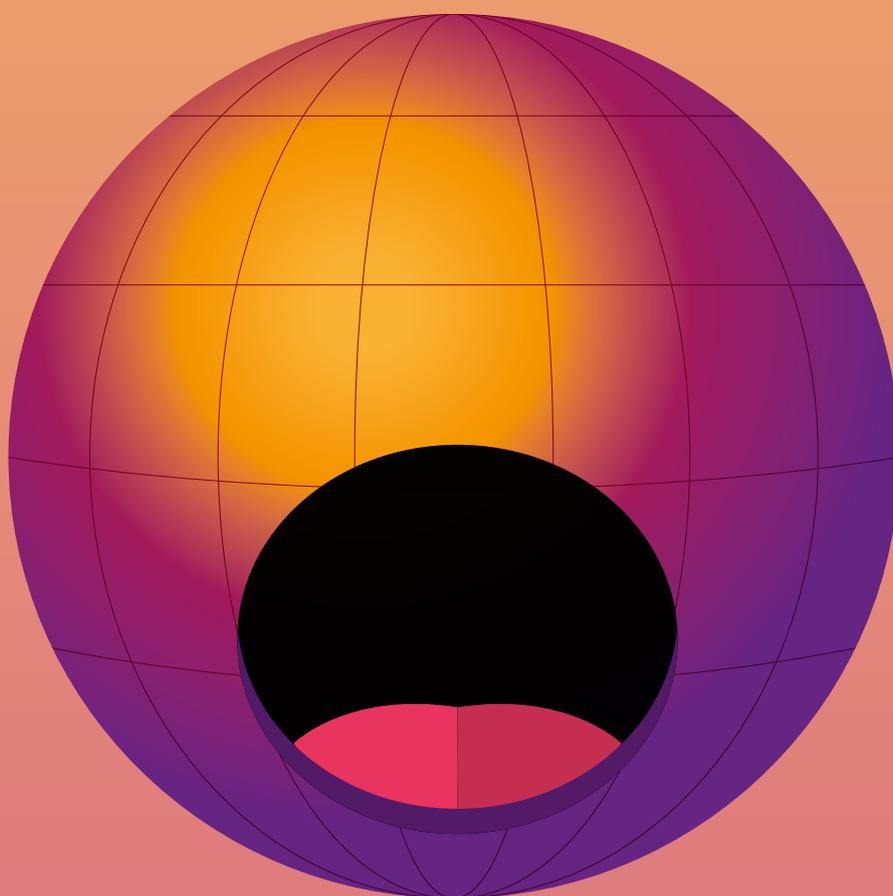


EUROPEAN FOOD TRENDS REPORT

Feeding the Future Opportunities for a Sustainable Food System

by Christine Schäfer, Karin Frick and Johannes C. Bauer



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Feeding the Future: Opportunities for a Sustainable Food System

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About the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute

The Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute (GDI) is an independent think tank in business, society and consumption. Based in Rüschlikon near Zurich, the research institute is the oldest think tank in Switzerland.

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Summary

Food is essential for survival; it fills our bellies, brings us joy, and we are reliant on it. However, what and how we eat not only affects our health, but also the environment. The global food system is a major contributor to global warming, biodiversity loss and thus the destruction of the planet. How can we change this?

A consumer survey conducted by GDI reveals a problem: the average Swiss person, for the most part, has limited knowledge about sustainable diet, and the environment remains low on their priority list when it comes to making choices about food. The business community is also hesitant. What do customers want? How will they react to unfamiliar innovations? What can we expect of them? How will our business models remain sustainable?

Despite these doubts, the transformation of the food system has already begun, and consumers are beginning to rethink their consumption. Industry, logistics, retail and research are developing new solutions for a diet that does not come at the expense of the planet. By employing methods of agro-ecology and precision agriculture, farmers can produce in a more resource-efficient way. Smart data enables more efficient logistics. New virtual distribution channels and a vibrant creator economy – which includes food bloggers, influencers and online chefs – are shaking up the industry and are able to bring important issues to consumers' attention. By using packaging that is recyclable or biodegradable, the processing industry is able to reduce its ecological footprint. Meanwhile, researchers have long since explored alternative protein sources based on cells or fermentation, the production of which generates fewer greenhouse gas emissions compared with conventional meat production.

Those who are quick to recognise these opportunities and take the lead will position themselves for success in the future. But that takes courage – and time. The food system has become increasingly complex, making it challenging to fully understand and putting it beyond the control of individual actors. Nevertheless, change is possible, and a system change is inevitable. Provided, that is, that all key actors – businesses, policymakers and consumers alike – work together and change their behaviour.

As a collective, consumers have the greatest power to effect change. In theory, anyway. As this power is distributed among many individuals, it is challenging to consolidate effectively. In its survey, the GDI asked consumers: What prevents you from switching to sustainable consumption? The results show that consumers often find that products are too expensive, difficult to recognise as sustainable, not available everywhere, and limited in range. Consumers themselves cannot eliminate all these obstacles. It is up to the players in production, retail and politics to take action. They have the power to accelerate the transformation of the food system.

However, conflicting goals within the food system hinder progress. They slow down decision-making and impede change. Priorities are still often set incorrectly. For example, Switzerland subsidises the cultivation of sugar beet, but at the same time warns against the consequences of too much sugar consumption. A realignment of priorities and a redistribution of funds to sustainable sectors are therefore inevitable. Otherwise, unhealthy and environmentally harmful foods will remain cheap, and agriculture will not have sufficient incentives to change its production.

There are many ways to create a sustainable food system. New chances and opportunities are emerging everywhere. By implementing a range of measures, players in agriculture, industry, retail and politics can collectively remove barriers to better consumer choices and create attractive, sustainable and healthy options that do not entail a price increase.

Disclaimer

To improve the readability of this study, no attempt has been made to use both genders in every case. Either form, whether feminine or masculine, used in this study, are intended to represent all persons however they identify in terms of gender.

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