Putting Food in Food

Packaged food as an essential lever in achieving positive health, social and environmental impacts

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Key messages

- Packaged and processed foods are an essential lever in achieving positive health, social and environmental impacts.
- FReSH proposes a systemic approach to food system transformations whereby changes to food processing and packaging (that businesses can own and act on now) trigger improvements across the value chain.
- This systemic approach emphasizes the fact that multiple interconnected solutions exist and need to be further developed to combine both incremental and transformational changes in order to achieve healthy and sustainable foods.
- Transformation will require identifying which business practices should be phased out, repurposed, or fast-tracked into food system goals on healthy and sustainable foods that meet social needs and have a strong business case.

Transforming food systems

Food systems – all the processes involved in feeding the global population – are key to supporting good health and well-being and are a critical part of the biosphere, underpinning prosperous societies and economies.[1] Yet current food systems are not providing adequately for people or the planet. Despite progress on improving nutrition, the burden of malnutrition remains stubbornly high: 815 million individuals are hungry,[2] 2 billion are deficient in critical micronutrients,[3] and 2.1 billion adults are overweight or obese,[4] contributing to the upsurge in diet-related diseases. Beyond nutritional outcomes, food systems are also a main contributor to environmental damage. They are responsible for up to 30% of greenhouse gas emissions[5] and 70% of global freshwater use,[6,7] and they drive deforestation, biodiversity loss, land degradation and pollution.

Action is needed urgently to shift food systems from their current status as major drivers of ill health and environmental degradation to a major force for securing both environmental and human health. Achieving impact requires transformational change over a two-year timeframe to demonstrate traction. To be transformational, action will need to be broad-scale, collective and mainstreamed. Yet a business case will only advance action so far: support is needed from science, policy, the technology sector and civil society to develop solutions, implement supportive policy, develop new tech solutions and engage with consumer groups to increase trust.

> "A business case will only advance action so far: support is needed from science, policy, the technology sector and civil society as well"

Food Reform for Sustainability and Health (FReSH)

To support business action and contributions to healthy and sustainable food systems, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and EAT through FReSH (Food Reform for Sustainability and Health) have convened a series of Science to Solutions Dialogues to facilitate and accelerate dia-

logue, engagement and action between academic research, civil society and the private sector. As such the dialogue aimed to (1) share scientific thinking on healthy diets from sustainable food systems; (2) scope out the specific business solution spaces that FReSH members can support; and (3) direct new areas of relevant scientific research.

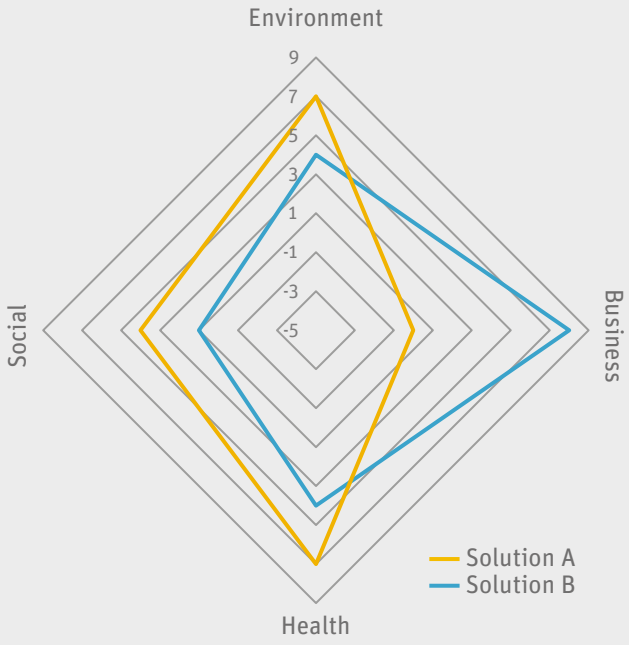
The first dialogue was held in March 2018, focusing on Putting Food in Food and identifying three challenge areas:

- How to improve the nutritional content and environmental sustainability of processed and packaged foods;
- How to bring the consumer along and unleash consumer power to embrace and drive change; and
- How to ensure that processing and packaging contribute to significant reductions of food waste and loss.

Three overarching messages emerged (Figure 1):

- Business represents a collective influence and capacity that is sufficient to set the changes required in motion;
- Business, science and society must persevere so that these actions become mainstream within the next two years – a critical timeframe to demonstrate traction; and
- The level of ambition must match the urgency for transformation.

FIGURE 1: The interrelation of environment, business, health and society



Source: FReSH, SSD1 2018.

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Providing affordable, safe, enjoyable and high-quality foods to all

So why was this necessary? Food processing is a core activity that can be used to provide affordable, safe, enjoyable and high-quality foods to all. Yet there are challenges to overcome in terms of both perception (e.g., categorical labeling of processed foods as unhealthy) and reality (e.g., generalizable low nutritional quality of many processed foods, or on the flip side, underemphasis of the contribution of food packaging to food safety and reduced food loss and waste). Greater emphasis of improved and real food quality of processed and packaged food – without neglecting taste and appeal – as well as greater emphasis on leveraging processing and packaging in order to increase the shelf life of highly perishable, highly nutritious and environmentally expensive food (e.g., high carbon, land and water footprints) are essential, if net positive health, environmental, business and social impacts are to be secured.

To test a range of business solutions, the dialogue participants engaged in a calibration exercise that simultaneously assesses candidate solution space impact on positive health *as well as* social *and* environmental *and* business impacts. They found this to be a useful exercise, but were eager to develop a more detailed semiquantitative tool to complement and test the assumptions made. For example, they noted that short-, medium- and long-term impacts would vary. In addition, the various solutions might affect different segments of the population in different ways. Participants proposed that one way to provide for this level of specificity would be to develop more precise indicators for each of the four dimensions.

Challenge areas and solution spaces

1. Improving the nutritional content and sustainability of processed food to help address over- and undernutrition

Food processing can play a pivotal role in addressing both under- and overnutrition. With a common understanding of the key challenge in mind – i.e., that solution spaces must focus on creating net positive impacts for both health and the environment – two key solutions to do this emerged during this dialogue.

First, to improve the nutritional quality of processed foods, reformulation, innovation and renovation are key tools that companies can use to optimize the healthiness of ingredients and to

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show that taste and nutrition are not mutually exclusive. Second, companies can develop sourcing and procurement standards to source healthy ingredients from sustainable production systems. For maximum impact, mainstreamed procurement standards that promote high-quality (healthy + sustainable) foods based on the EAT-Lancet Commission report outcomes should combine these two solutions.

To accomplish this, we should create a consensus framework on food quality capturing contributions to reducing over- and undernutrition and supporting multiple dimensions of sustainable food production. We must also understand financial partnerships to drive change and harness sensory science, and optimize the role of technology in overcoming transparency and traceability challenges for processed food inputs along the supply chain. Finally, we should send clear signals of intent to buy healthy, sustainably produced ingredients that are socially acceptable and beneficial.

It is necessary to make these procurement standards and practices mainstream. The ambition is to have 100% adoption of such standards and to become steadfast in the pursuit of such notions.

"We should send clear signals of intent to buy healthy, sustainably produced ingredients that are socially acceptable and beneficial"

2. Bringing the consumer along

Reframing the current discourse will harness the power of individuals to embrace and drive change. It requires putting individual well-being at the core of business solutions rather than viewing consumers as reluctant followers of business trends. Any approach to influencing consumer choice should account for the four main drivers of choice (Figure 2):

1. Marketing/advertising
2. Availability (e.g., costs, supply)
3. Taste/reward
4. Habits/familiarity/cultural preferences

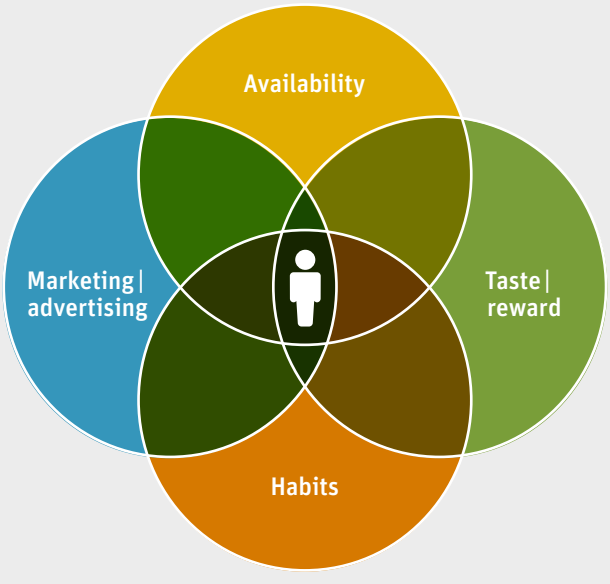
This can be done with a multifaceted consumer behavior change program that addresses these four drivers, complementing the introduction of innovative and reformulated processed foods to support health, well-being, and the environment (a solution identified in the first challenge). A holistic package of interventions targeting each driver will have a synergistic rather than additive effect. Focal areas for interventions include:

- **Marketing/advertising:** Optimize marketing and advertising to increase acceptability of healthy and sustainable food. Use innovative language to sell healthier/more sustainable foods without the healthy/sustainable label.
- **Availability:** Equivalent costs for healthy/sustainable and unhealthy/unsustainable foods could lead to equivalent acceptability.
- **Taste/reward:** Incrementally improve the health and sustainability quotient of food while preserving taste and acceptability.
- **Habit/familiarity/cultural preferences:** Use teachable moments and behavior change programs to change individuals' food habits.

Since sustained consumer behavior change programs are costly for businesses, building a convincing business case for behavior change programs is the key to selling businesses on the long-term benefits for their bottom line. Additionally, pilot interventions and scale-up strategies should recognize that one size does not fit all – one dimension of consumer choice might be more dominant in certain contexts.

Building a strong business case and piloting interventions to demonstrate multiple impacts (e.g., introducing smart foods to create demand for traditional foods and crops, encouraging towns to support communities' transition to resilient, low-carbon communities) will be central to scaling up such behavior change programs. Yet a business case will only advance actions so far; support from other actors, particularly though public policy and supportive legislation and partnerships to facilitate scale-up, will be essential to achieving mainstream support.

FIGURE 2: The four main drivers of choice



Source: FReSH, SSD1 2018.

3. Reducing food losses and waste (FLW) associated with food processing and packaging

To reduce food losses and waste associated with food processing and packaging, it is crucial to reframe the narrative from one centering on the cost of food to one emphasizing the value of food, including food that is wasted.

Four main solution spaces underscore the need for evidence to enable the development of specific solutions for this:

1. **Technologies to optimize processing and preservation** (with a particular focus on preserving fresh foods to increase their shelf life)
2. **Logistics solutions** (length of supply chain and delivery method, storage facilities)
3. **Consumer-oriented solutions** (portion size, replenishment and leftover management – technologies and apps)
4. **Mathematical modeling** (in order to limit the number of experiments that would produce FLW)

Barriers include regulatory restrictions on price agreements and purchasing agreement opacity. Consumer acceptance of processed foods is an area that requires more focus, as well as changing consumer mindsets regarding willingness to overpurchase and then waste food. There are imbalances in production versus demand, sometimes leading to overproduction, which in turn can result in food loss.

Levers include technology that producers can use to access up-to-date market information. Additionally, loans for good practice can provide incentives for producers to adopt positive production and processing methods.

To maximize impact, the FReSH platform is an ideal space to facilitate the sharing of best practices on FLW in a precompetitive space. To respond to the urgency for immediate change, businesses could adopt both incremental measures, such as shorter-term quick wins, and more systemic, longer-term solutions that might be more challenging to execute but more transformational in impact.

Reframing the current discourse will require putting individual well-being at the core of business solutions rather than viewing consumers as reluctant followers of business trends

Advancing these solutions

FReSH, WBSCD and EAT have a role in supporting the specific solutions put forth by Science to Solutions Dialogue 1: Putting Food in Food and in championing the required change on global platforms. In particular, these organizations recognize their responsibility to:

1. Create and amplify a new narrative that drives action;
2. Build the business case for action;
3. Support the development of action frameworks;
4. Curate the evidence needed to support action;
5. Normalize cross-sector collaboration; and
6. Gain support from other actors to achieve tipping points for transformation.

About FReSH

FReSH (Food Reform for Sustainability and Health) is a key WBCSD initiative aimed at food system transformation and industry change that emerged from the EAT–WBCSD partnership.

We turn the conventional 'farm to fork' approach on its head by working from 'fork to farm' to develop, implement and scale transformative solutions that are aligned with science-based targets.

This means we start with people, focusing on their consumption habits. Then we work back through the food system – from retail, packaging and distribution to how and what we grow – to determine what levers business can pull to contribute to food system reform in order to create healthy, enjoyable food for all, produced responsibly, within planetary boundaries, by 2030.

FReSH was jointly launched in January 2017 by EAT and the WBCSD and 25 founding member companies. The total membership has since grown to 36 companies thus far.

The entire outcome report can be found on the website of FReSH – we would welcome your thoughts and feedback to support food system transformation to create healthy, enjoyable food for all, produced responsibly within planetary boundaries by 2030.

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