

What is the food system and how does it affect nutrition?

LEARNING RESOURCE

Key Concepts

The food system is inclusive of the social, political, institutional, and environmental context of how we produce and ultimately consume food.

- The food system includes the range of actors and systems involved in the food *supply chain*, the *enabling environment*, the *food environment*, and *individual end-consumers*.
- Variables in the food system include how urban or rural a community is, industrialization, the level of formality in markets, agricultural productivity, a community's reliance on staples and food budget share, and more.
- Looking across our food system, we can identify ways to make nearly any food and agriculture related work more *nutrition-sensitive*.
- To find the appropriate entry point, we first analyze the root causes of *food insecurity* and *malnutrition*. What is preventing the consumption of safe, nutritious foods? Understanding what is most significantly impacting food choice and consumption will allow you to focus interventions with the food system to affect those patterns and structures.

The enabling environment of the food system includes the external drivers that affect its functioning, such as the political, economic, technology and infrastructure context.

The food supply chain encompasses the process and actors that move food from the ground where it is grown or raised to our mouths for consumption. This includes *production, food storage, transport, trade, food processing, retailing, marketing and consumer demand*.

- Throughout the food supply chain there are ways to consider and integrate nutrition.

- **Production:** Support production systems that make diverse nutritious foods available, accessible and affordable in sufficient quantities by maximizing production and minimizing food loss.
- **Food storage and transport:** Promote safe storage, develop distribution linkages, and increase technology and safety for safe food transport.
- **Food processing:** Promote processing that makes food more nutritious, shelf-stable, desirable, convenient, affordable, extends shelf life, and maintains food safety.
- **Retailing and marketing:** Support and train food vendors and market governance actors in nutrition and food safety.
- **Consumer demand:** Work to increase consumer demand through interactions at the household level in education and household decision-making.

Practice and check your understanding

Say it out loud (to a colleague, a friend, or to yourself!) or write it here:

What is the difference between the food system and the food supply chain?

What are 3 entry points in the food system where interventions/activities can positively impact nutrition outcomes?

What are 3 possible interventions/activities in the food supply chain that could improve nutrition outcomes?

Further Reading

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2021. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4474en>

Cole, M., Hendriks, S., Kambugu, A., Soussana, J., Zilberman, D. 2021. Ensuring Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for all through Transformation of Food Systems. United Nations: Food Systems Summit 2021. https://sc-fss2021.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Action_Track_1_paper_Ensuring_Access.pdf

