SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

WWF PRINCIPLES FOR CENTRAL EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

WWF wishes to convene stakeholders from across the food system and integrate decisions that will ensure human and planetary health. Together, we have the power to bring food to the top of conservation, climate and development agendas and help deliver tangible results which protect our future. We must work more closely and across sectors to act faster and raise awareness of the need for change.

On the basis of scientific evidence, WWF Central and Eastern Europe has prepared these seven principles as recommendations for retailers, food processing companies and food producers in order to reduce the negative impacts of their operations on the climate and the environment. Please choose the recommendations that are relevant to your specific business.

We are aware that adopting these principles in business practice is a journey. But every journey begins with the first step and every step matters!
These principles were inspired by the WWF Basket developed by WWF UK. They were prepared within the cooperation of the WWF-Tesco partnership for Central Europe.

The principles are also based on the Sustainable Development Goals developed by UNDP in 2015 and on the Farm to Fork Strategy, part of the European Green Deal, approved in 2020.

[1] https://www.wwf.org.uk/basket-metric

HOW WE PRODUCE AND CONSUME FOOD IS THE SINGLE BIGGEST THREAT TO NATURE AND CLIMATE TODAY.

USING

69% FRESHWATER

34% LAND

& CAUSING

30% TOPSOIL EROSION

75% TROPICAL DEFORESTATION

25% GHG EMMISSIONS

OUR CURRENT FOOD SYSTEM IS NOT GOOD FOR HUMAN OR PLANETARY HEALTH

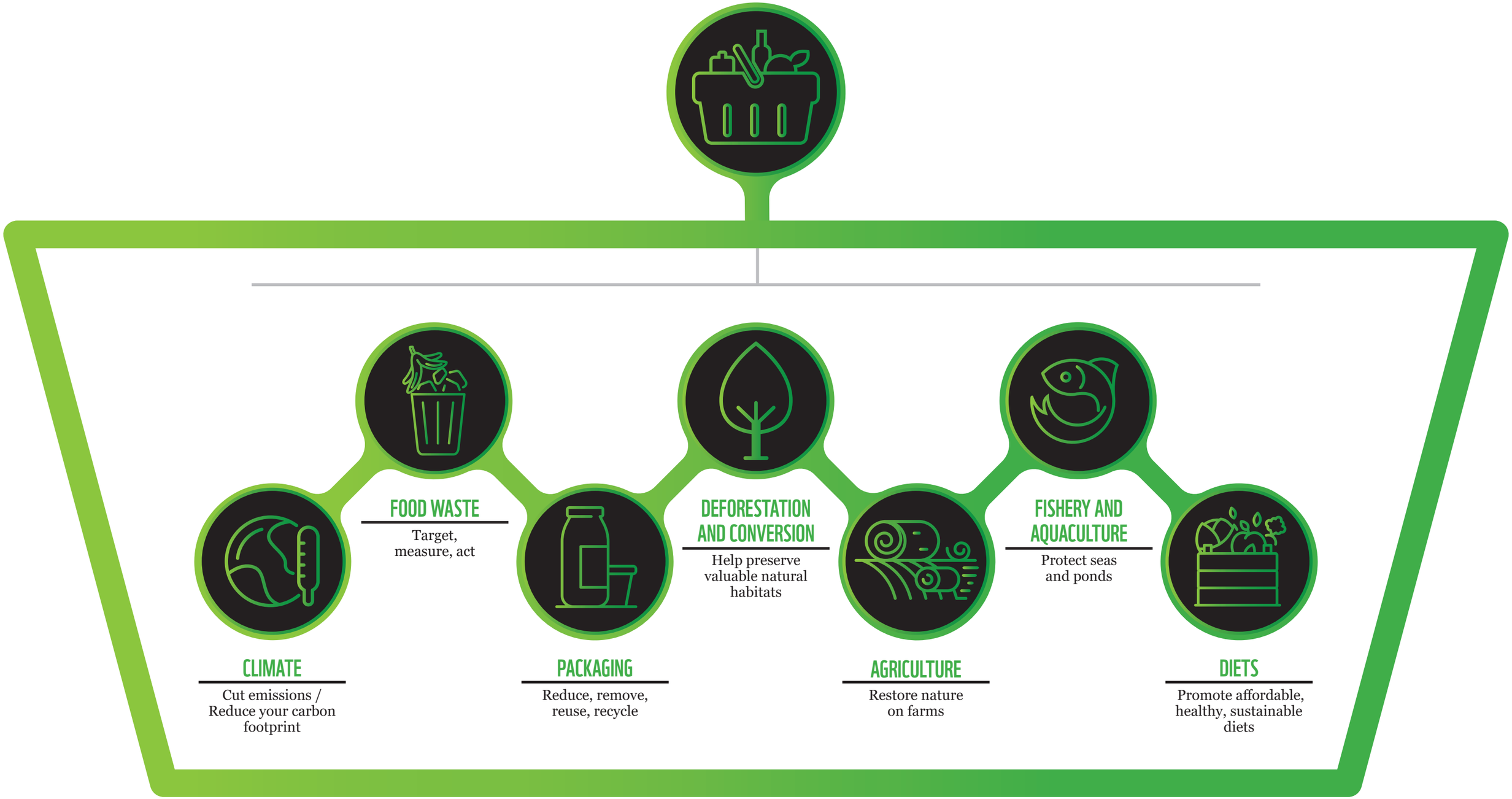
821 MILLION ARE HUNGRY

1,9 BILLION ARE OVERWEIGHT

20,000 + SPECIES OF POLLINATORS AT RISK FROM AGRICULTURE

93% OF FISH FISHED TO CRITICAL LIMITS OR WORSE

WWF PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN CENTRAL EUROPE



CLIMATE

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CUT EMISSIONS / REDUCE YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

GOAL

GHG emissions reduced across all scopes in line with the 1.5-degree science-based target (SBT).

Food systems are responsible for about a third of global GHG emissions. Without transforming food systems we cannot limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. We cannot phase out food in the same way we can phase out fossil fuels, but food systems can be part of the solution to the climate crisis. Nature-positive food systems will help reduce emissions and also sequester carbon. But realising the potential of food systems to help mitigate climate change requires systemic approaches. Piecemeal action will not lead to change.[2]

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Set and publicly communicate a science-based target aligned to a 1.5-degree pathway for scope 1 and 2[3] emissions.

Commit to reducing your scope 3[4] emissions and establish a target.

Measure the GHG footprint in scopes 1 and 2 (suppliers), plus scope 3 (retailers), reduce GHG emissions in line with the 1.5-degree science based target and offset any remaining emissions e.g. by protecting and restoring natural habitats that sequester carbon.

Require public emissions reporting in supplier contracts. Collaborate with supply chain partners to make the necessary reductions, including those detailed in the deforestation, diets, agriculture and marine sections of the principles.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Advocate for EC governments to take action to support a net zero transition based on the 1.5-degree pathway.

Advocate for consistent mandatory reporting to create a level playing field.

Advocate for incentives and financial support for businesses to make the transition to carbon neutrality.

[2] https://wwf.panda.org/discover/our_focus/food_practice/food_climate_cop26/
[3] Scope 1 = GHG emissions from running the business; scope 2 = GHG emissions from purchased energy and electricity.
[4] Scope 3 = GHG emissions from making the products you sell, and the impacts of those products when they are consumed.

TARGET, MEASURE, ACT

GOAL

Food loss and waste reduced by 50% in all aspects of the supply chain by 2030.

The EU wastes tens of millions of tonnes of food every year. Up to 40% of all food produced worldwide is never eaten. UNEP's Food Waste Index suggests that 931 million tonnes of food is thrown away globally by consumers, retailers and the food service industry each year. This wasted food accounts for 6% of global greenhouse emissions. At the EU level, the best estimates indicate that some 88 million tonnes of food are wasted annually, equivalent to 173 kg of food per person every year.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Follow the food waste hierarchy: sell the food products; if you cannot sell them, reduce their sale price; if you still have some left, donate them for redistribution to humans; if you still have some, send them for use by local animal charities; if possible, use food waste for renewable energy generation.

In general, be open and innovative (e.g. with regard to food that does not meet specifications or to crop flushes)!

Measure and report food waste and surplus in your operations, including the waste stage (e.g. storage, products past their sell-by date), the destination of the surplus (e.g. redistribution, animal feed) and waste.

Commit to the 50% reduction target across your own operations, the supply chain, on the farm and in households, e.g. through the Champions 12.3 approach[5].

Support farmers and producers in supply chains to measure and report food loss and waste generated on their property.

Review annually and minimise supply chain practices which may contribute to food waste and implement alternatives on farms (e.g. whole crop purchasing, improved demand forecasting, relaxing cosmetic standards and reviewing the role of brokers in driving food loss volumes) and in the home (e.g. lack of smaller pack sizes at fair prices).

In production and packaging development protocols, implement practices to target product issues which may contribute to food waste in the home (e.g. date, storage and freezing advice, shelf life, availability of appropriate pack sizes/formats).

Mobilise customers to significantly reduce food waste in the home, through awareness raising, communication and collective action.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Advocate for mandatory food waste measurement and reporting from farm to fork.

[5] https://champions123.org/

PACKAGING

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REDUCE, REMOVE, REUSE, RECYCLE

GOALS

100 % recyclable packaging, no excessive packaging. All materials are sourced sustainably and the use of recycled content is maximised.

One of the most characteristic manifestations of the consumer society is the increase in the production of packaging waste. Reducing the volume of packaging is crucial. The materials used to make the packaging significantly determine the overall impact of the packaging on the environment. The sustainability of the materials used must be a crucial factor.

At present, the main trend is the transition to a circular economy, which closes material flows in long cycles and emphasises waste prevention, product reuse, recycling and energy conversion instead of mining and landfilling.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Remove/reduce: Minimise primary, secondary and tertiary packaging by removing excessive packaging, taking the need to reduce food waste into account.

Ensure that there are robust specifications in place for the materials used. If specifications are not yet in place, conduct supplier reporting to determine the material supply chains including the current level of recycled content in packaging.

Remove all hard-to-recycle materials from your packaging.

Ensure that when technically possible, packaging is made from recycled materials and designed for easy recycling.

All wood, paper and board should come from 100% sustainable sources (FSC wood or recycled).

Develop a target for resource reduction in packaging.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Advocate for a common reporting methodology to improve supply chain transparency.

Support the creation of a central database of materials and their recyclability, places where material can be recycled, etc.

Support the development of reuse/refill systems, extended producer responsibility and clear instructions on each packaging item on how it should be treated.

HELP PRESERVE VALUABLE NATURAL HABITATS

GOALS

Agricultural commodity supply chains 100% free of deforestation and land conversion.

The EU's dependence on imported commodities comes with an oversized environmental footprint. Over the years, EU demand has driven the loss of millions of hectares of forests, savannah and grasslands, particularly in tropical areas, destroying valuable ecosystems and contributing significantly to climate change and biodiversity loss.

The EU is the second-largest importer of agricultural commodities associated with deforestation after China. Between 2005 and 2017, some 3.5 million hectares of forest were destroyed to produce agricultural commodities for the EU market – an area larger than the Netherlands. This released an estimated 1807 million tonnes of CO_2, equivalent to 40% of the EU's annual emissions.

Deforestation and land conversion have devastating environmental and social impacts. From fuelling climate change and forest fires to driving catastrophic losses in biodiversity, the environmental consequences of deforestation are well documented. Agricultural expansion, including in regions the EU sources from, can also be a threat to the human rights, livelihoods and lives of indigenous peoples and local communities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Publicly commit to supporting efforts to stop deforestation.

Require first importers to have supply chains free of deforestation and land conversion.

Communicate to suppliers that you will only purchase from suppliers with zero deforestation and zero land conversion policies.

With your suppliers, develop and agree on transition plans for supplies free of deforestation and land conversion.

Use materials from sources verified as free of deforestation and land conversion, for instance through physical certification to robust standards or through sourcing from landscapes and jurisdictions which are verified as free of deforestation and land conversion.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Publicly advocate in producing and consuming country/regional governments and authorities for policies and investments that decouple deforestation and land conversion from commodity production and accelerate the protection and restoration of forests, grasslands and other natural ecosystems.

Advocate for guidelines for suppliers on how to find and identify products free of deforestation and land conversion.

Work with food and consumer goods industries in Central Europe to engage them in the deforestation-free supplier movement.

AGRICULTURE

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RESTORE NATURE ON FARMS

GOAL

Competitive and sustainable agriculture capable of retaining water in the landscape and promoting biodiversity while avoiding soil degradation and nutrient run-off.

Current food consumption and production practices and systems are a primary cause of biodiversity loss, land use change, depletion of natural resources and climate change. Although the risks from our food sector are not always visible because many are chronic and indirect, transforming the way we produce our food offers the greatest opportunities to reverse our negative impacts on the natural world. Dissemination of sustainable agriculture practices supported by nature conservation and restoration could largely revive biodiversity, hydrological systems, soil and water quality and GHG relations. Europe has a key role to play in the transition towards resilient, equitable and sustainable agri-food systems on our planet.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Strengthen understanding of agricultural sustainability challenges in supply chains and develop sustainable practices.

Support knowledge transfer and advice to farmers and their advisors on regenerative/agro-ecological farming.

Develop and establish sustainable farm supply targets, criteria and processes supported by robust agricultural management schemes.

Work with certifying authorities, farmers and suppliers to improve certification standards across the supply chain.

Work with farmers to understand the role that sourcing policies can have in incentivising or disincentivising sustainable farming practices. Implement the findings to incentivise sustainable farm production.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Advocate for ambitious environmental aspirations in agricultural policy.

Participate in cross-sector initiatives that seek to maximise the impact of soil health and biodiversity action across the food supply chain.

PROTECT SEAS AND PONDS

GOALS

100% of seafood comes from sustainable sources by 2030. All seafood sources are certified.

Europe imports nearly twice as much seafood as it produces. In 2019, total fishery and aquaculture production in the EU amounted to 5.1 million tonnes, while 9.5 million tonnes were imported.

Europe's seafood consumption has environmental and social impacts worldwide. More than a third of global fish stocks are exploited beyond sustainable levels. Overfishing is a major threat to marine ecosystems – where vertebrate populations have fallen by half since 1970 – and to the millions of people who depend on them for their livelihoods and as a primary source of protein.

The growing importance of aquaculture also brings sustainability challenges at sea and on land. Production from wild-capture fisheries has remained relatively static since the late 1980s. The continuing growth in seafood consumption has been made possible by aquaculture.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Ensure that all sources are covered by relevant certification schemes.

Source certified material with no conditions or good progress towards closing conditions.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Advocate for the development of criteria for the sustainable management of freshwater fish ponds.

DIETS

© PHOTO / WWF

PROMOTE AFFORDABLE, HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE DIETS

GOAL

Increased proportion of plant-based foods in the average diet.

Europeans tend to eat more food, and in particular more animal products, than what is healthy for people or the planet. On average, EU citizens eat more than twice as much meat as recommended by health authorities.

What customers choose to eat has the largest impact on their footprint, as most of our food emissions come from processes on the farm or from land use change.

Studies by WWF and the European Consumer Organisation show that Europeans want to eat more sustainably, but face barriers in doing so and need sustainable food choices to become easier. Most find sustainable options are usually more expensive, unavailable, unappealing or unclearly labelled.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Focus marketing on promoting healthy, sustainable diets (e. g. lower-impact, seasonal and local products), inform, nudge and support customers to make choices that are more aligned with the Livewell diet[6].

Inspiration (e.g. recipes and customer communications) and community-level engagement supported by advice on storage, cooking and portions to reduce food waste.

Use ‘nudges’ to change consumer purchasing behaviour (e.g., placing plant-based alternatives near meat; using priority shelf space; promoting plant-based ‘meal boxes’).

Rebalance product pricing so that healthier, more sustainable products become the most affordable options for customers.

Set ambitious targets to increase sales of plant proteins.

Establish a system for measuring sales of animal/plant proteins along with carbon footprint and publicise the plant/animal proportion of protein sales broken down on an annual basis.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Advocate for mandatory environmental food labelling and mandatory environmental impact reporting by food businesses.

Advocate for multi-sectoral approaches (e.g. cooperation with educational institutions).

[6] Eating for 2 degrees - new and updated Livewell Plates
Good for you, Good for the Planet

WWF