

## Panelists discuss environmental and health impacts of Global Food Systems

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The second Global Session of the [UN Science-Policy-Business Forum](#) on the Environment convened from 9-10 March 2019 at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters, Nairobi, Kenya, on the eve of the [fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly \(UNEA-4\)](#). The Forum focused on the nexus of science, innovation and entrepreneurship for the environment. On 9 March 2019, the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) team hosted three panel discussions on Environmental and Health Impacts of Waste, Energy and Food Systems using messages drawn from the [sixth Global Environment Outlook \(GEO-6\)](#). The latter had a panel of Brett Rierson from World Food Programme (WFP); Andrés Guhl from Universidad de los Andes (Columbia), Lorenzo Giovanni from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Isis Alvarez from the Global Forest Coalition.

The environmental footprint of the global food system is massive: responsible for 19-29 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions; the principal user of fresh water accounting for 70 per cent of withdrawals; is the main driver of biodiversity loss; a major polluter of air, fresh water and seawater, particularly in farming systems that have heavy or poorly managed use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Within this environmental footprint, the consequences of livestock raising are disproportionately large – responsible for about half of agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions and almost 80 per cent of agricultural land use – a third of all cropland is used to produce feed crops. A whole systems approach is needed to reduce the agri-food system's environmental impacts and increase its overall efficiency and resilience including action to intensify agriculture sustainably, reduce food losses and greenhouse gas emissions along supply chains, and tackle wasteful consumption patterns including high consumer food waste and overconsumption of animal products.



*The Food Systems Panel in session:*

The panel noted that [GEO-6](#) addresses some fundamental questions for humanity today, including whether we will be able to change consumption and production patterns for a sustainable future.

Lorenzo Giovanni Bellu stressed that both the [GEO-6](#) and the recent FAO report "[The future of food and agriculture – Alternative pathways to 2050](#)", amongst other things, addressed what can be done to manage food demand and reorient people's dietary preferences towards more nutritious and less resource-intensive food. He stressed on how poverty, inequality and unemployment continue to constrain food access and hamper the achievement of food security and nutrition goals. He added that a more equitable income distribution is a must and requires strengthening access to assets for vulnerable groups.

Brett Rierson spoke on reducing post-harvest losses for poor communities through promoting improved hermetic storage, which has the added benefit of boosting livelihoods for women. He mentioned about [WFP Zero Food Loss Mission](#) that by 2030, 200 million smallholder families would be aware that they can reduce losses to almost zero and 50 million families would use hermetic storage. The outcome of these would be that agriculture becomes a profitable, desirable activity; farm productivity increases without new inputs; and economic power will shift into rural areas with the effect of economic growth and social stability.



Lorenzo Giovanni Bellu from FAO addressing the audience

Andrés Guhl, who was also one of the authors of the [Land Chapter in GEO-6](#), presented on Environmental and health impacts of food systems as stated in the [GEO-6](#) and underscored the role of consumer education and awareness in contributing to more sustainable diets. He also emphasized the switch to a less meat intensive diet and the role of private sector on sustainable production through certification schemes and voluntary guidelines. Andrés highlighted that by 2050, many of the problems highlighted in the panel discussion would still be present and that improved agricultural and livestock raising production systems that include Climate Smart agriculture; use of ancestral and traditional varieties; and improved water management are recommended.

Isis Alvarez spoke on Latin America's Livestock Systems role in forest and biodiversity loss through soybeans production for feed production and the resultant social impacts. She gave the example of an 11-year-old that died due to toxicity caused by Monsanto's Round Up that was used in spraying the neighboring monoculture soy fields. She presented that attracting investment should not be at the expense of human rights, people's livelihoods and environmental damage. Adding that a lower demand in meat and soy production is desired both in consumer and producing countries, with a shift to plant based diets and support for small-scale, localized organic food production. Protection of biodiversity, animal welfare and the rights and practices of peasant farmers, Indigenous Peoples and local communities should form the basis of agricultural policy.



From Left to Right: Lorenzo Giovanni Bellu (FAO), Isis Alvarez (GFC), Brett Rierson (WFP), Andrés Guhl (Universidad de los Andes) and Eddah Kaguthi (UN Environment) during the Science-Policy-Business Forum panel discussion on Environmental and Health Impacts of Food Systems on 9 March 2019.

