The American University of Rome

Master in Food Studies and Center for Food Studies

With the scientific patronage of the European Society for Rural Development

Conference

Sustainable Food Systems ⇔ Sustainable Diets

Rome, Friday, 11 October 2019

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Assorted beans and pulses. Credit: Bioversity International/C. Zanzanaini

There is now ample evidence that food provisioning is a major determinant of the unprecedented and possibly irreversible changes in ecosystems. With high-input, resource-intensive agriculture and overfishing, the planet is facing very serious challenges in terms of freshwater availability, soil degradation, continuing deforestation, loss of biodiversity and depleted marine life. Agriculture, and related land use change contributes around one fifth of total global GHG emissions, at the same time as farming is threatened by climate change. The dysfunction of the contemporary food system is also evinced by the co-existence of more than 800 million people in the world who are chronically undernourished and over 1.9 billion people who are overweight or obese.

With global population projected to reach 9.2 billion people by 2050 and with large parts of the world likely to experience higher household income, agricultural demand is expected to increase by 50% compared to 2013 (FAO, 2017) with an acceleration of the dietary transition amongst many low- and middle-income countries towards higher consumption of meat and of processed foods high in fats and sugars (Popkin, 2006). Meeting such demand could increase the environmental effects of the food system by 50-90% if no major mitigation measures are taken or technologies devised, putting at risk the planetary boundaries that constitute a safe operating space for humanity (Springmann et al. 2018).

The dietary transition towards “Western diets” with higher consumption of meat, sugars, and fats has been accentuated by urbanization, globalization and developments in the food systems that have led to concentration of control in a very small number of corporations. With increased separation between the places of production and consumption, citizen-consumers know less about where their food comes from, the impact of their consumption practices on distant producers and the extent to which their food choices, and the prices that influence them, are derived from distant farmlands and seas.

There is consensus that less resource-intensive diets are absolutely necessary for mitigating climate change and that a shift towards more sustainable diets with a lower environmental footprint will reduce the pressure on the use of land, bluewater and freshwater resources and reduce pollution of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems (Willett, et al. 2019; IPCC, 2018; Springmann et al, 2018; Burlingame and Dernini, 2018; Mason and Lang, 2017; Tilman and Clark, 2014; Bioversity International and FAO, 2012). At the same time, it is recognized that changing consumption habits is a complex endeavor that goes beyond individual behavior and involves collective social and institutional changes (Warde, 2017).

This Conference wants to debate how changes in consumption practices can impact on the sustainability of the food system and the challenges described above. What is a sustainable diet in different countries, for different populations and geographic contexts? Which are the obstacles that hinder the transition towards more sustainable consumption practices? How to transition towards climate-resilient development pathways? What is the response of the food industry? Which policies might enable the desirable transitions and transformations? Which new narratives may represent new directions in food consumption and food systems towards sustainable goals?

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Mason, P. and Lang, T. 2017. Sustainable Diets. How Ecological Nutrition Can Transform Consumption and the Food System, Earthscan.

Popkin B.M., 2006. Global nutrition dynamics: the world is shifting rapidly toward a diet linked with noncommunicable diseases. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 2006; 84:28998.

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Tilman, D. and Clark, M. 2014. Global diets link environmental sustainability and human health, *Nature,* 515, 518-522.

Warde, A., Welch, D., & Paddock, J. 2017. *Studying consumption through the lens of practice: Routledge Handbook on Consumption*. In M. Keller, B. Halkier , T-A. Wilska, & M. Truninger (Eds.), *Handbook on Consumption* [1.3] Routledge.

Willett, W. et al., 2019. *Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems*, The Lancet Commissions, Vol. 393, Issue 10170.

Aims of the Conference

In the context of the environmental challenges raised above, the aim of the Conference is to invite contributions that are both theoretically and empirically informed that address:

- efforts across different contexts to change food consumption practices in sustainable directions
- policies, research and investments conducive to fostering the desirable transformations of the food system and dietary practices
- critical assessments of the potential of social and technological innovations (e.g. novel foods) to shape production and consumption practices towards greater sustainability

Keynote speakers	**Harriet Friedmann**, Professor Emerita of Sociology, University of Toronto
	Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy, City, University of London
Invited discussant	**Colin Sage**, Senior Lecturer in Food Geography, University College Cork

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English will be the working language of the Conference.