Global Conference on Sustainability in Agriculture & Food Systems

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Abstract of the intervention:

The Roles of Resilience & Sustainability in Food Systems

One of the great human achievements over the last half century is that advances in food production have largely kept pace with demand on a global basis. Today, around 7 billion people are not hungry, up from about 2 billion 60 years ago. But we should not be complacent. Despite these successes, nearly 1 billion people are still hungry, and at least two billion more lack sufficient nutrients. Paradoxically, there are also already more than 2.5 billion people overweight or obese; different, overlapping forms of malnutrition are the 'new normal'.

We also know that current food system activities will continue to significantly impact natural resources, and that environmental and socioeconomic shocks and stresses are increasing. These include climate change, extreme weather and natural resource depletion, concurrent with substantial changes in geopolitics, socio-economic-cultural conditions, and dietary patterns. Some of these changes are gradual (e.g. global mean temperature increase, demographics, dietary change, cultural evolution, sea-level rise), and can be thought of as increasing stresses. Others can be sudden (e.g., extreme weather events, financial market crashes, disease outbreaks, political volatility, trade wars, conflict), and are thought of as shocks.

How then can the resilience of our food systems be enhanced in the face of these stresses and shocks to (i) ensure sufficient, nutritious food for a growing, increasingly wealthy population while (ii) mitigating poor health and environmental outcomes, and (iii) also enhancing vibrant enterprise and livelihoods?

Building on a brief introduction to food system challenges and what determines the degree of food (in)security, the 30-minute presentation will consider the nature of shocks and stresses. It will cover varied notions of how to enhance food system resilience based on adapting food system activities to transform food system outcomes which are both more sustainable and more resilient. It will conclude with suggestions of who needs to do what to move towards these twin goals.