RESEARCH

Bonding science and policy to accelerate food systems transformation

On Thursday 4 February 2021, from 10:00 to 16:30 Central European Time (CET), University of Montpellier and its I-SITE MUSE partners (Cirad, INRAE, IRD) are organizing a day for bonding science and policy to reflect on how to accelerate food systems transformation in view of the next United Nations Summit. 600 attendees are expected to take part in this online event. Placed under the high patronage of Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian (French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs), Mr. Julien Denormandie (French Minister of Agriculture and Food), and Ms. Frédérique Vidal (French Minister for Higher Education, Research and Innovation), the event is being held with the support of AFD and Agropolis International, in partnership with CGIAR.

This high-level event brings together scientific and political stakeholders from all five continents, including ministers from several countries and top executives from a number of major international organizations. It sets the stage for encouraging exchanges on how to strengthen science-policy links working towards the UN Food Systems Summit and beyond.

Food systems need a profound and urgent transformation

Half a century of technical innovation has resulted in very positive quantitative results in terms of food production and availability. Nonetheless, negative outcomes are observed in terms of the quality of diets and their impact on health; the environmental footprint of food systems; equitable access to food; value added distribution within sectors and power structures; and the emergence of new risks, particularly health risks.

However, given their multi-functional nature, food systems are both a possible entry point and a strong lever to achieve many Sustainable Development Goals. They stand at the crossroads of providing healthy, nutritious, and accessible food; preserving natural resources and ecosystems; and generating income, added value, and jobs.

It is therefore necessary and urgent to thoroughly review the manner in which food systems are designed, financed, managed, and regulated. The way their performance is assessed should also be revisited to meet the challenge for the necessary transitions and performance improvement in social, economic, and environmental terms and for resilience when facing global challenges. This issue concerns all stakeholders, whether they come from the worlds of policy, science, economy, or civil society, and will be the focus of the upcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit, scheduled to take place in New York in September 2021.
Science and policy acting together to accelerate food systems transformation

As a driving force for change, science-policy interfaces must help identify and overcome bottlenecks to achieve the desired transformations. Political stakeholders and decision-makers need to be involved with a scientific community that is ready to carry out relevant and timely research to meet the challenges of the future.