



We need to talk about climate change: bringing farmers and cities around the same table

The Fork to Farm Global Dialogue at COP26

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Introduction

The Fork to Farm Dialogues process has been about building relationships of trust between two sets of food systems actors, namely farmers and local policymakers. This process was born out of a desire to bring the voices of diverse farmers and local communities around the world close to the United Nations climate negotiations at COP26 in Glasgow, to support the decolonisation and democratisation of global food and climate policies¹.

Many food systems do not produce healthy food, they do not reward producers equitably and they destroy the environment, currently accounting for one third of global greenhouse gas emissions². It is becoming clear that the Paris Agreement cannot be met without rethinking food systems. Farmers, processors, traders, retailers, consumers, and local government are the ones who make change happen.

Food matters to our health, our families, our schools, our hospitals and is a core ingredient to forging community. It matters to local government, producers, businesses, and consumers. Food touches on multiple sectors: environment, agriculture, health, labour, trade, industry, etc. In short, food is a thread linking people with each other and helping join up disparate policy strands.

At COP26 our aim was to begin a conversation between those who think about change and those who make it happen, between those who produce and those who consume food, between those who seek reliable food production for now and those who worry about the future. By promoting this dialogue between those engaged in agriculture, livestock raising, fishing, pastoralism, and forestry along with subnational governments, and empowering them to act, more sustainable food systems will emerge. Only then we will be able to develop coherent policies that successfully deliver food systems transformation and address environmental and nutritional challenges.

We acknowledge that global and national policies are necessary to create the right conditions for food systems transformation. Our emphasis on dialogues seeks to accentuate the essential role of farmers and cities³ within the policy making process — not just in implementing top-down policy, but in shaping such policies, finding new solutions together and co-creating their futures⁴. In international policy spaces, including at the first UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, policies are being designed to define what needs to be done to decarbonise food practice, yet food producers and local governments are rarely meaningfully involved in these conversations⁵.

The name ‘Fork to Farm’ does not refer to the well-known idea of tracing food from farm to table; ‘Farm to Fork’. In ‘Fork to Farm’, the ‘Fork’ (recognising that not everyone eats with a fork) represents those who are not involved in food production such as decision-makers and consumers. It is the ‘Fork’ that needs to go to the ‘Farm’, representing food producers. This reflects the idea that decision-makers, consumers, and other food-system actors, need to make the effort to reconnect, through conversations, with the places where their food comes from, the ecological systems that produce food, and the people who steward these resources.

The Fork to Farm Dialogue process tried a new approach, following our Guiding Principles, co-written by the Fork to Farm Steering Group⁶.



Dandelion Johannesburg, South-Africa

The dandelion has a crucial role in restoring healthy soils from those that have been heavily compacted, thanks to their strong root structure.

The dandelion is a welcome plant in our garden and is never removed.

Object brought by participants to represent something that they are proud of in their food systems.

Guiding Principles

Just transition and respect for human rights

The Fork to Farm process is guided by the aim of achieving a just transition for farmers and cities to sustainable and resilient food systems that ensure access to fair and secure livelihoods and healthy and culturally appropriate diets for all.

Diversity

The Fork to Farm process is inclusive and will be grounded in the understanding that it is necessary to ensure diverse participation across age, gender, geography, ethnicity and farming and knowledge systems to build and support resilient and life-affirming food systems.

Equity and equal participation

Equity must be at the heart of the Fork to Farm process provides a safe space where horizontal dialogue between farmers and cities can take place and where all contributions are respected and carry equal weight.

Respect for different farming and knowledge systems

Equitable and inclusive participation must build on respect for the diverse farming and knowledge systems including Indigenous, traditional, and mainstream systems existing in the region. Dialogue hosts and facilitators work to ensure that these are represented and equally respected in the Fork to Farm process.

Sustainability and resilience

The Fork to Farm Process aims to contribute to sustainable and resilient food systems based on practices that respect and support the natural and social resources they rely on. This means that the Fork to Farm Dialogues support integrated food systems approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation that enable relationships of reciprocity within the food system. These relationships include those between social and cultural food practices, farming practices and natural resources, land, soil, water, and biodiversity.

Local-led and context-specific

The Fork to Farm methodology is adaptable to local context and intended to be co-designed by people and place. Recognising that the impact of the challenges faced vary between communities and that just and effective approaches to the climate and nature emergency must be grounded in local realities and experiences.

Connecting the Fork to Farm Dialogue process to COP26 was a way to link global policy with the practical experience of farmers and cities seeking to support and protect local food systems in accordance with the principles of the right to food and food sovereignty.

In preparation for COP26 we developed the Fork to Farm Local Dialogue by partnering with people in Ecuador, Scotland, Wales, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, México, Tanzania, the Philippines, Peru, and Belgium ⁷.

The defining feature of these Local Dialogues was to bring primary producers into a relationship-building process with actors who have decision-making power in the food system.

Each Fork to Farm Local Dialogue was shaped by its specific context and driven by the desire of communities to come together to reflect on the impacts and resilience of their food systems in the context of health, economic, and ecological crises. Throughout 2021 dialogues ran simultaneously across the world, with dialogue facilitators coming together as a Community of Practice, as part of a global movement of concerned farmers and cities. This Community of Practice was coordinated by Nourish Scotland and Go Deep Scotland.

This report on the Fork to Farm Global Dialogue presents the conversations which took place at this event. Snippets from the conversations exemplify how, **if we want a just transition where healthier food systems secure sustainable food for cities and sustainable futures for farmers, these local actors need to be key agents in the policy-making process.**

Theory of change

The climate crisis is driven by years of urbanisation, marginalisation of native foodways, and promotion of industrial agriculture and fishing.

Many food producers now feel singled out as part of the problem despite being incentivised for years to industrialise to feed the world. They are being left behind to carry the burden of the worst impacts of climate change.

In cities, nutrition insecurity is on the rise, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic which has been deepening inequalities. In many places, rifts between urban and rural populations prevent the two actors from connecting⁸. Yet both urban and rural residents are demanding action on climate change. With the knowledge, expertise, and existing relationships of decision-makers and farmers with

residents, land, water, and animals, these actors have the potential to build resilient food systems that are nourishing for all, but they need to work together.

At the heart of the Fork to Farm Dialogues process, is the theory that change happens locally and is driven by unique local knowledge, circumstances, and relationships.

Food producers and their communities around the world hold place-specific knowledge. Local governments are closer to their residents and garner a sense of local identity. As a result, these local actors are best informed about what can and cannot be done in their locale and are able to establish participatory and democratic ways to govern their local food system.

How do we work together?

At its heart, collaboration is about relationships, shared visions, and solidarity. However, trustworthy relationships take time to build. What is needed then, is a deep social process.

Guided by skilled facilitators, the Fork to Farm Dialogue process begins with the lived experiences of the participants. The conversation starts with emotions, personal experiences of food and climate change, and with participants' hopes and concerns for the future. Everyone is invited to share and deeply listen.

We believe this to be a decolonial process. This is because colonisation, was and continues to be a process of severing relationships both between and within ourselves and with everything around us. Coloniality can be understood as a process in which a person or group of people posit their ways of being and doing things as the only right way to do so⁹. Coloniality denies that there are multiple ways of being and doing things, emerging from relationships with local places, and possible 'worlds' which can coexist. If we view this in the context of relationship building, a colonial approach is one where a person or group of people is resistant to transforming themselves through meaningful relationships with others.

Thus, a decolonial approach is one where we are open to experiencing a deep and meaningful relationship-building process where we are openly transformed through our interactions with others (human and non-human).

Led by farmer and city participants, the dialogues do not begin with the technical concepts of climate change 'mitigation' and 'adaptation'. Instead, they begin with loss and loyalties, with stories and worries, with pride in place and engagement with local foodways. This whole-systems thinking reflects bottom-up approaches to building resilience that are guided by community needs, aspirations, and knowledge and complements the top-down policy-driven approach.

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Sheep Wool **The Borders, Scotland**

Sheep's wool goes to waste on sheep that are produced for meat, wool is worth nothing. Cost of shearing costs more than the value of the wool, there are some sheep that cast their own coats. Some have hair but not wool. We are quite high up, so sheep will shed. There are a lot of technologies around sheep. Sometimes we milk sheep. You use special breeds – British milk sheep. People are eating less sheep meat. It is not as convenient as something like chicken and is stronger tasting, once upon a time it was only sheep and beef.

Object brought by participants to represent something that they are proud of in their food systems.