

## A National Pathway for Sustainable Food Systems, Georgia

Development of the full value chain in food systems and stimulating rural economic activity is crucial for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth in Georgia. A vital responsibility of the next decade will be to reinforce the development of quality and production technologies, which will together ensure competitiveness on both local and international markets.

Despite the implemented and ongoing reforms and development-oriented programs, the food system still faces challenges that need to be overcome as a precondition for the social-economic growth of the country.

Our priorities for the next decade are as follows: to ensure the existence of a competitive value chain in food systems; to develop an effective system of food/feed safety, veterinary and plant protection; to guarantee the sustainable use of natural resources, environmental protection, preservation of ecosystems, and enable climate change mitigation and adaptation; and create effective systems of crisis management.

A sustainable food system delivers food security and nutrition for all, and in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition are firmly established. All the main elements of food systems, such as food supply chain, food environment, and consumer behaviour are of the utmost importance for Georgia.

Adequate nutrition is essential for the health and well-being of any nation, but food availability is not the only critical factor; the quality of food is also an issue that needs particular attention and efforts from all actors involved in the production, trade, and consumption of food.

According to the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia, 2021-2027 (ARDS) food security and food safety are especially important for the country, and is a key obligation of the Government of Georgia. The development of the rural territories of Georgia is important for addressing issues such as food security, environmental protection, economic development, and the establishment of high quality of life and security.

Competitive agricultural and non-agricultural production and helping Georgia to better adapt to deal with climate change are also essential factors for the development of food systems in Georgia. Signing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) created real perspectives for bringing Georgian products to the EU market. In addition, implementing the EU Association Agreement saw the introduction of complex reforms in all the necessary areas, especially in the field of food safety.

A sustainable food system lies at the heart of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As Georgia nationalized all the SDGs and the vast majority of SDG targets, the integration of the concept of sustainable food systems into the implementation of SDGs will help Georgia ultimately carry out all aspects of the 2030 agenda. In these circumstances it is vital to implement SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 13, SDG 15, and SDG 16.

The UN Food Systems Summit will be convened by the UN Secretary-General in September 2021. The summit will bring together government representatives of different countries, as well as key players from the worlds of science, business, environmental activists, youth organizations and other stakeholders who will contribute to transforming the world's food systems by 2030. The goal is to boost nature-positive production and ensure that everyone all over the world has access to healthy food.

**The first stage meeting of the National Dialogue** of Georgia of the UN Food Systems Summit was convened on April 16, 2021. Fifty participants attended, including representatives from the private sector, NGOs, scientific circles, public agencies, and international organizations, who all outlined the key trends for sustainable food systems in Georgia.

**The second stage meeting of the National Dialogue** was held on May 20, 2021. Fifty-four representatives from all municipalities of Georgia attended the meeting, discussing the identified key trends and amplifying the existing initiatives with their own visions about the food systems.

**The third stage meeting of the National Dialogue** of the UN Food Systems Summit was convened on June 4, 2021 and brought together the participants of the previous two preparatory meetings, who summarized and agreed on the findings.

The National Dialogues outlined the key trends to ensure sustainable food systems in the country by 2030. The findings of the National Dialogues were summarised, and are compiled below.

## Key trends for sustainable food systems by 2030

### 1. Ensure competitive value-chains in the food systems (Action Track 1, Action Track 3)<sup>1</sup>

#### Changes needed for national food systems to meet the defined expectations by 2030

- Increase competitiveness of the agricultural products in Georgia and development of their value-chains;
- Ensure availability of the respective infrastructure for the compliance of products with marketing standards at all stages of value-adding;
- Ensure additional supportive policy for the small farmers and the households;
- Promotion of the engagement of women and young producers in agri-food sector;
- Increase awareness of agri-food primary producers in agricultural practices;
- Improve access to mechanization;
- Develop agricultural land market;
- Develop highly-qualified services and ensure capacity building of human resources in the retail market of agricultural production inputs;
- Expand the roster of veterinary medicinal products (VMPs) and plant protection products (PPPs) in municipalities, enhancing controls;
- Establishment of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and improvement of technological processes;
- Improve access to funds, agricultural insurance (to cover more risks) knowledge, information and awareness-raising;
- Improve logistics in food systems;
- Provide support to the diversification of the rural economy;
- Provide support to agro/eco-tourism;
- Ensure efficient quality infrastructure (standards, labs, certification bodies) in the agri-food sector; introduction of international standards in primary production;
- Support the development of organic agriculture;
- Establish producers' associations, and subsequently ensure their enlargement and cooperation, as well as improve access to the market; ensure availability of high-quality agricultural production inputs and creation of agri-food processing capacities;
- Promote digitalization in agri-food systems;

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<sup>1</sup> The Action Tracks are aligned with the Summit's five objectives. Importantly, the Action Tracks are not separate, nor do they sit in siloes. Each Action Track is designed to address possible trade-offs with other tracks, and to identify solutions that can deliver wide-reaching benefits. There are five action tracks identified for Food Systems Summit Dialogue national feedbacks: 1. Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all; 2. Shift to sustainable consumer patterns; 3. Boost nature-positive production; 4. Advance equitable livelihoods; 5. Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress.

- Develop infrastructure such as green-houses, storage facility, hydro-melioration, mechanization, transport, energy, roads, and improve internet access
- Support the development of animal husbandry and animal breeding activities; refining preventive actions and control procedures for animal diseases; ensuring compliance of management, quarantine and eradication measures for especially dangerous diseases with international standards;
- Conservation of the country's biodiversity, collection of local varieties, restoration, improvement and creation Gene bank;
- Increase accessibility of high-quality agricultural production inputs;
- Improve irrigation and drainage systems;
- Provide support to the sustainable development of aquaculture.

## **2. Ensure effective systems of food/feed safety, veterinary and plant protection (Action Track 2)**

### Changes needed for national food systems to meet the defined expectations by 2030

- Increase qualification of personnel involved in food safety and food controls;
- Achieve continuous development goals for integrated food safety system in the country through the mechanism of developing guidelines, standard operational procedures (SOPs) and instructions, both for competent authorities and food business operators;
- Bolster extension and consultation services to provide pertinent information on food safety issues to farmers and food producers;
- Research “Actual Food and Nutrient Consumption” in the country, to be undertaken by relevant authorized bodies;
- Improve food environments, and raise population awareness on food safety and healthy nutrition, with particular emphasis on adolescents and young people;
- Enhance risk assessment capacities in food safety (including the refining of risk assessment methodology), as well as risk assessment and management, risk communication, and the effective enforcement of food safety legislation, along with systematic approaches to risk assessment procedures.
- Improve the overall laboratory capacity in the country; adopt new methods for laboratory test diagnostics in the area of food safety, veterinary and plant protection; expanding accreditation; capacity building for laboratory employees;
- Enhance and strengthen post-harvest storage and processing systems.

### **3. Sustainable use of natural resources, environmental protection, preservation of ecosystems, climate change mitigation and adaptation (Action Track 3)**

#### Changes needed for national food systems to meet the defined expectations by 2030

- Raise awareness about climate change; conduct training for the representatives of municipalities; hold frequent meetings with communities about climate change and its impacts; and organize training for schoolchildren on environmental issues;
- Ensure the sustainable use of water, land and forest resources, as well as the prevention of soil, air and water pollution;
- Establishment of early warning systems; ensure efficient management of the natural disasters;
- Restoration of windbreaks and promotion of planting trees for this purpose;
- Promotion of climate-smart and energy-efficient activities, as well as the elaboration and implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation action plans;
- Effective utilization of renewable energy sources;
- Support development of a circular economy.

### **4. Elaboration of effective systems for the crisis management (Action Track 5)**

#### Changes needed for national food systems to meet the defined expectations by 2030

- Ensure food security;
- Ensure crisis management plans are in place;
- Establish supply management systems for food and other basic needs;
- Establish effective communication mechanism between the state and the private sector for a force majeure situation, which ensures effective management of crises and shocks.
- Assist in management of food losses and expired food and improvement of related processes.

## Governance

In the upcoming years, the State plans to address the problematic issues raised by the National Dialogues in its strategies and action plans.

Our goal is to make maximum use of the country's potential. Products produced in Georgia shall become absolutely competitive and shall be marketed in the form which will be in line with the modern standards and requirements. The State will support the development of the agricultural value chain to the greatest possible extent. Programs for co-financing the agri-food processing capacities, storage and packaging infrastructures will be continued and expanded.

We will support the establishment of Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), primary production standards, quality and food safety standards; the local laboratory capacities will be enhanced.

Development and support programs for agricultural cooperatives will continue to increase the competitiveness of people employed in the agricultural sector.

Projects to promote energy-efficient and renewable energy technologies and practices will be elaborated and the work for the development of green economy will be intensified.

Targeted programs for co-financing of agricultural machinery will be continued and developed, including co-financing of all types of agricultural machinery.

Approximation with the EU legislation in the food safety, veterinary and phyto-sanitary areas will continue in compliance with the Association Agreement agenda.

Maximum knowledge and information on the modern technologies will be provided to farmers and producers. Simultaneously, we will support the development of scientific-research activities. Special economic development programs will be developed for the youth and the women living in the rural areas. Quality and accessibility of agricultural production inputs will be ensured.

The agricultural insurance program will be continued and improved to reduce the risks for those engaged in the agricultural activities.

Special attention will be paid to the proper and efficient use of water resources. The land balance of Georgia will be produced, agricultural land resources will be registered and the unified database on the land fund will be created.

Intensive support program will be implemented to develop agro and eco-tourism facilities in the regions. The financial accessibility of business loans will be enhanced.

Necessary conditions will be created/improved in the regions to facilitate economic activities and to increase the contribution of regions in the national gross value added (GVA). Proper conditions and accessibility of public services will be provided for the livelihood and development of the population in the mountainous areas.

## **Cooperation and partnership**

Food systems transformation will be achieved through inclusive multi-stakeholder collaboration in Georgia. The involvement of the civil society sector in the policy implementation process along with the public agencies is of utmost importance. It is vital to actively communicate with the direct stakeholders of food systems, such as producers, unions, associations, NGOs, scientific circles, donors, international organizations, higher educational and vocational institutions, local municipality representatives, as well as the civic sector in the country's municipalities.

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models, along with the establishment of a Civil Committee can be considered as one of the best mechanisms of cooperation. Collaboration at the level of municipalities, for instance, with rural councils is worth noting as well.

## **Connection with other documents**

Successful implementation of national strategies and programs, SDGs, as well as synergies between various sectors (agriculture/rural development, urban planning, nutrition, health etc.), will contribute to the good health of the population. This will significantly help in improving livelihoods, especially in the rural areas, and boost the resilience of people towards climate change and different shocks that will follow the end of the pandemic.

Integration of nationalized SDGs into implementation of this pathway, as well as alignment with national strategies, will enable the broad coverage of all sectors and sub-sectors which are drivers of sustainable food systems. The priorities of the ARDS are the economy and competitiveness, social conditions and living standard, and environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources. Along with the ARDS, several strategic documents will be integrated into the work, such as the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, National Environmental Action Programme, SMEs Development Strategy, strategies in the health sector, in education, and youth policy implementation.