

## International Agri-Food Network 2020 Activity Report

The International Agri-Food Network continued to build on a history of collaborative work to actively engage in international development processes across UN environments in 2020.

Rick White, CEO of the Canadian Canola Growers' Association, continued his two-year term as Chair of IAFN. He is the first farmer to serve in this role and has also been appointed as a Champion for the Food Systems Summit, due to take place in 2021. Both due to the uncertainty of how meetings will be conducted in 2021 and the importance of ensuring the continuity of IAFN's presence and involvement in the Summit, IAFN members decided and accepted (December 2020) that Rick White would remain chair of IAFN until the AGM in June 2022.

IAFN's presence in Rome and in the international food security community is well-established, thanks to the regular engagement of its members through the PSM in the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and at other fora, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), and the UN General Assembly (UNGA). In 2020, despite the lack of in-person presence and engagement IAFN contributed to the PSM work to the topics of Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches, Voluntary Guidelines on Nutrition, SDG Indicator 2.4.1, the International Year of Plant Health and Codex in addition to its ongoing work in amplifying private sector voices in pursuit of SDG2: End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture.

In particular, IAFN members were actively engaged in the (extensive) negotiations for the Voluntary Guidelines on Nutrition, including the Friends of the Chair meetings. This commitment to engagement was also evident in the participation in the five informal dialogues for the ongoing development of the Policy Guidelines for Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches.

### 1. FAO Activities

#### **FAO Governing Bodies, tracking of key decisions of Council, Finance and Programme committees.**

During the course of the year the Secretariat has tracked key issues for membership that have been brought before the FAO governing bodies for discussion. As a result of COVID-19, there were many unexpected changes to the FAO governing body calendar, including postponements, and transformation from in-presence to virtual meetings. Nevertheless, the virtual format did not lead to a decrease participation levels, with private sector registering in high numbers for all five FAO regional conferences, Committee on Agriculture, and various other FAO special events. The virtual format of meetings via Zoom could also be seen as having contributed to a more transparent involvement of non-state actors in the FAO meetings.

Some of the most relevant issues tracked during the course of the year have included:

- Updates on the preparation for Food Systems Summit, including engagement in Action Tracks and participation in the CEO Dialogues.
- FAO Private Sector Partnership Strategy (approved by the December 2020 FAO Council, see below), a detailed assessment of key points, issues and next steps was provided to members.
- Codex: Resources allocated to the FAO Food Safety and Scientific Advice Programme, in light of the FAO reorganization, FAO Food Safety Strategy.

- FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors.
- Updates on the FAO International Digital Platform for Food and Agriculture.

During the FAO Council (November 30<sup>th</sup>-December 4<sup>th</sup>) the FAO's new Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-2025 was approved and this will be a key platform for future IAFN engagement. The Chair of the Council commented that, in approving the Strategy members noted "the balance required between need for accelerated engagement with Private Sector and the need to ensure FAO's independence, credibility and transparency". The Strategy does identify new areas of engagement and a updated due diligence approach and expanded mechanisms through which partnerships can be developed. However, member states will require regular reports and the new due diligence mechanisms and rules will be periodically reviewed by the relevant Governing Bodies.

### COAG

The 27th Session of the FAO Committee on Agriculture was held virtually and 9 members were successfully registered by the Secretariat. A whatsapp group was created and made available to those attending the session to coordinate interventions and assist if needed. The virtual format allowed members to get a greater understanding of the COAG committee process and engage more substantively. The Committee welcomed this engagement and highlighted the importance of farmers, civil society and the private sectors to observe in the work of COAG in the future.

With the theme of Livestock's Contribution to the SDGs, there were many issues of relevance to IAFN membership. The conclusions from the COAG report highlighted the importance of the livestock sector and the need to track the activities related to it during the course of the entire intersessional period. The endorsed FAO Subcommittee on Livestock will be a channel to do so which the Secretariat will monitor for future engagement.

### Partnership, Outreach and Engagement

IAFN engaged with the new FAO management team responsible for the evolving private sector approaches of FAO which included both direct engagement with Beth Bechdol, the new FAO Deputy Director-General. IAFN introduced six key points of interaction with FAO. 1) Build back bBetter roundtables; 2) A Private Sector Council; 3) Jointly plan innovation seminars; 4) Plan 2 private sector events with FAO Director General annually; 5) Support the hand-in-hand engagement through companies; 6) Identify one partnership issue a year to advance (One Health for example). As part of the FAO private sector consultations, IAFN participated in three virtual meetings and online consultations (June-July). These sessions covered vision, engagement and impact and IAFN members had opportunity to provide suggestions and ideas for implementing FAO's new approach, stressing the need for broad and consistent engagement and the potential of joint training programmes.

### FAO Biodiversity Strategy Response and Engagement

As part of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors the Chair of IAFN was invited to speak at a Side Event of the Global Symposium on Soil Biodiversity (March 2020) on the implementation of practices using biodiversity/nature based solutions in promoting soil health. The event has been postponed but the engagement with IAFN by FAO remains the basis for further dialogue on this topic.

### 2. Youth and SMEs

As an IAFN activity linked to received sponsorship, which was not forthcoming, the IAFN engagement was limited to supporting the newly established youth group with their basic logistics and facilitating of on-line meetings.

### 3. Codex

Some overarching themes arising from the pandemic have highlighted the importance of Codex, due to the need for transparent and predictable rules-based trade, as well as the importance of science. In this environment, the Codex Coalition identified and discussed amongst its membership various issues and potential solutions. Throughout the year the Coalition with assistance from the Secretariat, provided outreach within Geneva, Rome and beyond to inform and influence policy discussions underway at FAO, WTO and in Ministries. Advocacy was proactive, continuous and targeted through outreach on key issues such as 1) the high level of global attention to trade/MRL issues; 2) non-science factors being considered by Codex, and 3) Impact of Codex meeting delays, need for prioritizing delayed CCPR/JMPR, and proceeding virtually.

The Secretariat disseminated timely information and invitations to relevant webinars related to timely topics, including: 1) Farmers' Perspectives on SPS Challenges for Sustainable Food Production and Trade; 2) Challenges and opportunities related to the EU Green Deal for LAC agro producers and exporters; 3) Africa MRL challenges; 4) FAO rice webinar on margins of SPS committee; 5) COVID-19 webinars on the resilience of Trade; and 6) U.S. ITC and farmer case study presentations on margins of SPS committee.

### Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The AGM was held on 16 June via Zoom. While it did not benefit from an in-person participation from members, a full agenda was covered, which included discussion on Governance Matters, Workstream updates, International Year of Fruits and Vegetables, and other routine items.

*The IAFN Secretariat team would like to thank IAFN members for their diligent and productive work throughout this year.*