

World Off-Track on Nearly Every Food System Goal – Latest Assessment Reveals

GENEVA/WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, August 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The 2026 Food Systems Countdown analysis reveals that progress is too slow and insufficient to meet 2030 goals, but 2050 could still be achievable, provided actions are consistent and accelerated.

The latest study from the [Food Systems Countdown Initiative \(FSCI\)](#) reveals the stark reality of where global food systems transformation stands – for most indicators on health, environment, livelihoods, governance and resilience, a vast majority of countries will not meet the internationally agreed 2030 goals. And for some indicators such as greenhouse gas emissions from food systems, no country in the world is projected to meet the target.

The study, published in Nature Food, represents the most comprehensive performance assessment of food systems to date, covering 197 countries and 44 indicators across five themes: diets, nutrition and health; environment, natural resources and production; livelihoods, poverty and equity; governance; and resilience. And for the first time, the study goes beyond tracking trends to assess progress and measure how food systems are actually performing, and how much more needs to improve to meet globally set targets.

“What makes this Countdown paper different is that it doesn't just tell countries whether they're moving in the right direction — it tells them how far they still have to go, and against a benchmark that's actually within reach. That distinction between tracking trends and measuring performance is what turns a monitoring exercise into a tool for accountability,” said Dr. Bianca Carducci, lead author.

Key Findings:

- The study finds that, of 30 indicators, only one — mobile phone subscriptions, a proxy for connectedness and resilience — has been met by most countries. For 22 indicators, fewer than one third of countries will meet their global target or benchmark by 2030.
- The indicator ‘greenhouse gas emissions from food systems’ has one of the largest gaps, with the global average 75% away from the target. No country in the world will meet the target at its current pace.

Most regions of the world would need dramatic annual changes to achieve 2030 targets. For example, Africa will require at least a 15-20% improvement across 23 indicators every single year, and Asia will have to cut food insecurity by over 63% every year. High-income regions are

not exempt. In Europe, 19 indicators remain unattainable by 2030. The analysis also shows that some indicators are moving in the wrong direction, notably civil society participation, governmental accountability, ultra-processed food sales, agricultural water withdrawal, pesticide use and changes in emissions from food systems.

“Accountability for food systems transformation requires accelerated progress — without it, efforts risk becoming performative rather than transformative. We can no longer afford to continue at the present pace,” said Dr. Mario Herrero, Professor, Ashley School of Global Development and the Environment, Cornell University.

Bright Spots Offer Hope

Despite the sobering picture for 2030, the study is not entirely bleak. For 7 of 33 indicators, at least a third of countries are already on track to meet the 2030 target. And half the indicators have been moving in a desirable direction at the global level. The study also offers the pace at which changes are required to achieve the targets by 2050, making progress feel achievable rather than impossible.

In some cases, regional and income benchmarks provide more realistic milestones that can motivate countries. For example, on average African countries are 58.7% away from the global benchmark for affordability of a healthy diet, but that gap narrows to 32.2% when measured against a regional benchmark set by the average of the top fifth of African countries.

“Bold global targets are vital for inspiring ambition. But they can become a source of inertia if they seem permanently out of reach. Therefore, regional and income-group benchmarks keep progress within sight and help identify the exemplar countries that can show others how it is achievable,” said Dr. Jessica Fanzo, James Anderson Professor of Food Policy and Climate at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies Europe.

Urgent Call to Accelerate Action

The study highlights the urgent need for accelerated action across all indicators. Priority actions should focus on indicators where progress is most off track, like food affordability, food insecurity, government effectiveness and food systems emissions. Food systems emissions change will require annual reductions exceeding 60%, which is challenging even for 2050.

“Food systems transformation is a shared responsibility. The governance indicators including government effectiveness, accountability and civil society participation are not just one category among five. They are the enablers. Improving them unlocks progress across the entire system,” said Dr. Lawrence Haddad, Executive Director, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition.

Improving government effectiveness and accountability are the critical leverage points that interact with the largest number of indicators. However, the urgent need for transformation involves more concerted, creative and accelerated action from the global community that must recommit to achieving these targets by 2050, especially for those most vulnerable.

“The kind of comprehensive assessment that this Countdown study provides is critical for governments and all other partners to set priorities, direct investments and resources, and draft and redraft policies. Our global food systems demand urgent, decisive action — starting now,” said Dr. José Rosero Moncayo, Chief Statistician and Director of the Statistics Division, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The 2026 Food Systems Countdown analysis gives every country a mirror, as well as a signpost for what needs to be done, in which direction and at what pace. We owe it to the billions whose livelihoods depend on food systems, and the billions more who cannot afford a healthy diet, to act now, and to act fast.

About the study:

The study, “Food Systems Performance Evaluated Against Targets and Benchmarks Reveals Urgent Gaps and a Path to 2050,” and accompanying report, “The Food Systems Countdown Report 2026: Assessing Performance, Driving Change,” is available at www.foodcountdown.org. Country-level data and profiles are accessible through the Food Systems Dashboard. Code is available on GitHub (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

For interview requests and/or enquiries regarding the 2026 Countdown study and report, please contact:

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About the Countdown:

The Food Systems Countdown Initiative (FSCI) is a global interdisciplinary research collaboration co-led by Johns Hopkins University, Cornell University, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition. It produces annual monitoring reports and a country-level data platform to support evidence-based policymaking and accountability for food systems transformation.

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