



Finding common ground in a divided world

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About GFFPI

The Global Forum on Farm Policy and Innovation (GFFPI) is a collaborative platform created by four leading independent agricultural institutes from Australia, Canada, the European Union, and the United States to increase the sustainability of agriculture worldwide.

The purpose of the collaboration is to use existing evidence and emerging research to inform dialogue that can unlock new thinking and ideas. In doing so, the organizations believe that they can increase knowledge and understanding of key gaps and opportunities to deliver better outcomes for more sustainable agriculture around the world.

Partners include:



The **Australian Farm Institute** is an independent institute leading the farm policy discussions to ensure a viable future for the Australian agriculture community. The AFI delivers timely analysis and insights, and promotes the evidence-based policy solutions that maximize the economic and social wellbeing of farmers.



The **Canadian Agri-food Policy Institute** is an independent, non-partisan not for profit organization for agri-food leaders to come together, share insights, and advance ideas on emerging issues facing this important sector.



Farm Foundation in the United States is an independent, non-partisan 501c3 accelerator of practical solutions for agriculture, combining the trust and reliability of a "think tank" with the impact and urgency of a "do tank."



The **Forum for the Future of Agriculture** is one of the leading European platform that brings a wide range of public, civil society and private sector partners and stakeholders to generate new ideas and thinking, ways of working, and solutions that can help build a more resilient, sustainable, climate friendly and nature positive food and agriculture systems.

PREAMBLE

Developed as a catalyst for conversation, this paper brings together a range of perspectives on global agricultural policy and sustainability. It was designed to frame key issues ahead of a series of dialogues held in October 2025, and to draw on the insights that emerged from those discussions in shaping the final sections of the paper. Together, these dialogues and reflections inform a forward-looking view of where the GFFPI can add the greatest value in strengthening collaboration, innovation, and policy coherence across global agrifood systems.

Section 1: Common Ground

Authors:

Emmanuelle Mikosz, Director General – Forum for the Future of Agriculture **Tyler McCann**, Managing Director – Canadian Agri-Policy Institute **Katie McRobert**, Executive Director – Australian Farm Institute **Shari Rogge-Fidler**, President and CEO – Farm Foundation

Our changing world

The global food and agriculture system is navigating a period of profound disruption. Climate pressures, geopolitical tensions, economic volatility, shifting consumer expectations, and questions about the role of evidence in policymaking are converging in ways that challenge long-held assumptions. In this environment, agriculture sits at the centre of debates about sustainability, security, and prosperity.

Across regions, the pressures look different. In some places, the debate turns on the role of government in shaping policy. Elsewhere, the focus is on trade, investment, or the ability of farmers to innovate in the face of climate and market uncertainty. Yet these perspectives point to the same underlying reality: agriculture is deeply interconnected with global systems, and no country can address today's challenges in isolation.

The Global Forum on Farm Policy and Innovation (GFFPI) exists to help the sector find its footing in this shifting landscape. By bringing diverse voices together, the Forum seeks to move conversations beyond polarisation and towards practical solutions that strengthen resilience. This paper draws on contributions from across the GFFPI network to illustrate how collaboration, policy, trade, and innovation can each act as pathways to common ground — and how, taken together, they chart a course for agriculture in a divided world.

In this environment, the need to identify and strengthen common ground has never been more urgent. Agriculture, sitting at the nexus of food security, economic resilience, and environmental stewardship, offers a unique platform for building shared understanding. GFFPI was created precisely for this purpose: to bring diverse voices together, spark constructive debate, and chart pathways toward sustainable, productive, and resilient food systems.

Our shared global context

Managing volatility and ambiguity

Global agriculture is not just at a crossroads - the scale of change underway makes that description feel almost insufficient. In the 10 years since the Paris Agreement placed climate change at the centre of global agricultural policy, the sector has had to grapple with a succession of shocks: a worldwide pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, escalating production costs, food price inflation, and growing trade tensions. Most recently, a deeper challenge has emerged, as confidence in evidence-based policymaking has begun to erode.

As a result, the policy spotlight has shifted. Whereas climate action once dominated the agenda, concerns about food security (often framed in terms of the less clearly defined concept of "food sovereignty") now sit at the forefront of agricultural debates.

For the past 20 years and more, futurists have argued that we are living in a VUCA world: one which is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. But it's doubtful that even they could have anticipated just how accurate the VUCA prophecy would turn out to be.

The extraordinary changes we are witnessing today - arguably the biggest reordering of the global rules and institutions since World War II - are a response to the rapid economic, social, environmental and climatic changes which have manifested themselves globally since the late 1980s and early 1990s. Seen from this perspective, these changes have less to do with a new

administration in the United States or the rise of China, and more of an attempt (rightly or wrongly) to deal with the reality of the world as it is today.

Carmakers, consumer goods and tech-providers, farmers and growers, financial markets, as well as consumers and the major trading blocs and countries across the world: all players in the global economy are hastily trying to work out what the VUCA world means for them and how to recalibrate their strategies and plans. And they are doing so in the knowledge that what they committed to yesterday is often out of date today, and what they do today could be redundant by tomorrow.

A path through turbulence

Given this context, the need for international collaboration is more important than ever. Indeed, the guiding principle of GFFPI is to bring people together to build a more resilient, sustainable food and agriculture system. While institutional frameworks may well have to evolve to support such collaboration, there is evidence (if we look beyond the often challenging and provocative rhetoric) that others are drawing similar conclusions.

The recent turbulence in global trade discussions is undeniably extreme. However, this has also surfaced important questions, especially about the distribution of the benefits from globalization. While unilateral action may have provoked some of those questions, it will only be through collaboration and negotiation (rather than unilateralism) that we will answer them.

Developments in geopolitical conflicts over the past decade have shown that whilst unilateral intervention can create new space for different options, the path to effective conflict resolution still requires the collaborative engagement of as many like-minded parties as possible.

To achieve progress in the current context requires us to see the world as it is, rather than how we would like it to be, and adopt a mindset that actively looks for the opportunities and the common ground wherever possible.

Collaboration as compass

Seen from an EU perspective, the European Commission's 2025 Vision for the Future of Agriculture was built on an ambitious attempt to do just that: bring together a diverse range of stakeholders to build a shared vision of the future. Hopefully the collaborative spirit generated during that process can be maintained in the difficult discussions on its implementation that lie ahead.

That same Vision is also positive about collaboration with our international partners, whether it be advancing the partnerships with Mediterranean neighbors or concluding the EU-Mercosur trade deal. It may even be possible, if people are willing to stare through the fog of the current tariff discussions, to find renewed opportunities for transatlantic collaboration on the agri-food system.

Certainly GFFPI's firm belief in the roles of negotiation and collaboration to address 'wicked' global economic, social, environmental and climatic challenges remains undiminished. Yet while remaining optimistic, we must address the global paradigm shift resulting from significant changes in the United States' approach to agricultural trade, sustainability and innovation policy.

Shifting paradigms: the ripples of U.S. policy

Departures from the norms

The U.S. food and agriculture policy landscape has already undergone a notable transformation in 2025 under the new administration. While the full implications are still unfolding, early actions suggest significant departures from recent policy norms—with the potential to permanently reshape the U.S. role in global food systems, sustainability approaches, and agricultural innovation.

When GFFPI was founded in 2020, one of the most striking differences among participating nations was the varying role of government versus the private sector in shaping food and agriculture policy. That contrast is even more pronounced today. The U.S. Executive Branch now wields increased and significant influence across key domains—from trade negotiations to sustainability priorities and research funding decisions—creating a new paradigm in U.S. Federal policy direction and tone. The ripples (sometimes waves) of these directional changes are being felt around the globe.

Trade: turning away from globalization

Trade policy has seen some of the most immediate and high-profile shifts by the current administration. Their "America First" lens has led to a retreat from multilateral trade frameworks and a pivot toward bilateral and transactional negotiations. The reintroduction of steep tariffs, and then the strategic reduction of those tariffs under headlines like "Liberation Day," exemplifies a bold, centralized, and unpredictable approach.

For example, tariffs that were once as low as 2% have been replaced with levels reaching 30%, Even with some being reduced to 15%, the overall baseline remains higher than in previous decades. These shifts have most visibly affected trade with China, where U.S. export volumes are reaching historic lows. As an example, once the top customer for U.S.-grown sorghum, China has turned to Australia for its supply, cutting off a critical export channel and dealing a major blow to American farmers' prospects for this year's crop.

Simultaneously, U.S. disengagement from key global institutions—ranging from the World Trade Organization (WTO) to United States Agency for International Development (USAID)—has added uncertainty to international trade norms and food security cooperation.

Sustainability: retreat from engagement

U.S. Federal policy around sustainability has also been dramatically reframed. Federal support for climate, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs have been significantly reduced or eliminated. Other Federal investments in new climate-smart agriculture and green energy programs are also being cut or reduced. This pullback is already having effects across the agricultural sector, including the loss of jobs, reduced investment in climate-smart agriculture, and the withdrawal of support for conservation initiatives once seen as critical to rural resilience.

To illustrate the impact of these changes at the state level, recent Federal funding withdrawals have placed Maine farms and local food systems under acute financial and operational pressure. One affected farm (operating on leased land) lost a scheduled direct payment intended to support proven conservation practices, including crop rotation, mulching, tarping, soil health improvements, and biodiversity enhancement. The abrupt loss of operational cash flow has created extraordinary financial risk; a situation echoed across the state, as farms go uncompensated for completed projects.

The cuts extend beyond the farm gate. The USDA recently eliminated two national programs that allowed Maine schools and food banks to purchase fresh produce directly from local farms. This decision has removed more than \$5 million from Maine's agricultural economy and curtailed access to healthy food for 100,000 students. The result is a dual setback: weakened farm viability and diminished nutrition for Maine's children.

Perhaps most quietly, but consequentially, several new bilateral trade agreements now include provisions for fossil fuel purchases, linking energy and trade in ways that could complicate the advancement of renewable energy adoption both in the U.S. and abroad.

The private sector now faces the question of whether it can or will carry forward the sustainability agenda in the absence of federal leadership and investment. Some state and regional conservation and soil health initiatives persist due to diversified funding streams. Still, with the proposed reorganization of USDA into five regional hubs, uncertainty looms about which programs will remain, and who will lead them. These structural shifts underscore the need for clarity and long-term strategy in agriculture and environmental stewardship.

Innovation: research under pressure

Innovation, long the backbone of U.S. agricultural leadership, is also under pressure. Funding reductions to both public and private universities, especially those in the land-grant system, threaten to stall decades of progress. Agency, NGO, and higher education institutions that once led global innovation in crop science, food safety, and ag tech in the U.S. now face significant funding challenges.

Private-sector innovation continues, with advancements in precision agriculture, robotics, and data analytics showing promise. Yet many of these technologies are not yet at scale. Compounding the challenge is a growing labor shortage, driven in part by immigration restrictions, which is increasing the urgency of deploying labor-saving solutions that are not yet ready for widespread implementation.

The role of dialogue and independent analysis

The U.S. experience in 2025 offers both a warning and an opportunity for global agrifood: it demonstrates how quickly established norms can change, and how vital it is to maintain mechanisms for shared learning and mutual accountability. Across trade, sustainability, and innovation, continued engagement between governments, the private sector, and research communities will be necessary to build a food and agriculture system that meets the needs of both people and the planet.

As policy paradigms shift and national strategies diverge, nonpartisan platforms that elevate diverse voices and rigorous analysis are critical to ensuring that short-term decisions do not undermine long-term food system resilience. Forums like GFFPI provide essential space for exchange, reflection, and evidence-based collaboration to drive systems thinking for a vibrant future for the food and agriculture system.

Trade as the connector

Two ends of a single system

While technology and innovation are shrinking distances and connecting countries in new ways, geopolitical, economic, and armed conflicts continue to push them apart. In this fractured landscape, a policy focus on agriculture might seem old-fashioned — yet food production and consumption form the two ends of a single system with the power to draw the world closer together.

At first glance, the current state of agricultural trade reflects division. OECD projections suggest the Americas and Central Europe will remain net food exporters while much of the rest of the world will depend on imports. It's expected that Australia and New Zealand would also hold their current position as (non-subsidised) net agricultural exporters. The share of global production that is traded has held steady at around 23% for the past five years — up from 16% in 2000 — but behind that stability lie shifting flows. Sub-Saharan Africa's net imports of basic food commodities, for example, are expected to rise by 55% between 2025 and 2034.

This trade gap highlights differences between producers and consumers, yet it also demonstrates their connection. Trade connects countries with differing agroclimatic conditions, resources, and production capacity, moving food from surplus to deficit regions and enabling a more efficient global allocation of supply. Too often, this interdependence is overlooked. Even at the local level, the people who buy food and those who grow it often feel worlds apart.

Despite these different roles in the agrifood chain, both producer and consumer are essential to each other's health, wealth, and wellbeing: we are all working from the same proverbial soil.

The role of food in strategic policy

Many organizations have worked to bridge this perception gap at the domestic level, but progress is slow. Extending that connection globally is harder still, yet the potential rewards are greater. The first step is recognising that producers and consumers, importers and exporters, already share common ground. That means treating food not merely as a commodity but as part of one of the world's most critical systems.

Institutions like the FAO, OECD, and APEC are advancing cooperation on food and security, but more needs to be done – much more. This shift requires countries to rethink the role of agriculture in their global engagement.

Canada, for instance, set out five new strategic actions in its 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy but largely ignored agriculture and food (aside from opening a new trade office). Expanding Canada's trade footprint in the region is a positive step, but the strategy missed the chance to highlight the role Canadian farmers, processors, and researchers can play in food security, innovation, and growth. Canada's 2025 Africa Strategy repeated the omission, making only passing mention of food security.

Both strategies overlooked the need for deeper agricultural engagement at a time when the demand is urgent. Major donor nations are reducing development assistance while global food insecurity remains high. The World Food Programme estimates there are 200 million more acutely food-insecure people today than before the pandemic. While the numbers have eased from early-decade peaks, conflict, economic strain, and extreme weather keep them well above pre-2020 levels.

Planting seeds in common ground

When living in a country that exports plenty of food - and working in an agriculture sector that sees exports as central to economic growth - producers can easily lose sight of the common ground shared with consumers around the world. The realities of food production and food consumption may be very different, yet a farmer striving to be profitable and sustainable and a family struggling to afford their next meal are two equally important ends of the same system. Closing that gap, or at least deepening mutual understanding of these roles, can remind divided people and nations that they share common ground. Agriculture and food can plant the seeds of connection the world so urgently needs.

Innovation as a bridge

Reshaping approaches

Across agricultural trade, sustainability, and collaboration, innovation is the connective tissue which turns common goals into shared gains.

Innovation is not simply "doing things differently" - it means creating solutions that are fit for the whole system, not just for a single purpose. A breakthrough in plant genetics, for example, only achieves its full value when it is supported by market access rules, sustainability metrics, and on-farm viability. It begins with multiple disciplines and perspectives at the table from the outset - such as Indigenous land management knowledge, trade policy, digital technology, and sustainability standards - each informing the conversation.

It's about deliberately redesigning how science, policy, markets, and community knowledge interact, so that stakeholders can address complex problems together rather than in isolation. Innovation is required to build adaptive capacity and capability, so that agrifood systems can respond to shocks (whether from climate, trade disruptions, or biosecurity threats) without losing ground.

In this sense, innovation is not a bolt-on or a buzzword, but the operating principle that makes ambitious cross-sectoral goals genuinely achievable.

Innovative by necessity

As an example, Australian farmers are innovative by nature - because they have to be. Climate change-induced deviations in water availability and quality, average temperatures, and increased incidence of pests, diseases and weeds are negatively impacting Australian agricultural productivity both directly and indirectly. The southern growing regions are currently experiencing historically dry drought conditions, with long term trends for decreased rainfall predicted. The arable land footprint continues to shrink as housing and industry expand.

Australian agriculture is also a highly globalised industry, with 72% of production value being exported annually – yet Australian farmers receive less government support than all their international competitors, bar New Zealand. Despite these challenges, the value of production is predicted to reach an all-time high in 2026.

Faced with extreme pressures from climate and markets, the Australian farming sector has embraced invention and developed some unique structures to support innovation.

Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) models, along with industry investment in RD&E through the Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs), link private funding to industry-good benefits. These mechanisms ensure producers have skin in the game when addressing innovation challenges, leveraging industry funding with matched government investment.

Sustainability frameworks have been developed across a broad spectrum of agricultural commodities, unified by a national framework¹ which also reflects the sustainability expectations of global markets. These frameworks establish shared values and signals and guide voluntary alignment across government, industry, and community initiatives.

Place-based ecosystem management, as exemplified by Australia's Natural Resource Management (or NRM) Regions model, demonstrates how regional planning can bridge community-led sustainability priorities with national and international environmental goals.

Precision agriculture is widely adopted in Australian farming, where data analytics, targeted input use, and site-specific management are advanced through partnerships between researchers, technology providers, and producers, ensuring innovations deliver both productivity and environmental gains.

¹ The Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework (AASF) - HOME - AASF

Knowledge and resource exchange

Yet Australian farmers cannot be innovative without collaboration, and are dependent on trading markets (which in turn depend on their output). Much of this innovation is driven by private-public partnerships, as exemplified by the RDC and CRC approaches. Purposeful innovation thrives when public and private sectors work together to strengthen the sustainability of agrifood systems. And no one country can innovate alone – the exchange of ideas and learnings is necessary to accelerate innovation at the pace required to meet current agrifood challenges.

This matters now more than ever, because agriculture now operates in an increasingly constrained world where challenges are both nebulous and interconnected - and shifting faster than traditional approaches can handle.



Conclusion

The old adage says: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." That wisdom is more relevant today than ever. In a world that grows more interconnected each year, the notion that any nation can act in isolation and remain untouched by the consequences of its choices is increasingly untenable.

The perspectives gathered here show that while contexts differ across Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia, the underlying challenges remain deeply connected. The possibilities of collaboration; the risks of policy retrenchment; the interdependence of trade; the necessity for innovation approaches to productivity, sustainability, and resilience.

Taken together, these insights reaffirm a simple but powerful truth: agriculture has the capacity to unite rather than divide. The sector can channel volatility into opportunity when stakeholders choose to collaborate rather than retreat behind borders or vested interests.

The work of the GFFPI has always centred on building spaces where evidence and dialogue take precedence over polarisation. As global agriculture faces escalating pressures — from climate change to shifting trade rules and evolving societal expectations — this role becomes more critical.

The path to resilient, sustainable, and fair food systems lies not in going faster alone, but in going further together. By cultivating trust and focusing on outcomes that matter for people, the planet, and prosperity, the sector can sow enduring common ground for the decades ahead.

Section 2: Deep dives

Authors:

Michael Robertson, Andy Hall, Rohan Nelson - CSIRO (Australia)

Gail Tavill – Chief Sustainability Officer at OSI Group (U.S.)

Dr. Tassos Haniotis - Special Advisor for Sustainable Productivity, Forum for the Future of Agriculture; Senior Guest Research Scholar, IIASA (EU)

Vivian Hoffmann, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute and Associate Professor, Carleton University Department of Economics and School of Public Policy and Administration

Enabling innovation

Authors:

Michael Robertson, Andy Hall, Rohan Nelson - CSIRO (Australia)

It is increasingly clear that new ways of enabling innovation are required to tackle an expanding set of agriculture sector goals (Hall, Nelson). These goals include persistent challenges of declining productivity and an unpredictable climate. However, prioritisation of new cross-sectoral goals – such as moving to a net-zero future, caring for our environment, supporting healthy communities, embracing indigenous knowledge, building national resilience, and making the most of new technologies – raises questions about the type of agricultural innovation system needed to achieve them.

These questions matter. Innovation at the interface of agriculture and other sectors opens up possibilities beyond solving these great challenges. This kind of innovation could also create future industries that are new sources of productivity growth and global competitiveness. These are questions being posed in many innovation systems of advanced economies, and this creates an opportunity for learning from each other's efforts. Here, we outline the case study of Australia in enabling agricultural innovation.

The Australian agricultural innovation system includes multitude of private and public bodies that together invest in agricultural R&D, with a total expenditure of around \$3B per annum. With limited private sector agricultural R&D capacity, Australia relies on public R&D agencies and international spillovers as its key sources of innovation.

A notable feature of the Australian agricultural innovation system is the Rural Research & Development Corporation (RDC) network. The 15 RDCs invest in R&D using compulsory levies collected from farmers, and set R&D priorities aligned to farmer needs via structured consultation with industry representative organisations. RDCs have a major influence on the whole innovation system as their R&D investment (and the priorities targeted) steers the public co-investment. It has proven to be a highly effective way of developing demand-led novel technologies and farming methods which help keep Australian farmers competitive in world markets.

This approach has both strengths and limitations. RDCs are understandably oriented towards prioritising the commercial needs of current levy-paying farmers. Their mandate is to produce commodity-specific, productivity-enhancing technologies, rather than anticipating more transformative futures for farm enterprises that don't yet exist.

One challenge for considering new ways of enabling innovation in Australia is that the RDCs are often mistakenly viewed as Australia's entire agricultural innovation system. This perspective overlooks a much broader set of players and capacities that could be marshalled around innovation goals. It also unfairly holds the RDCs responsible for a lack of progress on goals which are difficult to meet on their own, while neglecting the essential innovation system capabilities needed to complement the RDCs. It is important to recognise that the RDC system was not designed to address broader value chain and multi-sector productivity, sustainability and social inclusion goals, indeed it is structurally constrained in its ability to do so – some additional innovation system capabilities are needed (Nelson).

Our analysis suggests that future ways of enabling innovation must recognise strengths and weakness of the system in relating to the expanding goals that the sector faces, which cannot be fully explained by patterns of agricultural R&D expenditure (Robertson). Instead, the focus should be on the capacities needed to make productive use of ideas and technology and to direct innovation towards different goals. This is largely concerned with ability to diffuse and share ideas and build patters of interaction that support the co-development of solutions.

A persistent challenge in Australia is that the necessary interactions between the diverse sets of sector organisations, relevant to challenges and opportunities needed to enable innovation, are often incomplete (Howard et al. 2018). In the case of productivity, interactions need to be strengthened between players in the agricultural supply chains. In the case of responding to broader national agendas such as emissions reduction agenda, the focus must be on developing novel forms of cross-sectoral collaboration. For example, the development of sustainable aviation fuel supply chains based on agricultural feed stocks involves collaboration between agricultural and transport sectors, and also technical, organisational and value chain innovations, and creates a new source of rural prosperity in marginal agricultural areas.

Policy can play a role here is setting directions and enabling the novel forms of collaboration. For example, "mission-mode public investment" can open up new innovation trajectories and associated markets (Mazzucato et al. 2020). Australia's national science agency has piloted such approaches on topic such as drought resilience and novel proteins. Policy can also play a role of strengthening critical functions in the innovation system that maybe weak or absent. These include, for example: the ability to identify cross-cutting issues of national significance and direct innovation towards them; the ability to strengthen the technological capabilities of the workforce and agri-businesses to assimilate new technology; or the ability to systematically learn about the effectiveness of innovation practice in relation to evolving goals and to scale good practice. Nelson et al. (2025) describes how various countries have tackled this policy challenge.

In summary, agriculture in Australia can play a key role in tackling major national challenges, including declining productivity gains in the agriculture sector, if a different approach is taken to innovation. This will require different capabilities to those deployed at present (Nelson et al. 2025), including the ability to create and coordinate new capabilities - particularly in innovation rather than traditional research, setting innovation system directions, and scaling up and transferring learning between contexts and sectors. We believe sharing the Australian experience and learning from others will create the vision for this innovation approach to be realised.

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Why business isn't done with sustainability

Author:

Gail Tavill – Chief Sustainability Officer at OSI Group (U.S.)

I've been asked by friends and family recently if I'm worried about the future of my job. It's a fair question given my role as the head of sustainability at a large US-based food company. Rollbacks on environmental regulations, climate policies, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, renewable energy infrastructure investments, and conservation programs are all in the news, so one might think sustainability in business may no longer be a priority. Fortunately for me – and our planet – the exact opposite is true. From my seat, I see companies, especially those with big, global brands, doubling down on sustainability.

Voluntary Public Commitments

My company and many of our customers, peers, and suppliers have made ambitious, public commitments on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) related topics, and most notably, science-based climate targets. These commitments, once in the public domain, are an asset of a brand, not readily influenced by political tail or headwinds, and are not easily clawed back without substantial reputational risk. NGOs, investors, influencers, and consumers are very good at holding companies accountable to these commitments. Regulations, while a powerful motivator, mainly drive actions from laggards. Voluntary actions anchored in a business or brand's mission are more likely to be sticky and transcend any one country or market.

How do these commitments involve the Agriculture Sector?

Data is a powerful tool for setting priorities. The process of setting science-based climate targets generates a LOT of data, and for many food companies, that data pointed squarely at our Scope 3 emissions. For many of us, that focus was even sharper towards Scope 3, Category 1: Purchased Goods & Services – or in other words, the emissions associated with growing the food we use to make our products (see Fig. 1). These emissions include many aspects related to farming, including direct emissions from farm equipment, fertilizers, manure management, emissions from animals, etc. These insights led companies to be much more acutely aware of the impacts of their actions within their supply chains.

What does this mean for farmers?

The good news for production agriculture is that this attention to farm-level emissions is also bringing engagement, research, and investment to the sector in new ways. While the conversations in boardrooms may be focused on emissions and climate accounting to achieve external commitments, sustainability teams are beginning to engage with farmers in new ways. We are shifting towards enabling adaptation and adoption of practices to drive more resilient production systems, with a desired "by-product" of "claimable" carbon emissions reductions (also known as inset credits). In many cases, practices that reduce emissions and sequester carbon in soils have much more practical primary benefits that improve productivity, efficiency, and profitability on the farm. But there can also be barriers to entry – change management, technical knowledge, access to equipment, water, etc. These challenges can slow down progress. That's where companies are starting to play a more intentional role. We all need to have strong, resilient supply chains to access raw materials to feed our businesses. Paying for emissions reductions in the "currency of carbon" is just one way companies can help mitigate risks related to change.

What's next?

The next phase of corporate sustainability will be less about lofty commitments and more about measurable, durable outcomes—especially at the farm level. We'll see stronger partnerships between brands, suppliers, and farmers, where data flows both ways to inform decisions and demonstrate progress. Investments will shift from pilot projects to scaled solutions that integrate sustainability into core business operations, making climate resilience as fundamental as product safety or supply reliability. The companies that thrive will be those that turn ESG from a talking point into a quiet, operational advantage—embedded in how they source, innovate, and build trust across the value chain. Political tides may ebb and flow, but the business case for sustainability will keep moving forward, powered by the combined interests of farmers, consumers, and brands who know their futures are inseparable.

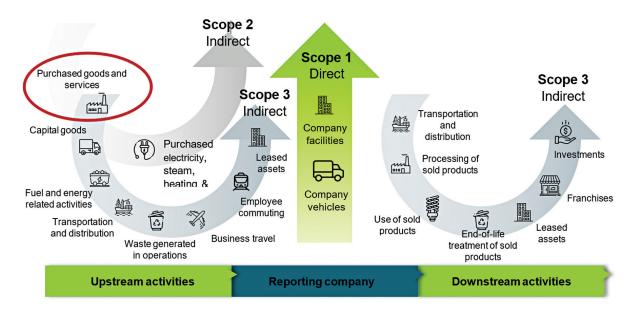


Figure 1: The emissions associated with growing the food we use to make our products

Agriculture's tipping point

Author:

Dr. Tassos Haniotis - Special Advisor for Sustainable Productivity, Forum for the Future of Agriculture; Senior Guest Research Scholar, IIASA (EU)

That global agriculture is at a turning point is in many respects an understatement. It has been a decade since the Paris Agreement brought to the forefront of the global farm policy debate the challenges stemming from climate change. Since then, global agriculture has confronted the impacts from a pandemic, wars, surge in production costs, food inflation, trade frictions, and lately the reversal of the very foundation that led to the Paris Agreement – trust in evidence-based policy design.

In this environment, food security and the vaguely defined notion of "food sovereignty" have replaced climate action as farm policy priority.

To redress this situation and respond to the urgency created by the interconnected challenges of climate change and food security, we must return to the basic principles that underpin agriculture's role and impact. At its core, agriculture exists to meet the most fundamental human need: the production of food.

First comes the recognition that **productivity growth** as the essential element in meeting the demand needs of a growing global population characterised by significant asymmetries between food needs and food availability.

Second comes the recognition that productivity growth **needs to be sustainable**, avoiding the mistakes of the past and succeeding in reducing the environmental footprint of food production.

Third comes the urgency of promoting innovation and technological progress **based on** the production and the widespread dissemination of pertinent **new scientific knowledge**.

The recent OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2025-2034 states that:

"[As] the projected production growth in the livestock and crop sectors is not fully offset by the assumed productivity improvements, direct agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are projected to increase by 6% by 2034. The relationship between agricultural growth and emissions will continue to evolve depending on the adoption of more efficient production methods and changing patterns of land use and input utilisation."

The adoption of more efficient land use and input utilisation methods is exactly where the Global Forum on Farm Policy Innovation could make a valuable contribution. In the global debate on climate change action, GFFPI could help by assessing how different public and private initiatives affect agriculture's carbon footprint. These insights would support the refinement of measurement methods—an area the OECD has already identified as a need—and, in turn, enable more effective strategies for achieving sustainable productivity growth.

Priority should be in the areas of:

- **Identifying** land management **practices**, especially around soil, that increase carbon sequestration.
- **Disseminating knowledge** stemming from innovations that enhance sustainable productivity in cooperation with international organisations.
- **Analysing** the **interface of** developments in **AI and precision farming** to better exploit their joint potential and reduce the risks stemming from their application.

Global food security in a divided world

Author:

Vivian Hoffmann, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute and Associate Professor, Carleton University Department of Economics and School of Public Policy and Administration

Food security means that all people, at all times, have reliable physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for a healthy life. While a human right in itself, food security is also instrumental: its absence amplifies poverty, worsens health and education outcomes, fuels instability and migration, and forces governments into costly crisis responses. In short, resilient food security underpins social stability and inclusive growth.

After decades of progress, global food security has faced major setbacks since 2019. Production, transportation, and income disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, and trade restrictions by exporting countries all combined to create a perfect storm, resulting in a sharp increase in undernourishment. While these shocks have subsided somewhat since the record-high food prices of 2022, neither prices nor nutrition outcomes have fully recovered^{2,3}.

Integrated models by IFPRI, combining climate, demographic and economic data show that achieving global food security faces continued headwinds.⁴ Agricultural productivity growth has slowed in past decades, with expansion to new land accounting for an increasing share of output gains, threatening tropical forests that are critical carbon sinks and biodiversity reserves⁵. Meanwhile, the global population and incomes continue to grow, putting increasing pressure on food systems. Without strong adaptation and policy action, climate change will make food security harder to achieve than it would be otherwise, and in many lower-income regions harder than todawith higher prices, slower production growth, and more people at risk of hunger compared with no-climate-change scenarios.

However, the investment required to advance such adaptation is falling, with many countries cutting back on international aid for agricultural research and development as they prioritize domestic and military priorities. This represents a strategic misstep, as global food security must be seen as a global public good: food crises lead to conflict, migration, and humanitarian strain.

Against this backdrop, GFFPI's members have much to contribute—and to gain—as global leaders in sustainable agriculture. Doing so requires action on three fronts: innovation, global diffusion, and working to maintain free agricultural trade.

Innovation is required to sustainably produce food in the face of a warming and climate with greater frequency of extreme weather events. Breeders are adapting varieties to new conditions; farmers are adopting precision nutrient and water management; processors are developing new plant-based high-protein foods. These are technologies with significant public and private benefits, yet they may face hurdles to scaling. Public action can coordinate handoffs from public labs to private deployment, de-risk finance for agri-food start-ups and growers, and harmonize standards and labels to unlock export markets. Canada's experience developing and deploying new rapeseed varieties for canola oil and facilitating their export through a public-private collaboration in the 1960s and 70 shows how a once-niche industrial oil grew to account for 14.5% of agri-food export value by 2024⁶.

 $^{^2\} https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/d5be2ffc-f191-411c-9fee-bb737411576d/content$

³ https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en

⁴ https://cgspace.cgiar.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/8dcd407e-a639-4fdb-af4d-0d2fd87eaa03/content

⁵ https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/international-agricultural-productivity/summary-findings; https://www.wri.org/insights/forest-carbon-sink-shrinking-fires-deforestation

⁶ Phillips, P.W., 2017. Private-public R&D in the development of the canola industry in Canada. In *From Agriscience to Agribusiness: Theories, Policies and Practices in Technology Transfer and Commercialization* (pp. 101-115). Cham: Springer International Publishing; https://netzeroindustrialpolicy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/C3-TA-Canadian-industry-strategy.pdf; https://www.canolacouncil.org/markets-stats/; https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/sector/overview

To achieve their full potential, new technologies must be diffused globally. Technologies developed in GFFPI countries can be tailored for lower-income contexts where yields lag far below potential and micronutrient malnutrition remains widespread. Even small adaptations—shelf-stable biofortified foods, stress-tolerant seed, low-cost soil diagnostics—can drive outsized gains.

Finally, the importance of rules-based agricultural trade to food security is difficult to overstate. Many of the world's poorest nations are net food importers. Even when protectionist policies do not alter these countries' market access directly, the food price volatility engendered by restrictions on agricultural trade can lead to widespread hardship and hunger. Moreover, impediments to free agricultural trade prevent land from being used for its most productive purpose – effectively wasting this finite resource.

In sum, global food security requires coordinated action among GFFPI members to foster innovation in the agri-food sector, diffuse its benefits for global impact, and push to preserve and expand open, rules-based, agricultural trade.

Section 3: What we learned

Authors:

GFFPI leads and Dr Sunghun Lim, Farm Foundation Agricultural Economics Fellow

To test and deepen the ideas outlined in this paper, the Global Forum on Farm Policy and Innovation (GFFPI) convened two invitation-only roundtables in October 2025. The first, held on 3 October in Ottawa, brought together senior government officials, policy advisers, farmer representatives, and agrifood industry. The second, hosted in Washington DC on 7 October, engaged a complementary group of industry experts, researchers, and former policymakers from the United States.

Each discussion was framed around this paper's core questions: how to find the common ground that can sustain open, evidence-based trade in a period of geopolitical tension; how to align productivity and profitability with environmental integrity; and how to strengthen innovation systems that connect research, policy, and practice. The aim was not to secure consensus but to explore how these shared challenges are experienced in different contexts—and to identify where genuine convergence may be found.

Taken together, the two workshops underscored both the diversity and the interdependence of agricultural systems across North America. The Ottawa dialogue reflected the perspectives of an export-oriented, innovation-dependent sector navigating questions of resilience, trust, and how to navigate an increasingly turbulent global market. The Washington discussion, in turn, illuminated how shifts in trade, sustainability policy, and private-sector leadership are reshaping the U.S. agricultural landscape.

These conversations have sharpened the GFFPI's view of where its work can add the most value: as a trusted, non-partisan platform for connecting evidence, experience, and strategy across borders. The next phase of the Common Ground initiative will focus on translating this shared insight into action—developing measurable approaches to outcomes-based sustainability, strengthening mechanisms for technology and knowledge diffusion, and continuing to provide a venue for honest dialogue at the intersection of policy, trade, and innovation.

Ottawa Roundtable Summary

Participants at the Ottawa roundtable on 3 October 2025 described agriculture as standing at a crossroads: a sector bound across the country and around the world by shared challenges yet increasingly fragmented by how those challenges are experienced - and what the preferred solutions could be.

Across regions, producers and policymakers alike are navigating new forms of volatility—geopolitical, economic, and climatic—that are breaking the frameworks that enabled growth, profitability and sustainability over the last forty years. While the United States and Canada were often cited as close comparators and each benefited from closer trade relations, discussions revealed how differently each is positioned within this shifting terrain. In both, the farm sector is adjusting to global realignments in trade and investment, but the pathways to resilience diverge.

A unifying thread through the conversation was food itself: its potential to connect, and its growing role as a fault line. Food should be a bridge between producers and consumers, across borders and supply chains, yet participants observed that trade tensions and national security concerns are increasingly turning it into a site of contest. Food exporters, once seen primarily as guarantors of global food security, now find their role complicated by the weaponisation of trade through tariffs, export controls, and non-tariff barriers. In this environment, reliability and predictability have become as central to food security as productivity.

Several participants called for a rethinking of global frameworks to reflect this reality. If food can be used as leverage, it can also be used as assurance: long-term export commitments and transparency in trade can reinforce trust and position countries as reliable partners. The idea of treating food security as a "global public good"—akin to non-proliferation in its importance to

stability—resonated strongly. This would demand new forms of collaboration and new alliances that recognise the legitimacy of both public and private roles within the food system.

The discussion underscored that sustainability remains essential, but resilience may now be the more useful organising concept. Resilience connects productivity, risk management, and social stability. It acknowledges that sustainability frameworks, while vital, have sometimes been coopted by protectionist measures disguised as environmental or ethical standards. Participants noted examples where codified standards, such as in Codex, had been used to shield domestic industries rather than advance genuine science-based outcomes. A shift in language—from sustainability as aspiration to resilience as operational capacity—was seen as a way to rebuild credibility and inclusiveness across diverse production systems. A focus on resilience also reflects the difficulty in pursuing a growth agenda when the fundamentals that drove growth in the past are now breaking down.

Canadian participants reflected on their own position within this landscape: a nation with strong innovation capacity and export orientation, but limited visibility in value-added markets. There was broad recognition that building brand identity and market differentiation are critical to capturing more of the value chain. Yet industrial policy remains a weak spot, with innovative startups often acquired before they can scale, and investment thresholds too low to trigger strategic oversight. Greater focus on market development, strategic partnerships, and "super-friend" networks of like-minded exporters was suggested as a pragmatic path forward.

Underlying many exchanges was a concern for trust—between governments and citizens, between trading partners, and within the global food system itself. Participants noted declining confidence in institutions and information sources, including social media, and pointed to agriculture's unique role as a connective tissue across these divides. Food carries emotional and cultural weight as well as economic value; it can ground cooperation where other forms of diplomacy falter. Embracing diversity (in production systems, governance models, and cultural approaches) was seen not as a weakness but as a precondition for meaningful collaboration.

In the end, the Ottawa conversation echoed the broader 'Common Ground' theme: in an era of fragmentation, agriculture can still serve as a bridge. By reframing sustainability through the lens of resilience, and by fostering public–private partnerships that prioritise reliability, fairness, and open exchange, food systems can remain both productive, profitable and peace-promoting. The challenge lies not only in producing enough food, but in ensuring it can be moved, trusted, and valued in ways that strengthen global stability.

Washington D.C. Roundtable Summary

Summary of key insights

Participants from Australia, the European Union, Canada, and the United States convened on 7 October 2025 in Washington D.C. to reflect on how much the global agricultural landscape has shifted since GFFPI's last dialogue and to explore shared perspectives on trade, sustainability, and innovation.

Across regions, there was consensus that agriculture is navigating an era of deep complexity: markets are increasingly volatile, climate pressures are intensifying, and government responses are often short-term or transactional. This has opened space—and necessity—for stronger collaboration among the private sector, academia, and civil society.

What we heard: a sector managing complexity

Participants described agriculture as operating in a period of deep complexity characterized by market volatility, intensifying climate stresses, and policy responses that are often short term or transactional. The perceived erosion of evidence-based policymaking—and, with it, the principles of comparative advantage that underwrote recent decades of trade—has sharpened uncertainty. The group's view was not fatalistic: rather, it underscored the need to realign incentives so that sustainability and profitability reinforce one another at the farm gate. When environmental practices also raise yields or revenues, adoption scales; when they do not, progress stalls.

Several structural pressures cut across regions. Overproduction and price volatility, coupled with concentrated supply chains, are squeezing farm incomes—particularly for smaller producers with fewer buffers against weather extremes and demand shocks. At the same time, competitive dynamics are shifting. Rapid production growth and structural cost advantages in South America (including double cropping systems) have altered trade flows and narrowed margins for North American producers, while the European policy debate continues to balance ambition with practical delivery. A core insight from the discussion was pragmatic: sustainability gains will not scale unless they reinforce farm profitability. When environmental practices also improve yields, input efficiency or market returns, adoption grows; when they do not, efforts stall – reinforcing the call to connect sustainability, productivity and income at the farm gate.

1) Trade and geopolitics: pressure and possibility

Trade remains both the field of contest and a bridge. The roundtable noted that while the share of global production entering trade has held broadly steady in recent years, flows are shifting, and strategic choices by major actors carry outsized ripple effects. In that environment, it matters whether agricultural exporters continue to rely primarily on bulk commodities or move further up the value chain toward differentiated, higher margin products. The latter path was regarded as essential for income resilience and for reconnecting producers and consumers—two ends of the same system.

Participants situated these choices within evolving policy settings, especially in the United States, where 2025 has brought prominent departures from recent norms on trade and sustainability. The paper documents steep tariff swings and a retreat from multilateral frameworks, with knock-on effects for export volumes and for the predictability that producers and investors require. While views differed on the long-term trajectory, there was shared concern that policy volatility raises transaction costs across the chain and complicates cooperative solutions.

2) Sustainability through profitability: the private sector's expanding role

A striking point of alignment was the role of the private sector in pushing sustainability forward even when public signals are mixed. Corporate climate and ESG commitments—made publicly and reinforced by investors, NGOs, and customers—are moving companies from pilots to scaled,

operational changes in sourcing and manufacturing. Crucially, many firms have learned through target setting that their largest emissions lie upstream at the farm level (Scope 3, Category 1: "Purchased goods and services"). This redirects attention—and investment—toward practices that reduce emissions while improving productivity and resilience on farms. As the paper's diagram on page 13 illustrates, these upstream categories dominate the footprint for food manufacturers, which is why data sharing, co-investment, and new risk sharing models with producers are gaining prominence.

The discussion highlighted promising pathways that align income with conservation outcomes: regenerative agriculture programs, ecosystem services markets, and procurement models that reward observed improvements (not just compliance). Participants stressed that credible, cost-effective measurement remains a bottleneck; building trust around metrics is essential if payments for outcomes are to scale.

3) Innovation acceleration: from research to system capability

Bringing sustainability and profitability together requires innovation systems designed for cross sector problem solving—not just discrete research breakthroughs. In this vein, the meeting surfaced examples of "whole system" innovation. Notable examples included Australia's national approach to agricultural sustainability, articulated through 19 interconnected principles and supported by longstanding public–private mechanisms (RDCs and CRCs) that put producers' needs at the core of R&D while leveraging matched investment. These structures create channels for diffusion and adoption, not solely invention—precisely the capability gap many jurisdictions face.

Participants observed that mission oriented public investment, cross sector coalitions (for example, linking agriculture to transport in sustainable aviation fuel supply chains), and deliberate efforts to strengthen weak system functions (technology assimilation, workforce capabilities, and learning at scale) are central to turning ideas into sector wide gains. Participants also pointed to place-based ecosystem management and precision agriculture as near-term places to compound benefits for productivity and environmental outcomes.

4) Regional perspectives: different paths, shared stakes

- **United States & Canada:** The group noted twin pressures from policy uncertainty and climate risk, and a continuing need to shift a greater share of output into value added products. In the U.S., changed federal priorities on trade, sustainability, and research funding have immediate implications for farm level investment and planning; this context framed much of the discussion on private sector leadership and on the importance of independent, nonpartisan platforms for shared learning.
- **European Union:** The debate is less about whether to aim high and more about how to deliver—how to protect credibility in science-based policymaking while ensuring that sustainability targets integrate with productivity and income realities. Participants emphasized that implementation must be practical and measurable to maintain political legitimacy.
- Australia: With high export exposure and comparatively low government support,
 Australian agriculture has had to make innovation a habit. National frameworks and
 regional NRM models provide governance and alignment tools that others can adapt,
 particularly to connect voluntary market signals with credible reporting and on farm
 viability.
- **South America (notably Brazil):** Cost structures and double cropping strategies continue to expand regional competitiveness, changing the benchmark to which others must respond. This is reshaping trade balances and forcing strategy adjustments well beyond the Southern Cone.

5) Points of convergence: the common ground

Across jurisdictions and institutional roles, the roundtable converged on three durable anchors:

- 1. **Science based trade rules:** Whatever the politics of the moment, rules that privilege evidence and predictability are essential to investment, innovation, and food security. The alternative is higher friction and lower trust.
- 2. **Value and resilience across the chain:** Moving beyond a narrow focus on volume toward more differentiated products and sturdier supply relationships is now a competitiveness strategy, not a niche. It helps buffer farms and firms against price and policy shocks.
- 3. **Sustainability linked to profitability:** Practices that deliver agronomic and financial gains will spread; those that do not will remain pilot bound. Aligning incentives—through procurement, finance, and ecosystem service payments—turns climate and nature goals into operating advantages.

These anchors echo the paper's overarching thesis that collaboration—across governments, markets, and knowledge communities—is the surest compass through turbulence.

Participants endorsed continuing this conversation with tangible, near term workstreams that complement the paper's priorities:

- Outcome based measurement that producers trust
- Scaling adoption, not just invention
- Trade for resilience and value
- Independent dialogue in a politicised environment

The Washington D.C. roundtable did not resolve differences—nor was it meant to. It clarified where cooperation is still both possible and necessary. Participants expressed cautious optimism that common ground exists across regions: a shared belief in the importance of science-based trade, in the need to add value and resilience within supply chains, and in advancing sustainability through profitability. The group agreed that continued dialogue and updated documentation of these shared insights will be essential next steps in strengthening global collaboration on agricultural trade and innovation.

Where next for GFFPI

The Ottawa and Washington roundtables reaffirmed GFFPI's purpose as a trusted platform for dialogue and evidence-sharing across jurisdictions—but they also clarified how much the landscape around that dialogue is shifting. The gravitational centre of global agrifood policy is moving. Influence that once flowed primarily from the transatlantic axis of the EU and the United States is increasingly shaped by the priorities of the BRICS economies⁷, whose approaches to agricultural sustainability and trade are rooted in national development, sovereignty, and food security.

This rebalancing poses profound questions. What happens when the dominant policy model moves from incentive- and compliance-driven systems toward sovereignty-based frameworks? How might this reshape the rules of trade, the distribution of investment, and the very definition of 'sustainable agriculture'? If the past two decades were defined by efforts to facilitate global trade, enable innovation and harmonise environmental metrics, the next two may hinge on how to reconcile diverse models of legitimacy—where self-sufficiency, resilience, and strategic autonomy carry as much weight as global standards, carbon intensity or biodiversity outcomes.

The workshops highlighted that such shifts are already being felt on the ground. Farmers, businesses, and research organisations are grappling not just with policy ambition but with timing. The gap between the long horizons of policy goal-setting and the immediate needs of implementation is widening. As one participant put it, "policy makers are focused too far in the future—so populism is having a party." The challenge is to bridge that temporal divide: matching large-scale goals with smaller, enabling policies that make participation practical, and connecting global commitments to the granular realities of production systems.

Against this backdrop, GFFPI's comparative advantage lies not in prescribing solutions but in creating the conditions for them to emerge. Three areas of focus suggest themselves:

- **Inclusive global policy innovation.** Developing 'policy sandboxes' that allow governments, industry, and researchers to test practical pathways for aligning sustainability, productivity, and trade objectives—without presuming a single model or metric.
- **Bridging research and implementation.** Through research, GFFPI can trace how past policy designs shaped today's capacities and use this insight to inform future-ready systems of diffusion, measurement, and trust.
- Mapping the new geography of influence. By examining how BRICS-led policy experimentation is redefining the global agrifood order—and how OECD economies can respond collaboratively—GFFPI can help ensure that sustainability, openness, and fairness remain mutually reinforcing.

The question is not whether the centre of gravity will shift—it already has—but how global actors choose to respond. In that sense, GFFPI's next phase is about providing the space, evidence, and relationships to ask better questions that enable productive pathways forward.

⁷ Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Iran

