

## COVID-19 and Food Security PSM Position Paper

The global COVID pandemic has reminded everyone of the need to stay healthy and the primacy of access to food for food security. While the immediate problem has been access to food and the need for shelf stable foods, disruptions at borders and in supply chains may cause an echo in the food system with potentially disastrous effects.

### **A) Keep Food Moving: Domestically and around the world**

This is not the time for isolated country-level policies, but rather to harmonize all operational guidelines and learn from each other on a global level. Trade enables food & nutrition security, and this could not be more important than now. Food and medicines (human and animal) should be top priorities for movement. It is crucial that Governments recognize the importance of the entire food supply chain from agricultural inputs to food and food ingredients, feed, packaging and transportation. This is a year-round cycle driven by harvests and growing seasons.

Simply put, the food security and economic sustainability of the food sector is at stake. In the current COVID-19 situation, food insecurity will dramatically increase if trade in food and feed is not prioritized. CFS stakeholders should encourage the free flow of goods so that people remain food secure, and feed remains readily available for animals and pets. Governments may need to accept a level of flexibility regarding the required documents for the completion of trade transactions, which for example may include accepting scanned copies with original documents sent afterwards—when technically feasible.

Governments should consider prioritizing the cold chain and shelf-life extension technologies, thereby ensuring nutrient-rich perishable food products (e.g. fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meats) are not lost during labour shortages, border disruptions and large fluxes in demand. Coordinated policies by Governments can contribute to these types of food products being prioritized by border control systems. The role for shelf-stable and processed foods is also vital at these times.

### **B) Social Protection: Farmers and SMEs**

Social protection services are essential for everyone. Many fiscal relief measures are geared to employees. It is important to ensure farmers, fishers, and small business owners are also covered by social protection measures.

### **C) Essential Services: Food Supply Chain**

Beyond those health workers in the front line, and to the extent possible, all those working in food supply chain should be considered essential, so that operations in ports, superintendents, pilots on vessels and others can access normally, and keep ports open. Other vital services include: veterinary services, farm supply companies, equipment service, transportation, and warehousing.

Farmer workers, agricultural herders and farm labourers who frequently move across borders must continue harvesting, grazing and planting. Given their contribution to food nutrition security globally, Governments should identify, protect and ensure these and other “essential workers” throughout the entire value chain are able to move and work.

**D) Inputs: prioritize the movement of agricultural inputs**

This unprecedented situation has great potential to disrupt agricultural production, making it critical that farmers have the necessary tools and inputs to produce the food and feed we all need, along with the financial support to stay in business. Planting is seasonal and if inputs are not in place it will impede the ability to produce the next season of crops. It is fundamentally important to ensure that growers can provide food and feed for the time ahead, especially with trade routes, supply chains and retailers all being disrupted.

**E) "One Health": Maximize efficiencies in human and animal health**

PSM is pleased to see FAO is coordinating with WHO and OIE using the One Health approach, since greater alliances between animal and human health researchers are needed to manage disease. Prioritizing coordinating action to exchange the valuable scientific data and information will be key. Lessons learned from Ebola and other animal and human health crises should be shared amongst all CFS stakeholders. These lessons can help governments make the best evidence-based decisions required to identify the correct actions in the most efficient manner.

**F) Global Realities: Let us not forget other food security challenges**

Protracted crises have created public health crises and food security issues in countries such as Syria and Yemen, and now locusts are impacting food security in the Horn of Africa. These very areas will be harder hit by COVID, as highlighted by the HLPE Issue Paper. School feeding programmes that kept children fed are now largely postponed. Take-home rations, home delivery or financial compensation should also be considered for the most vulnerable children.

Recently, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has also released a number of responses to the growing COVID-19 pandemic. CFS chair Mr. Thanawat Tiensin [released a statement](#) which in part read, “we have both a moral and political obligation to initiate a proactive dialogue among stakeholder on the implications and potential impacts on this pandemic on global food security and nutrition.” The High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) also released an [impact report](#) on of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition.

As important as COVID is globally, the lack of access to safe food and water kills millions each year. Global resources should respond to this crisis, while balancing the needs to address other food security crises affecting the world.