.