



Exploring integrated solutions from the land for addressing food and energy production, economic development, biological diversity and climate change challenges.



## **Mounting Food System Challenges Portend Global Humanitarian Crisis – What Can Ag Do?**

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The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it a number of collateral setbacks, not the least of which are the ongoing breakdowns in the global food system. This is especially troubling, given that before the pandemic, hunger was already on the rise with nearly two billion people across the globe suffering from food and nutrition insecurity.

Much is made here in the United States of the growing meat shortages, dairy farmers dumping milk for lack of a ready market, and other setbacks attributable to the coronavirus crisis.

But reports of food chain issues across the globe suggest a universal challenge. Rice shipments from Vietnam and India have been suspended. Russia, Kazakhstan and other nations have stopped exporting processed grains. Serbia has banned the export of sunflower oil, while Egypt has suspended the export of legumes for three months.

Even with global food stocks relatively high at this time, rendering the impact of these protectionist moves fairly small, the prospect of other nations following suit in a sort of domino effect raises fears among world food officials that global markets could develop choke points. Impediments to free flow and trade of food goods would likely prompt much broader shortages and the collateral damages – famine, impoverishment, civil unrest – that could come with them.

Recognizing the growing challenges facing global food systems, the agriculture sector is stepping up. As SfL Co-Chair A.G. Kawamura pointed out this week in a call held among world food industry leaders in anticipation of the World Food Summit set for September 2021 in New York, "It is quite possible that the greater crisis in the making is not the pandemic, but the slowly accelerating collapse of multiple sectors of the global food chain." Kawamura emphasized that the agriculture sector's response to the growing crisis will dictate "how many lives and livelihoods will be impacted in the months and years ahead."

Among Kawamura's recommendations made during the call is for summit leaders to promote enabling policies that ensure that those who produce the food are fairly compensated. He said free rein must be given to those who innovate and find ways to accelerate the sustainable intensification of the production of food, feed, fiber and ecosystem services. In turn, Kawamura said, those services – carbon sequestration, water filtration, biodiversity enhancement and recycling of nutrients – are worthy of investment and should be monetized through enabling policies and investment programs.

The global pandemic and the pressure it is putting on our food systems have brought with them a clarion call for the integrated land management practices advocated by SfL. The new coronavirus underscores the importance of the UN [sustainable development goals](#) (SDGs), which were adopted by all member nations in 2015. The SDGs represent an urgent call for action for all countries – developed and developing – to work together and create strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth, all while tackling climate change and preserving our oceans and forests.

SfL is working on several platforms to promote among world leaders the advantages of land management solutions, such as [large landscape initiatives](#), that can help address the food chain issues that are starting to grow. SfL representatives will be on hand either in-person or virtually in October at the FAO Committee on Food Security Annual Meeting in Rome, Italy, where the COVID-19 pandemic is now expected to dominate discussions. They will also be present in Glasgow, Scotland, for the next round of global climate talks and continue their advocacy of [climate smart agriculture](#), a critically important strategy for addressing a changing climate that is also posing a threat to our food security.

To reiterate a point made in this space four weeks ago, to counter threats like the coronavirus outbreak and climate change, policy makers must embrace land management policies that offer a systems approach that recognizes the tremendous diversity of agricultural landscapes and ecosystems. Furthermore, policies must enable producers to utilize the systems and practices that best support their farming operation.

To further ensure the success of these policies, it is critical to seek the input of farmers, livestock producers and foresters themselves. Those who work the earth have historically faced a myriad of existential threats and have found ways to not only survive but prosper. The coronavirus epidemic and its ramifications on the food system may be unprecedented, but those who produce our food, feed and fiber have long proven their capability to meet severe challenges and thrive.