



FOOD
PRACTICE

WE DON'T KNOW BUT WE DO CARE

Understanding public awareness of
the food system's threat to nature



THE FOOD SYSTEM: THE BIGGEST THREAT TO NATURE

CAUSES 70% OF
BIODIVERSITY LOSS
CAUSES AT LEAST 24% OF
ALL EMISSIONS
CAUSES 75% OF
TROPICAL DEFORESTATION
USES 34% OF ALL LAND
USES 69% OF ALL WATER

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THERE ARE SEVEN BILLION FOOD EXPERTS ON THE PLANET TODAY

Each of us is one. And yet, our everyday choices about what we eat are contributing to the negative impacts the food system is having on nature. The food system is the major cause of biodiversity loss, uses most of our natural resources and contributes around a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions. We must change the decisions we make, to halt and reverse these impacts.

WWF has recently conducted a global survey of over 11,000 people of varying ages, incomes and social circumstances, to understand the extent to which the general public understand the threat of the food system to nature. The survey was conducted in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Netherlands, South Africa, United Kingdom and USA.

The results were striking. Just nine per cent of respondents identified how we produce and consume food as the biggest threat to nature. Youths - on whom we place much hope for a sustainable future - are currently highly unaware of the issue, with 11 per cent of 18-24 year olds thinking the food system poses no threat at all to nature.

Although the general public don't explicitly realize the true extent of the threat, they seem to have an intuitive connection with the problem once they are asked whether or not they want to see stakeholders doing more to create a sustainable food system. Governments in particular are called out as needing to take more action. Encouragingly, the public realize their own role - they are as likely to demand more of themselves as of businesses.

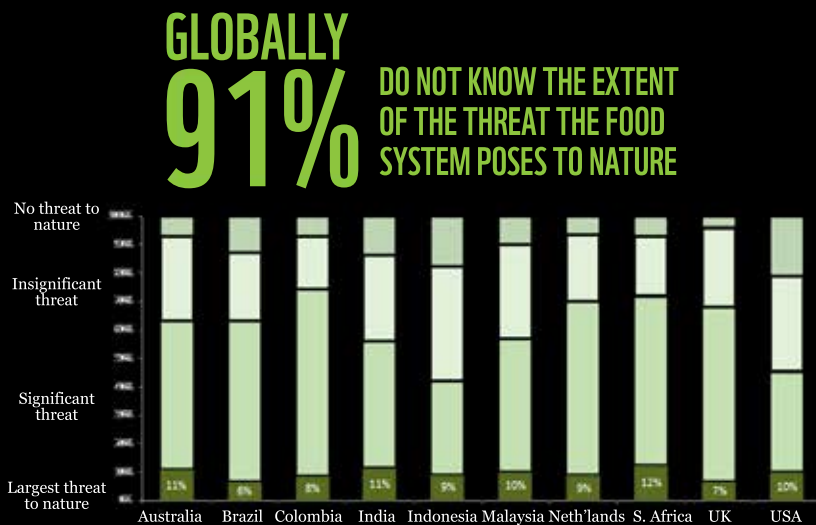
It is clear we need to increase people's awareness of where food comes from, how much is wasted or lost, and raise awareness about the environmental impacts of our diets. Awareness enables us to change our own behaviours to ensure the proper functioning of our food system. While there is a lot of great work already being done to improve the food system, we must work across sectors at greater scale and with greater urgency.

The good news is we can make the food system work for people and nature. If food is produced more sustainably, distributed fairly and consumed more responsibly, we can feed everyone without destroying more forests, rivers and oceans. By working together to realize an evolved food system, Food 2.0, we all have the power to bring food to the top of the conservation agenda and help protect our global food security. To do that, we, consumers, need to deal with food in a different way. We need to enter into a New Deal for Nature and People.

WE DON'T KNOW...

AWARENESS IS INCREDIBLY LOW

On the whole, awareness of the problem is incredibly low. Just nine per cent realize the food system is the largest threat to nature. Many countries realize there is a threat, but don't understand the true extent. However, in the US and Indonesia, two of the world's most populous countries, more than half see the threat as insignificant or not even existing. In four countries, more than one in ten people believe the threat doesn't exist – and, along with China, these four countries are the most populated in the world: Brazil, India, Indonesia and the US.



AWARENESS IS LOWEST IN SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULATED COUNTRIES



IN THE US AND INDONESIA, MORE THAN HALF THINK THE THREAT IS INSIGNIFICANT AT BEST

YOUTHS ARE NOT READY FOR THE VANGUARD

It was also evident that although we place much hope for a sustainable future on today's youth, they are not ready for the vanguard. In the youngest age group of respondents, 11 per cent do not see any connection between our food and threats to nature – the proportion rises to 40 per cent when the threat is seen as insignificant or not existing. In Brazil, Colombia, India and the Netherlands, this age group were the most likely to say that no threat existed. In Brazil, India (both 16 per cent), Indonesia and the US (both 17 per cent), the feeling of there being no threat is particularly striking. In Indonesia, more than half (56 per cent) think the threat is insignificant at best. Only in the UK and Malaysia, were they the most likely to say the threat is the greatest posed to nature.

MORE THAN
1 IN 10 18-24 YEAR OLDS THINK THERE IS NO THREAT AT ALL

40% THINK THE THREAT IS LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

IN BRAZIL, COLOMBIA, INDIA AND THE NETHERLANDS, YOUTHS WERE THE MOST LIKELY AGE GROUP TO SAY FOOD POSES NO THREAT TO NATURE



ONLY IN MALAYSIA AND UK WERE YOUTHS THE MOST LIKELY AGE GROUP TO SAY FOOD IS THE BIGGEST THREAT TO NATURE



... BUT WE DO CARE

Although the general public don't explicitly realize the true extent of the threat, they seem to have an intuitive connection with the problem once they are asked whether or not they want to see stakeholders doing more to create a sustainable food system.

MORE ACTION IS DEMANDED - GOVERNMENTS ARE LAGGING

More action is demanded – 59 per cent feel that the majority of stakeholders (comprising governments, NGOs, businesses, food producers and consumers) are not doing enough. The level of dissatisfaction grows incrementally as respondents get older, with the proportions feeling the majority could do more rising from 47 per cent for 18-24 year olds to 69 per cent for over 55s. Only in Asia is there positivity about the efforts of the majority of stakeholders - Indians (54 per cent), Malaysians (60 per cent) and Indonesians (66 per cent) think that enough is being done.

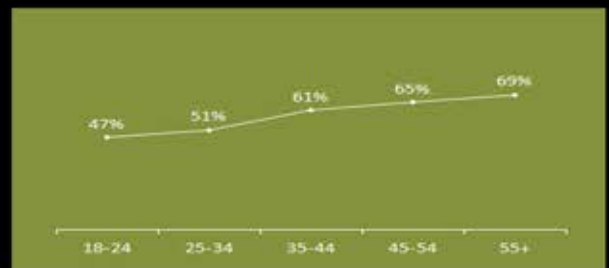
Governments in particular are seen to be lagging, with the vast majority believing they could do more. In three countries, Brazil (80 per cent), Colombia (81 per cent) and South Africa (82 per cent), more than three quarters state they do not do enough.

CONSUMERS AS MUCH TO BLAME AS BUSINESSES

Businesses are also widely seen as being able to do more (60 per cent say they are not doing enough), but consumers do realize their own role in achieving sustainability, holding themselves equally as accountable (59 per cent think consumers do not do enough). In Australia, Colombia, South Africa and the UK, less than a third of people are satisfied with the efforts of one group or the other. Specifically, in Australia, the Netherlands and the UK over one third think businesses are doing too little, while there are three countries in which more than a quarter think consumers are doing too little (Colombia, South Africa, UK).

59%

THINK THE MAJORITY OF STAKEHOLDERS CAN DO MORE TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM



THE LEVEL OF DISSATISFACTION GROWS WITH AGE

 59%

 60%

THINK CONSUMERS THINK BUSINESSES
CAN DO MORE TO MAKE THE
FOOD SYSTEM SUSTAINABLE

THE ACTIONS WE MUST TAKE

To protect our shared future, we need a New Deal for Nature and People. As part of that, we must work with more urgency, across sectors, industries and geographies, to raise awareness of the threat the food system poses to nature, and to implement transformations which change behaviour from farm to fork.

HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

If we are to change how we eat, a concentrated effort is required to help the general public understand our diets effect not only our bodies, but also our planet. While consumer awareness and education campaigns will be helpful, effort must be made to transform the way in which dietary advice is given. As reliable science-based advice endorsed by governments, National Dietary Guidelines must evolve to include information on what foods can deliver required nutrition with minimal planetary impact. Healthy eating must be equated to sustainable eating.

WASTING FOOD CAN NO LONGER BE AN OPTION

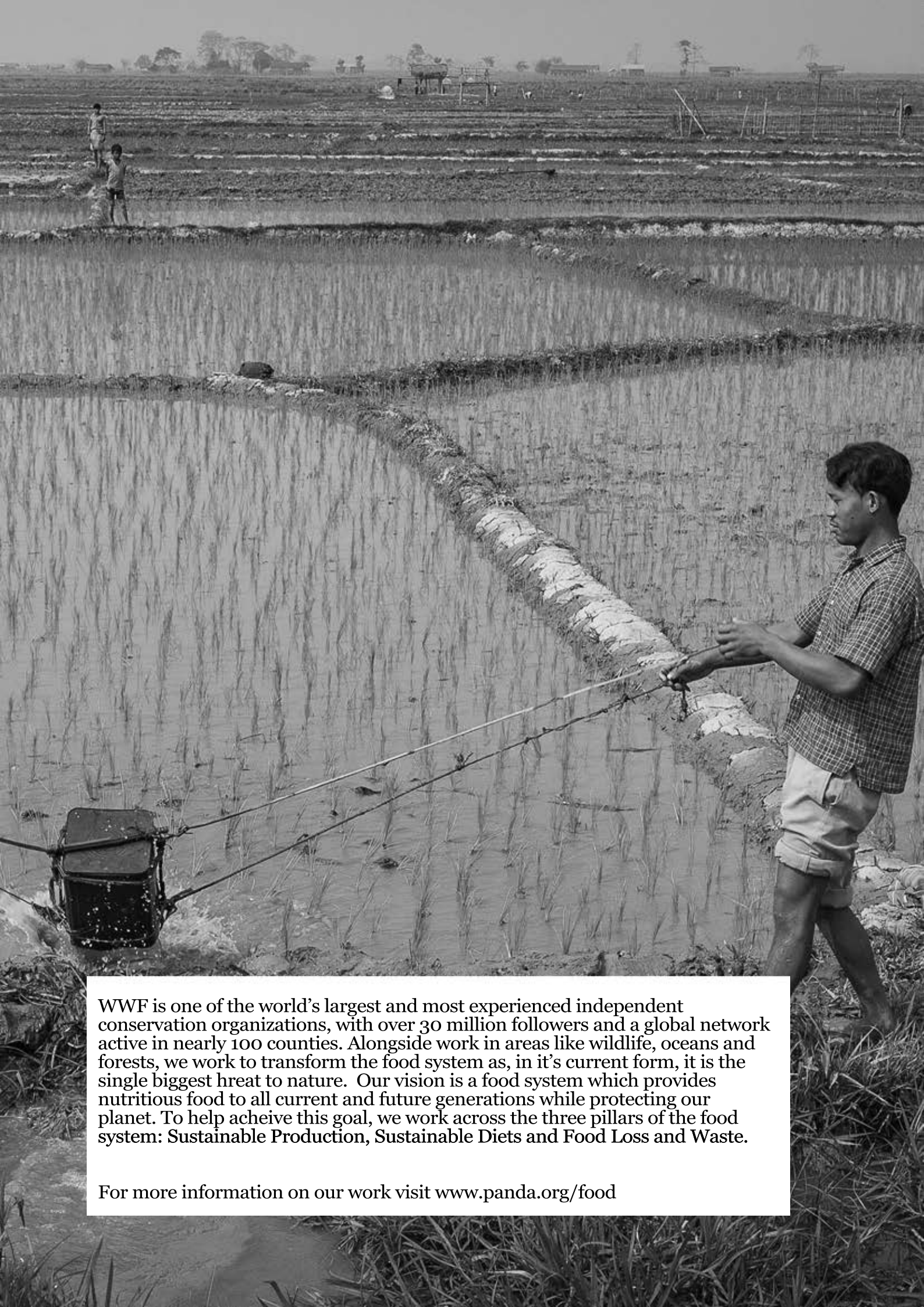
To make the most of our resources, we must reduce food waste. Consumers need to know water, land and energy are wasted when food is wasted, and that emissions are created when it is sent to landfill. Mass awareness must be raised to change behaviour and education programmes developed for youths. But we must also remove waste as an option for consumers. Businesses like hotels, restaurants and supermarkets must measure and reduce how much they waste, and tackle practices like poor labelling and mass packaging which encourage the consumer to waste. There are frontrunner companies making great progress in this area, but scaling up is more urgent than ever. To aid this, governments need to create enabling environments and ensure a consistent approach, through tools such as legislation, tax incentives and national programs.

EMPOWERING CONSUMERS

It must be easy for consumers to make better decisions about what they eat. Information on the planetary impact of food needs to be presented when consumers are considering buying food – it has to be simple for them to access and understand. Standards and labels are important sustainability tools, but producers and the private sector must work together to strengthen them, ensure accountability across supply chains, and make it easy for customers to understand and trust the information.

SUSTAINABLE SOURCING NOT OPTIONAL

We can see that consumers are demanding the food system be made more sustainable. One of the key actions must be for the private sector to implement sustainable and transparent supply chains – these have to become a business necessity. To protect some of our most threatened landscapes, deforestation and conversion-free foods need to be at the centre of these efforts. The private sector must lead the way by using new technologies and traceability tools, but others - including governments, financial institutions, international organizations, and consumers - have a key role to play.



WWF is one of the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organizations, with over 30 million followers and a global network active in nearly 100 countries. Alongside work in areas like wildlife, oceans and forests, we work to transform the food system as, in its current form, it is the single biggest threat to nature. Our vision is a food system which provides nutritious food to all current and future generations while protecting our planet. To help achieve this goal, we work across the three pillars of the food system: Sustainable Production, Sustainable Diets and Food Loss and Waste.

For more information on our work visit www.panda.org/food



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