

UN Food System Summit ‘Dialogue’ events spark renewed concerns of corporate capture in North American food system and rural economies globally

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has [announced](#) that this week a series of invitation-only ‘U.S. National Food System Dialogue’ events will be launched ahead of the United Nations Food System Summit (UNFSS), slated for later in 2021. As civil society and food producer groups in the United States, and members of the self-organized [United Nations Committee on World Food Security’s Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism \(CSM\)](#), we have significant concerns about the UNFSS, and its related Food System Dialogue events, which from its onset has been led by interests affiliated to agro-chemical corporations and economic forces that do not serve the interests of people and the planet.

In March 2020, [550 civil society organizations sent an open letter](#) to the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General condemning the involvement of the World Economic Forum in the UNFSS, the appointment of Ms. Agnes Kalibata as UNFSS Special Envoy due to her links to corporate agribusiness, the failure of the UNFSS to elevate the primacy and indivisibility of human rights frameworks as foundational to the governance of food systems, and the necessity of civil society organizations to have an autonomous, self-organized, and equal ‘seat at the table.’ These concerns have not been addressed despite numerous CSM interactions with UNFSS organizers. A Summit born of corporate influence has no chance to meaningfully address the fundamental issues of corporate capture of our food systems, the exploitation of agricultural labor, the marginalization of human rights, and the manipulation of public institutions by powerful business interests.

Our concerns around the legitimacy of the UNFSS, and related events organized by USDA, have been compounded over the past year as we witnessed firsthand the U.S. government’s repeated undermining of negotiations on the UN Committee on World Food Security’s Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition. In [similar fashion](#) to U.S. Ambassador Kip Tom’s attempt to derail international policy discussions around agroecology, the U.S. government’s representation to the UN Committee on World Food Security has objected to the inclusion of references to the UN 2030 Agenda, human rights frameworks (specifically the Right to Adequate Food, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, and ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights) references to the World Health Organization and regional public health authorities, and safeguards against conflicts of interest in public policy-making spaces. Furthermore, the U.S. National Food Systems Dialogue events are led by U.S. Undersecretary of Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs at USDA, Mr. Ted McKinney, who prior to this role worked for nearly 20 years for Dow AgroSciences, now part of Corteva which is one of the world’s largest agro-chemical corporations. These on-going elements clearly indicate that the U.S. government is neither objective in engaging in multilateral policy spaces in the United Nations, nor acting in good-faith to represent the needs and interests of all producers in the U.S. toward the transformational food system change we need, and thus further undermines the legitimacy of the UNFSS.

The COVID 19 public health crisis clearly revealed the fragility of the corporate-dominated sectors of the food system in the U.S. and globally. With rising hunger in the U.S., historically high farmer

debt, producer income and housing insecurity, and agribusiness monopsony control of most key agricultural markets and sectors (including farm inputs, processing, and retail), it has never been more apparent that systemic reform of food and agriculture sector governance is needed.

The UN is an international organization in which all countries are supposed to have an equal voice, regardless of their economic weight. Existing mechanisms at the UN, including the UN Committee on World Food Security, allow meaningful consultation, negotiation, and dialogue with civil society and producer organizations from around the world. We call on USDA and the U.S. government's representation to the UN, and the UN specialized agencies, to make significant changes in how it approaches international food and agriculture policy. In the context of the UNFSS, we urge the incoming Biden-Harris administration to:

- Publicly announce and implement steps to raise environmental, labor, public health, food security/sovereignty, and economic standards of all food producers, workers, and consumers, with prioritization of historically underserved and marginalized communities, through international multilateral fora, such as the UN Committee on World Food Security and UNFSS.
- Publicly announce all stakeholders the U.S. government is consulting in the formulation of its policy positions and priorities in-relation to the UNFSS.
- Determine processes to ensure broad and meaningful participation, consultation, and negotiation with civil society and producer organizations (including CSM North America) throughout all events and policy negotiations related to the UNFSS and the UN Committee on World Food Security.
- Take conflicts of interest prevention measures to ensure that the UNFSS, and the U.S. government's role in the UNFSS, do not cater to agribusiness interests but rather the public good.

We look forward to a response to these concerns.

On behalf of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism - North America

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