

VIRTUAL MINISTERIAL POLICY DIALOGUE ON FOOD SECURITY STATEMENT ON COVID-19

1. We, the APEC Ministers, and high-level representatives responsible for food security, met virtually on 27 October 2020 for a Ministerial Policy Dialogue on Food Security. We welcomed the attendance of the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) and private sector representatives.
2. We express our deepest condolences and sympathies in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on lives, livelihoods, food security, agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries, including the food supply chains in the region. This pandemic has not only threatened the well-being and safety of all people but also disrupted the global economy, trade and industries.
3. We are aware that everyone including farmers, fishers, food producers, and consumers remain vulnerable to disruption in production processes, labour force, supply chains, trade and markets as a result of the pandemic. We acknowledge on-going efforts by economies in combating the spread of COVID-19, as well as its impact on food and agriculture. Moreover, we recognise the impact that the pandemic has had on women, including in the agriculture industry, and the need for women to be empowered to lead in economic recovery efforts, given the critical role women play in agricultural production and food security.
4. We recognise the economic impact that the pandemic has had, particularly on vulnerable groups, and the need to support them in food production and access to help ensure food security for all across APEC economies. We appreciate the work undertaken by different food relief organisations, specifically the World Food Programme which received the Nobel Prize in 2020 for its work on behalf of food security and to combat hunger.
5. We note that the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn our attention to how disruptions in trade and supply chains can cause food shortages and its adverse effects on nutrition. Given the disruption to supply chains as well as a sudden change in consumer demand, economies need to strengthen solidarity and cooperation, and continue their efforts to help ensure global food systems remain open, innovative, reliable, resilient, accessible and sustainable.
6. We reiterate the importance of APEC to collaborate with the United Nations, its specialised agencies and other relevant international and regional organisations, as well as relevant stakeholders in the timely and transparent implementation of practical, effective and science-based response measures consistent with World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments. We also recognise the importance of preventing future pandemics, by working across sectors to apply a One Health approach and develop science and risk-based guidelines based on international standards.
7. We note the importance of the Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) COVID-19 Statement and reaffirm our commitment to work to facilitate the flow of essential goods and services, including food and agricultural products and inputs across borders to minimise disruptions to global supply chains and food trade. Emergency measures related to food and agricultural products designed to respond to COVID-19 should be targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary, and not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption to global supply chains and be consistent with WTO rules. We stress the importance of international trade for global food security and recognise that measures inconsistent with international rules and standards may create non-tariff barriers, increase food price volatility and undermine food security at this critical time. We urge a continued focus on open and predictable trade in food and agriculture.
8. We urge economies to focus efforts on meeting the needs of vulnerable groups and building resilience to be better prepared to respond to future pandemics and other shocks. We stress the importance of addressing disruptions to employment and income sources, particularly of vulnerable groups, whose food security is severely affected by the pandemic.

9. We commit to continue supporting a swift economic recovery during the unprecedented challenges, which is in line with the APEC 2020 theme, "Optimising Human Potential Towards a Resilient Future of Shared Prosperity: Pivot. Prioritise. Progress".
10. We encourage information sharing and cooperation among economies and relevant APEC fora to help ensure that sufficient, safe, affordable, and nutritious food continues to be available and accessible to all people while reducing food loss and waste through all stages of the food supply chains. We look forward to the further exchange of views and collaboration with relevant stakeholders to address the adverse impacts of COVID-19.
11. We acknowledge the critical role of the private sector in improving food security and commit to promoting public-private partnerships and investments towards greater resilience in the food systems. We take note of ABAC's recommendations for a whole-of-system approach for food production, infrastructure, distribution, trade and regulation for sustainable food systems in the region.
12. We recognise the growing significance of innovative technologies such as digital agriculture, smart farming and biotechnology in enhancing food security by matching producers with the need of consumers, increasing agricultural productivity, minimising food loss and waste, and enabling greater resilience in supply chains during times of disruption. To that end, we urge economies to make the necessary investments in capacity-building and effective regulatory measures based on international standards which would help them to realise full potential of those benefits.
13. We are committed to further strengthening cooperation in relevant fields, especially the food standards and safety assurance connectivity to assure safety, enhance productivity, build capacity and reduce barriers to food trade.
14. We take note of the APEC Food Security Roadmap Towards 2020, the APEC Action Plan for Reducing Food Loss and Waste, the APEC Food Security Business Plan, and the Action Plan to Enhance Connectivity of APEC Food Standards and Safety Assurance. We welcome the review work of the Roadmap undertaken by Malaysia and look forward to the development of a new Roadmap post-2020, charting the way forward for the regional food security agenda.
15. We note the outcomes of the meetings of the Policy Partnership on Food Security, the Agricultural Technical Cooperation Working Group, the High Level Policy Dialogue on Agricultural Biotechnology, and the Ocean Fisheries Working Group, as well as the series of food security workshops, seminars and ongoing discussions.
16. We thank Malaysia for leading and making the arrangements for the Virtual Ministerial Policy Dialogue on Food Security and related meetings, and look forward to progressing this important work during New Zealand's host year in 2021.