

Headline: How local food systems ensure sufficient supply and help the planet

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The global food system — which encompasses the journey of food production from the farms to our plates — is exerting enormous pressure on our environment.

By 2050, with a projected increased global population of 9.8 billion, we would need the equivalent of almost three planets worth of resources to sustain our way of living, if our current consumption and production patterns remain the same.

A 2021 study published in *Nature* said that 34 percent of global human-caused greenhouse emissions, which exacerbate climate change, are driven by the global food system, from production, land-use change, to packaging and transporting our food.

Climate change also threatens our food security. Changes in weather patterns can reduce crop yields, diminish the nutritive value of some foods and, as we know too well, the greater frequency of extreme weather events destroy farmlands, coastal areas, and transport infrastructure.

While there are many challenges, there are also plenty of solutions at every scale. We need to be, not just ordinary consumers, but food citizens. For one, we must strengthen our local food systems.

One example of a local food system that works is the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-Philippines' food shed farming enterprise that was first developed in 2016 for sugarcane smallholder farms in Negros Occidental.

The sugarcane workers and their families had poor access to the variety of nutrients needed to be healthy. They are also among the poorest sectors in the country and were in need of additional sources of livelihood.

Each food shed is a greenhouse made of locally available materials. Food sheds are a sustainable system as they optimize the use of limited space for food production, while improving the health of the soil through regenerative practices. It requires a land area of about 60 square meters, including open space and access pathways. The actual production area is 42 sq m.

Communities benefit from proximity to a healthy variety of crops and from financial literacy training and organizing as a community enterprise. The system uses green and natural farming technologies such as composting, rainwater harvesting, and natural pest and disease control, among others, to produce healthy and quality crops and poultry (e.g., chicken meat and egg) products.

From the initial two food sheds in Negros, WWF-Philippines with the support of donors and the communities themselves, have now built 60 food sheds all over the country, including Palawan and Donsol. Our goal for the food shed program is to replicate the model toward the holistic improvement of communities and the environment. Food sheds have proven to be a successful vehicle for communities to visualize an effective local food system within their own neighborhood.

Community-based efforts such as the food shed farming enterprise play an important part in the overall effort to address food security, but they need to be coupled with national and local initiatives

and policy support. The National Land Use Act is a good example of legislation that will strategically address food security because it designates areas for food production all over the country. Local government ordinances promoting urban/compact agriculture will also encourage more people to be engaged in productive initiatives.

Addressing food security requires a whole of society approach. Local efforts are part of the solution.

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