Food System Vision Prize
Full Refined Vision – Good Food Hub, Beijing, China

It’s a different world now since we submitted our proposal for the first round, not long after which what is now known as the COVID-19 outbreak was declared in our country. Since then, it has spread to the rest of the world and during the time of writing, the lives of many people around the globe are still being shadowed by it and likely will be for the rest of the year. What we know so far is the alarming fact that the pandemic was first identified in an unregulated wet market in Wuhan. The Chinese government has thus banned wildlife trade for food and some major cities have subsequently outlawed eating dogs and cats.

COVID-19 reveals the enormous risks humanity is facing when 70% of our infectious diseases are from animals. We must confront the reality that the ways we relate to animals today are problematic and risky, largely manifested in our food system and painfully revealed by the wild animal trade in Wuhan’s wet market. Our excessive demand for animal protein has led to large concentrations of astronomical numbers of animals around the world. These factory farms are potentially hotbeds for zoological diseases that might lead to more future devastating pandemics. We cannot help but ask: how many more crises will it have to take for us to change our problematic relations with animals and with our food?

The COVID-19 outbreak calls for us to examine our shared risks, and we must work together for a livable future. It also reminds us of the importance of how animals are treated in our food system. To stay within planetary boundaries by 2050 we must take radical and urgent actions to transform our food system. And we all know that, to achieve these:

(1) China can play a vital role. (2) We have no time to lose.

Recognizing this is common sense, but the challenge is “how to make this happen…in China?” Here in China at the Good Food Fund, we have been asking ourselves: how can we facilitate food system transformations that are timely, long-term, and sensitive to the Chinese cultural and social political contexts? How can we help the greatest minds, hearts, and resources work together in the food space, rather than against one another, the latter of which we see all too often in many social sectors?

Therefore, what we need is not only an immediate short-term response to the crisis but a long-term, systematic thinking. Neither wildlife trade nor meat eating is not the only issue and COVID-19 will not be the only major crisis we will be facing. If we fail to take a food system approach to our endeavors for changes, we will not be able to engage all stakeholders or address the interrelated issues before they become bigger challenges. As many scientists have warned, our risks for health or ecological disasters are high and the potential consequences will only dwarf COVID-19.

We can think of the pandemic as an “enabler,” enabling us to think more boldly and do things that otherwise might be difficult to do. The unprecedented consequences of the COVID-19 crisis have mobilized political will and public support for better food governance systems, and by 2050 we will have made substantial progress.

The first thing the COVID-19 has enabled our team and partners to do is to envision the Chinese government implementing integrated food governance at all levels. This will be necessary for bringing about timely and long-term changes to a nation of 1.4 billion. Food governance reforms will begin in 2021 with the establishment of the nation’s first Food Policy Council (FPC), facilitated by us and targeted at Beijing and Wuhan. Currently, few if any Chinese cities have a well-integrated food governance, a fact that creates pitfalls in the fragmented and problematic management and monitoring of the food value chain, as shown by the wet market in Wuhan. Our FPC, if successful, would be the first such kind of endeavor in China to establish integrated food governance at the city level. An FPC will provide a good basis for devising, testing and implementing policies that prioritize health and ecological sustainability. It will also serve as an important mechanism for city officials to work with scientists as well as the industry and local communities to manage human contacts with animals to prevent future risks of zoonotic diseases from spreading. We regard this new idea for an FPC inspired by COVID-19 as an integral part of our vision for the future.
Since the outbreak, we have also added a “People’s Food Council” (PFC) component to our vision, i.e. creating a new public space where citizens from all walks of life can initiate topics and engage one another in food-related public discussions that are important to them. Parallel to each other, the municipal Food Policy Council will be monitored by the People’s Food Councils so that government decision-makers and the private sector are held accountable to citizens for their nutrition, health, and environment.

We have been developing an urban design initiative aiming to rethink and redesign China’s wet markets, not just as an immediate response to COVID-19 outbreak but also as part of our long-term vision for a healthy and sustainable urban food system. There have been a lot of outcries from outside China, mainly in the West, demanding China to close its wet markets. We have received many interview requests from journalists who write for media outlets, for instance, Bloomberg, regarding our stance on this.

We must say that the term “wet market” is in fact foreign and exotic to people living in China. It actually encompasses an array of markets with regional variations: There are, of course, markets that focus solely on selling (live) animals. (Among them is the “Seafood Market” in Wuhan, known to be the ground zero for COVID-19.) However, most “wet markets” are community-based farmers’ markets which sell mostly fresh produce with some animal products. These markets are an important part of the urban food landscape and have provided livelihood for small local farmers. They have also increased accessibility of fresh produce for average households and serve as an informal public space where one engages with neighbors.

The real issue with these markets lies in live animal trade, wild or domestic. And this MUST be changed. We therefore have, since the outbreak of coronavirus in late January, worked with Slow Food China, whose team has founded the Beijing Design Week among many others, on plans to reinvent the so-called wet markets (or “community-based food markets” as we prefer to call them.) We envision making these markets entirely plant based. In this way, we can keep these markets in our urban food landscape while minimizing risks for zoonotic diseases.

The reason we are elaborating on the above is that we envision these community-based markets as symbols for a lively urban food culture in the future. This vision has also informed our thinking on this proposed Good Food Hub project (hereafter “the Hub”). We now envision the Hub to be located in one of these markets where it can interact with almost all stakeholders in the food space and serve as a powerhouse for facilitating and accelerating food system transformation in the city. We also envision that the Hub will soon be replicated elsewhere in the city and around the country.

There have been, of course, many other major trends around the globe pressing us for change. China is already the world’s largest food producer and consumer. China’s demand is reshaping agri-food governance, production, processing, logistics, and sales at home, across Asia, and in every corner of the globe within most multilateral trade fora. Production and consumption of animal protein skyrocketed in the past four decades and have led to double burdens of health and the environment.

Today, non-communicable diseases have become the leading cause for deaths of adults worldwide, estimated to be 11 million by the EAT-Lancet Report. China is for sure no exception - diet causes more than half of the disease burden in China (Afshin et.al. 2019). Zoonotic diseases are on the rise as well, mainly caused by large concentrations of animals and loss of habitats for wildlife pose increasing public health hazards. A major research result announced in April 2020 shows that 80% of the children tested in the Yangtze River Delta have antibiotics used in farm animals detected in their urine.

Furthermore, the Lancet Commission Report on the Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change defines climate change itself as a pandemic. Meat production causes obesity, colorectal cancer, cardiovascular disease, and also generates greenhouse gases. Globally, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from food account for roughly one quarter of all human-caused GHGs. Consequently, it will not be possible to achieve a safe climate without tackling food. Left unchecked, emissions from food could rise to account for more than half of the allowable 2050 carbon budget.

Food system transformation is a global imperative. The hidden health and environmental costs of food exceed total global agricultural revenue even without accounting for the costs of COVID-19.
Luckily, food policies are gradually shifting away from meeting calorie demands and towards improving health as proven by the latest revision of China’s National Dietary guidelines in 2016 (Chang, 2018). Healthy China 2030 — a national blueprint issued in 2016, acknowledging that industrialization, urbanization, an aging population, and environmental change have created new health challenges (Chen et.al. 2019). By 2030 the plan aims to control negative factors in population health, promote healthy lifestyles, guarantee food safety, and establish a sound governance system and legal framework for health. China also added “Ecological Civilization” to its constitution. It invests heavily in green energy as a development strategy. China’s leaders are already demonstrating the political will necessary around food safety, environmental protection, and public health policy (Pan, 2016).

At the latest World Health Assembly, Chinese President Xi announced that China will make all of its upcoming COVID-19 vaccines a “global public good.” We hope that, despite all ongoing and potential conflicts between China and the US, China (and even the future U.S. administrations) will continue to invest in more global public goods.

Historically, China has been an agricultural giant. Our ancestors knew that, as a nation, we were bound to our land for survival and prosperity. They knew that their children and many more generations to come might rely on the same land to make a living. They understood that agricultural resources were finite and they must allocate them in a wise way, which included feeding humans directly instead of feeding farm animals and then humans. This is the mentality we carry as we envision our future food system.

We envision our food system in the year 2050 to be centered around the constraints of our ecological system. That means our food production will be based on good stewardship rather than exploitation and abuse of natural resources. Food is the single most important lever to optimize human health and the sustainability of our ecological system, as described by the 2019 EAT-Lancet Report. The issues we are facing today are multi-faceted and intertwined, and only a systematic approach will bring the needed transformation in our food. It’s the systemic approach — we need political will and fundamental change in our priorities and values. We need transformations and innovations in policy, production, consumption, technology, and culture.

Our system approach: We announced our Good Food Pledge in 2019 to provide the first systematic guidelines in China for supporting sustainable food: 1) Plant Forward, 2) Animal Welfare, 3) Healthy Eating, 4) Reduce Waste, 5) Local Seasonal, 6) Circular Economy, 7) Preserve Biodiversity, 8) Food Education. We envision that by 2050, the Pledge, with some timely amendments along the way, will have become the core principles for food system transformation in China.

According to the 2019 EAT-Lancet Report, a drastic transition to plant-based diets is among the most effective ways to stay within the planetary boundary by 2050. Substantial shifts away from consumption of animal protein will lead to a “triple duty action” to address undernutrition, obesity and climate change. A high-level special report issued by IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) on Climate Change and Land issued in August 2019 also points out that meat reduction is essential for our mitigation and adaptation of climate change.

In our vision, by 2050, animal protein may still exist in the food system in some parts of the world but it will no longer be necessary in a city like Beijing, a fact that will subsequently reduce a large chunk of the carbon footprint of our food system. Alternative protein is already gaining popularity in China, with major food companies including top meat and dairy producers, starting to produce plant-based meat and milk. KFC and Starbucks, among others, started selling plant-based meat products in China in spring 2020.

With the advance of technology, alternative protein production will become much less costly and energy intensive as it is popularized over the next three decades. By 2050, after 40+ years of development, alternative proteins such as plant-based meat, eggs, and milk will replace animal protein as the low-carbon healthier option. Further, we will have a wide range of climate adaptable product lines available for consumers.

What is even more exciting will be the fact that whole food, plant-based options will greatly increase its varieties and diversities, thanks to public and private investments into unleashing the power of plants. The world is known to have more than 30,000 kinds of edible plants by the 2010s and we have only been getting our nutrients from a tiny fraction of that incredible pool of options. By 2050, farmers, scientists and chefs will work together to increase the diversity in the fields and on our plate. In time of writing this proposal, we have just launched a new nation-wide initiative to document local vegetable varieties traditionally known to the local
population but little to the outside. These documentation will be village-specific and will eventually be compiled into an archive of not only regional ingredients but also recipes. The proposed Good Food Hub will serve as the physical host of the archive and a “lab” where these ingredients and recipes will be tested and innovated. Nutritional values and climate resilience of regional plant specialties will be studied and introduced to agricultural production to increase crop diversity as well as to discover more alternatives for feeding Beijing’s population.

“Foods and medicines are one” — unlike modern chemistry-based Western medicine, Chinese medicine’s reliance on herbs has always been an intrinsic part of our agricultural system. In 2050, it will have greatly enriched our food choices and possibilities for food therapy. Better understanding of Chinese medicines will be achieved with time and with continual integration of traditional herbs into diets as spices, condiments, side dishes, and food supplements. These new varieties will be developed together by food scientists and chefs. Revitalization of the ancient Chinese medical wisdom that focuses on One Health will help us get back to doing the right thing, which is what we call “Tao” — way of Life.

A plant-based transformation will enable us to allocate a good deal of natural resources to feeding the human population directly. In turn, this will help us to improve food production practices by reducing the monoculture of the feed industry. We shall thus drastically reduce our reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides and create a significantly richer biodiversity. Since we will stop consuming animal products produced by unsustainable agriculture, such as factory farmed beef, lamb mutton, and the products of overfishing, we will contribute to the preservation of rainforests and the oceans — all beneficial to meeting our environmental goals. The information this gives us will in turn be reflected in our dietary choices in Beijing. Once our temperature increases slow down, risks of yield reduction of many crops might also be avoided.

We also envision that the city of Beijing will address what we know as the “multi burdens of malnutrition” — hunger from lack of access to food, hidden hunger from lack of micronutrients, and obesity from overnutrition. Malnutrition costs human capital and constraints human development, so once it starts to improve, poverty will also be reduced.

A balanced diet not only requires the individual to have good food literacy and make smart dietary choices but also is the outcome and responsibility of a balanced and just food system, which we at the Good Food Fund are committed to achieving. Diet-related diseases will be confronted with preemptive measures through health-centered food policies at the government and institutional levels, support systems at the community level, food education in schools, workplaces and through the media, and mandatory labeling on food items in stores and menus.

By 2050, Beijing’s municipal government will have ruled out the possibilities for foods with low nutrition values and higher health risks, such as most animal products, soda and highly processed foods, to enter K-12 schools, college campuses and public spaces, like parks. Sodas with added sugar will be highly taxed and allowed to be sold to adults with restrictions. These products will not be advertised on public media or in public spaces. Government-supported food literacy programs will be made into school curricula and media campaigns for adults. The vast majority of children and adults will drink fruit water, plant-based milk and smoothies (with a wide range of fortified options) instead of dairy milk since most Chinese are lactose intolerant.

Nutrition issues start young and sometimes even before birth. In Beijing by 2050, adults preparing for pregnancy or delivery will receive free mandatory health and well-being workshops both online and onsite so that they will have sufficient knowledge in terms of rightly feeding themselves and their growing families. The advent of new technologies will also make it possible for us to monitor the nutrition and health conditions of pregnant women in Beijing and provide timely counseling and interventions to those in need, regardless of their financial conditions. This will help to avoid stunted growth and other early childhood deficiencies caused by malnutrition during pregnancy.

Support for breastfeeding will be an integral part of our public nutrition policy and critical economic arrangements will be made to support women in this role. Regardless of their family income, babies and toddlers across the city will be better taken care of during the first 1000 days of their growth, ensuring sufficient breastfeeding and intakes of healthy, plant-based micronutrients to avoid stunts and early-life undernutrition. Low income families will receive support for quality food that has good nutrient density and that micronutrients are made available for the children.
We envision that by 2050 the municipality of Beijing will be home to one of China’s most aging societies. Diet and nutrition for the city population should be well designed to meet the age-specific demands of the population, guided by science, policies, and new technologies. Advanced health-monitoring devices, both wearable and kept at home, can help individuals manage their weight and risk of disease by making recommendations for their dietary choices at each meal.

Unsustainable farming practices have degraded rural areas, so in order to revitalize these rural communities we need to fix environmental problems, mitigate climate change, improve living conditions, and change the way we relate to food by supporting locally produced and sustainable food production. Regenerative agriculture will become the norm, so our production of food not only helps us better adapt to climate changes but also helps mitigate it. A much richer diversity of crops that are made available for production and consumption will not only change the monoculture landscape, but also give us a wider range of choices for climate resilient crops. Government investment in healthy soil and growing public support will be the prime drive for regenerative agriculture that preserves and increases micronutrients and nutrient density in the soil.

Good productions will be evaluated not merely by efficiency but also by the nutrient values of the food that grow on the land. Small local farms will dominate our rural landscape. Most of the fresh produce families, food services, and restaurants consume will be locally sourced. Projects like urban agriculture and edible schoolyards will be popularized among Beijing residents. This transformation of our food system will also be aided by urban design. Urbanization is a large burden on sustainability: it is estimated that by 2050 nearly two-thirds of the world’s population will be living in urban areas, not just demanding more agricultural resources but also taking up land and water that was previously used for food production. And farmers, often referred to as “peasants” in China, usually fall into a low social status in Chinese society. Beijing will address these problems with policies that support growth of rural livelihood and rural communities.

With continuous improvement of water, land use and the whole ecosystem, we will have more young people moving to work in rural areas. In our vision, the urban and rural divide in Beijing will increasingly blur and new jobs and communities will be created to allow young people to join food productions. The grave urban–rural divide developed under the Maoist/Soviet policies will largely diminish as more and more people move closer to food production and work remotely on the Internet, which reduces carbon footprints from food and increases their chances of getting fresh and safe foods. This will also decrease traffic flows and help mitigate climate change, which in turn will improve rural livelihood and productivity.

We envision that true revitalization of the rural areas has to come from both food production and rural livelihood that place well-being and sustainability at the core of their value proposition. Only such long-term change can create long-lasting food security and thus job security for the farming population, almost half of which will be women.

The Good Food Hub, which we will implement in 2021 with an award from the Food System Vision Award, will become the classic model for community kitchens that not only provide safe, healthy, locally-sourced, delicious food but also a public space for community-building and food education. The Hub will host China’s first chef-in-residence program and start to change the landscape of the nation’s chef training. Chef education will no longer merely recognize the improvement of culinary skills but also an appreciation for optimal health and minimal climate impact. Additionally, chefs’ leadership is widely recognized by the public in championing healthy and sustainable dietary patterns. Whole-food and plant-based choices will become the mainstream choice for children and adults and will be offered as the main option at restaurants and food services.

Fostering and championing leadership in the food space lies in our core mission, which is why our proposed Good Food Hub will be a community-based training academy for chefs and home caretakers to be also dietitians and lifestyle mentors at their workplaces or homes. This will fundamentally change the family power dynamic and give the caretaker, usually the woman/mother/grandmother, more say in the family and more opportunities to be a role model for their children, who will in turn learn from the healthier lifestyles that their mother or grandma lives. And as mentioned above, this will also revolutionize the chef profession, elevating it from what it is now generally a passive, obscure and less respected social status to a higher status as a healthy and sustainable lifestyle coach and mentor. More leading female chefs will thus emerge.
Food literacy programs will be well-established across the city, from K-12 schools to colleges to offices and communities. Climate resilience will be included in the core values of the food literacy education. Beijing residents, who have been through SARS in the early 2000s, smog pollution in the 2010s, and COVID-19 in 2020, understand that personal health is tied to population health and the ecological system’s health.

Government food policy will prioritize health and sustainability. Sustainable dietary choices will be included in the China National Dietary Guidelines and carry similar weight as the recommendations for diets that optimize personal health. And in the core of the “sustainability diets” lies the “low carbon” recommendations for optimal public health impact. The true costs of our food production will be largely reflected in the price tabs of the produce and animal products that people buy. In Beijing, where our proposed project is based and where people enjoy the highest average income in the nation, a climate tax will be imposed on food products with large carbon footprints, which include but are not limited to most animal products, imported goods, and highly-processed foods. The tax income will be allocated to support government, civil society, and corporate campaigns to mitigate climate change.

Environmental taxes may be deemed effective but still be unpopular. Various studies suggest that earmarking revenues from such taxes could mitigate this dilemma by moderating the perceived cost–benefit ratio to enhance public support. Research shows that equal per-capita transfers, earmarking revenues for environmental purposes, and transfers to low-income groups increase public support compared with allocating carbon tax revenues to general government budgets. Policy packages may also be an effective tool.

After 30 years of hard work and improvement, food policies centered around One Health will be prevalent at all government levels in Beijing. A food governance council will be found at each level to ensure a holistic approach to food policy. Governments will implement compulsory food education schemes in schools, communities, and workplaces. Labeling will be compulsory not only for health information but for the environmental impacts of products and their ingredients. A license on food safety, nutrition, and sustainability will be required for food service managers and executive chefs to work in Beijing in the 2050s, with the same rationale as a driver’s license or fire regulations for restaurants.

Beijing will reform current policies of investment in food production and food services. Subsidies to large, concentrated animal agriculture will end, and farmers will no longer be incentivized to use more water, land, energy, pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers to produce staple foods like rice, wheat, and maize at the cost of more nutritious or sustainable foods like vegetables and fruits. Such harmful subsidies will be gradually replaced by investment into food production that will optimize our health, environment, and economic benefits.

State subsidies, government investments, and tax and trade policies over agriculture products will be reviewed regularly on the basis of the latest evidence-based scientific research, so public resources can be distributed to optimize public health and the sustainability of our ecological system.

The food industry will also embrace a low carbon value proposition. Overpackaging of products should be outlawed and replaced by regulations that encourage upcycling of packaging, minimal packaging, and energy-intense storage. Since people will be living in communities closer to food production locations, shipping of these products will also drop significantly.

Technology can be a double-edged sword — it can negatively affect health and sustainability (for instance, technologies for ultra-processed food and intensive animal farming), but it can also provide solutions to these problems (for instance, the rise of alternative protein innovations). New technology, if carrying our core values for sustainable food transformation, can provide multiple benefits — in productivity, nutrition, resilience, and improvement of the environment through better management of land, water, energy consumption, and carbon emissions.

By 2050, precise monitoring of soil quality and water use will be easily achievable with new technologies. Technology can also help us introduce new crop varieties that will survive in extreme conditions such as severe heat or submersion in water. We will be able to better integrate food production into urban designs and the city’s landscape with food growing in schoolyards, balconies and riversides.
With the aid of new technologies, catering for the many large-scale conferences and other events hosted in Beijing will transition from the wasteful, meat-heavy, unhealthy, and unsustainable practices of 2020 to services that are healthy, sustainable, and plant-based. And with better sensors, precise waste management will continue improving and be widely adopted into homes, public kitchens, restaurants, and farms.

Trade-offs will be necessary to attain our 2050 vision. First, drastic transformation to plant-based diets means that animal agriculture will shrink dramatically and will undergo serious restructuring, including transitions to producing plant-based products. Second, there are trade-offs in the way we produce alternative protein in 2020 — signature products like the Beyond Meat and Just Eggs have been questioned for their health value and their environmental footprints, something that can be largely improved with time.

One justification given for large-scale industrial farming is its efficiency. An increase in smaller-scale regenerative farming might result in various degrees of productivity loss that require adaptations and innovations in policy, technology, economics, and culture. Reintroduction of traditional crop and animal species will increase biodiversity and resilience, preserve cultural traditions, and revitalize rural communities — productivity and rising prices might be the trade-offs such measures face.

Transforming the food system may involve political feasibility problems, as potentially effective policy interventions will interfere with citizens’ daily lives. Shifting incentives to enable effective food system transition will play a critical role in overcoming barriers to adoption and scaling. These may include market-based incentives, blended finance mechanisms, public fiscal incentives, grant capital, and non-financial incentives.

Increasing food prices to reflect the true costs of food production also makes good food less affordable to low-income families. Government programs are needed to make good, nutritious foods more accessible to all.

Should local communities or China as a whole “outsource” production of more polluting and resource-intensive agricultural products by importing them from other places? And what about the trade-off between reducing carbon footprints by producing foods locally and importing foods with higher nutrient density from regions where the soil is better? All of these require us to critically evaluate our short-term and long-term goals.

In the next three years, we need to achieve the following key milestones:

1. The term “Food System Transformation” has entered the public discourse, shown by increasing appearance in government policies, books, public media, social media, and on college campuses. Academic researchers from diverse disciplines – agriculture, health, sociology, public policy, science, etc. have started to study and provide more insights into the food system. Farmers, activists, entrepreneurs, chefs, educators, and government officials are working out of their usual silos to seek innovative systemic approaches. The “Good Food Pledge” has been signed by thousands of institutions, families and individuals, and it serves as a guideline for those who want to be part of the transformation.

2. The government has adopted a consolidated system approach to food governance, symbolized by the establishment of Food Policy Councils in a number of cities across China. These councils enable the government to engage multi-stakeholders, design food policies centered around health and sustainability, and implement these policies with consolidated efforts of different government departments. A number of Chinese cities have joined global initiatives on the food system transformation, such as the C40 Good Food Cities Declaration.

3. Our first Good Food Hub has been running successfully for a couple of years and has inspired replicates in a number of Chinese cities. The Hub has become the earliest and most notable public space for citizens to participate in dialogues on the food system and celebrate good food, and it serves as a training ground for future change-makers. The Hub has also seen the establishment of the nation’s first “People’s Food Council,” a citizen-based advocacy group championing healthy and sustainable foods and safeguarding food sovereignty.

By 2030, we will need to make significant progress to secure public health and keep humanity within the planetary boundary. For our vision to become a reality by 2050, we envision progress in the following areas:
1) Public policy and food governance will make long strides: China’s population is expected to be surpassed by India’s in the late 2020s, and a rapidly aging society will become a reality. It will be more urgent than ever for public policies to prioritize health and sustainability for an increasingly vulnerable population. Governments will cancel most previous subsidies to animal agriculture, instead drastically increasing investments in incentives for plant-based dietary transitions, reduction of food waste, and improved farming practices. New technological innovations will also be applied to support food system transformations, and food literacy programs will be made mandatory for communities.

2) Per capita meat consumption will be reduced by 30%+ and consumption of other animal products will fall by 20%+. The number of vegetarians and vegans will grow to be roughly 15% of the population. A new plant-forward culinary culture will be established and accepted by the nation’s mainstream.

3) Systems of protein production will be transformed. With general demand for animal protein dropping, government subsidies decreasing or disappearing, stricter health and environmental regulations, and competition from a growing alternative protein industry, animal agriculture will undergo major restructuring. Half of the industry will either disappear or convert to alternative protein production.

4) Regenerative agriculture will increase significantly and win widespread public and government support.

5) Food waste will be reduced by 30%.

6) Every major city will have at least one Good Food Hub or similar space.

**The role we envision for our Good Food Hub:**

By 2050, every community-based market (currently known as the “wet market”) will host a Good Food Hub (“the Hub”). They will become the city’s “food oasis,” ensuring that no food deserts exist in the city.

The Hub will serve as a plant-based lab, kitchen, studio, classroom, and archive. Ideally, the Hub will offer a space for parents and grandparents to work alongside professional chefs who showcase predominantly fresh produce from sustainable agriculture. We will invest funds in renovating the space, paying the managing team, and setting up an international chef-in-residence program.

The Hub will bring cascading effects to revolutionize public spaces in the model of the “wet market,” where food is not merely a commodity but a medium that connects people, ideas, and communities. Every week, a parent or team of parents will join hands with a professional chef to present a weekend dinner using sustainably-grown produce and ingredients that celebrate both traditional culinary philosophy and creativity, challenging the minds of diners on issues such as sustainable sourcing, plant-based diversity, food waste, and animal welfare. It will be:

1) a lab — where resident chefs and home cooks introduce traditional recipes and create new ones with a wide range of plant-based ingredients produced mainly by local or regional sustainable farms (in some occasions animal products from high-welfare farms).
2) a kitchen — where sustainable agriculture products are presented in the form of tasty and healthy meals offered to the city’s residents.
3) a studio — where chefs and home cooks interact with artists and designers in creating intriguing online and on-site events on food system transformation.
4) a classroom — where young chefs and home cooks learn and contribute.
5) an archive — where traditional and innovative plant-based recipes are collected, documented, and made open source for everyone in the city and beyond.

The Hub will revitalize urban food culture in Beijing - a culture of mindfulness eating, which is fundamental for any meaningful changes to last. In most part of our history, knowledge and wisdom about food were passed down through the generations. This process was disrupted by urbanization and industrialization of food production. Since raising food literacy lies in the core of the Hub, we envision that by 2050 this old transition will be back.
The Hub will turn a market into a civic food space for the neighborhood. It is where food travels from farm to table, presented by those who care for and love food and their fellow citizens. It will be where the city’s most interesting dialogues about food take place not just among activists or academics but everyone in the community. It will be the community kitchen where citizens can appreciate tasty, healthy and sustainable foods. It will be a studio, which connects the market with a larger online audience. It will also be a training ground for young chefs and family cooks. Better management of food waste will also be a central theme discussed, tested and learned at the Hub.

The Hub will serve as a lab for chefs to develop tasty recipes for low-carbon ingredients. It will create public dialogues on climate change resilient foods among policy-makers, scientists, farmers, chefs, students, activists, educators as well as other citizens. The Hub will also be an incredible community-based meeting point for food designers to collect ideas, be inspired and test new designs that can support the city’s environmental agenda.

The Hub will lead culinary innovations on sustainable ingredients. It will also serve as a training space for chefs and parents to be lifestyle coaches. With many of its popular culinary events, the Hub will highlight good produce from local farmers and generate support for their livelihood. It will also feature leadership of women.

We also envision that our Hub, sitting right inside the community food market, will also make possible and give rise to China’s first “People’s Food Council,” a grassroots, self-organized committee whose members will be elected by local residents to protect the sovereignty of the local community on governing issues related to their food, health and environment. We think it is important that food is not only something that fuels us but also something that nourishes our minds and builds our communities. We think it is important that these dialogues around food are not just dominated by policy-makers, academics, or businesses but also that ordinary citizens join the conversation.

[Please feel the energy of our future Hub from the pictures below which were taken during our 2nd edition of the Good Food Festival, which is the prototype for the Good Food Hub. This past edition was fortunately held in a local community in Beijing during the first weekend of January 2020, just days before the outbreak of COVID-19. We are sure the future Hub will be even more exciting.]
Stakeholders:
National government:
1.1 Agriculture Dept.: Issue national agri policies that prioritize quality of soil and food instead of quantity, and support small to medium farmers as an effort to revitalize rural communities. Taxation of foods with large carbon footprints will be used to support good agricultural practices that increase the resilience of our food system. Policy to cut food waste on the farm.
1.2 Environment Dept.: Environmental policies that recognize the critical role of food system transformation and create incentives for cities, institutions, communities, families and individuals to support productions and consumption of sustainable foods.

1.3 Health Dept.: Include ecological sustainability in the diet guidelines. Taxation of highly processed foods or those with high added sugar will be earmarked to increase access to healthy foods for the poor households and for the young.

1.4 Education Dept.: Implement a national program for food literacy and integrate it into school curricula.

1.5 Commerce Dept.: Make food manufacturers, food services and restaurants comply to national health and sustainability standards. Policy to cut food waste on the table.

City government:

2.1 Food Policy Council: Consist of senior officials, researchers and representatives from communities and businesses. Its mission is to devise, test and implement a city-wide integrated food governance. Suggest tax-reduction incentives for healthy and sustainable food production. Implement a city-wide Meatless Mondays program.

2.2 Agriculture Dept.: Encourage regional diversities of crops as well as those that are environmentally resilient.

2.3 Environment Dept.: Set climate goals for the city’s food governance and monitor its implementation.

2.4 Health Dept.: Prioritize preemptive measures rather than medical treatment. Establish a committee that oversees diet-related preventative measure for diseases.

2.5 Education Dept.: Connect schools with farms for food education.

2.6 Commerce Dept. and City Investment Board: Invest in food businesses that produce health and sustainable foods. Policy incentives for recycling and upcycling.

2.7 Urban Design Dept.: Take food landscape as a core part of urban design to support a lively urban food culture. Redesign food markets.

Farmers:

3.1 small to medium farmers: Produce foods that are plant-based, healthy and sustainable.

3.2 large farms: Prioritize quality of food rather than quantity.

Institutions:

4.1 Food services: Provide institutional foods in schools, corporate cafeteria, etc. Put health and sustainability at the center of their work.

4.2 Schools/Education agencies: Integrate food literacy education in the curriculum. Unhealthy foods are not allowed to be sold on campus.

4.3 Media: Advertisements or commercials are regulated so foods that have high health and/or environmental risks cannot be advertised.

4.4 Restaurants: Clearly label their ingredients on the menu. Combine culinary innovations with health and sustainability.

4.5 Manufacturers/Food processors: Have greater incentives to produce foods that both healthy and environmental sustainable.

4.6 Hospitals: Use diet to treat patients with non-communicable diseases.

4.7 Research institutions: Produce a rich body of work on food and its relation to health and sustainability.

4.8 Retailers: Reduce carbon footprints in transportation and business management.

4.9 NGOs: Provide support on the ground for health and sustainability policies.

Community

5.1 (would-be) parents: Learn about food, eat healthily/provide healthy food for the young, and help their children to develop a healthy and sustainable eating habit. Cooking at home is greatly appreciated and caretakers are also diet and lifestyle mentors for the family.

5.2 senior citizens: Enjoy simple but nutritious foods subsidized by the government.

5.3 children: Receive food education at home, in school and on the farm. Unhealthy foods are not allowed on and near school. Have access to healthy food in school and at home regardless their family backgrounds.

5.5 chefs: Health and sustainability are taught at school and are given same weight as culinary skill training. Become leaders for a new culinary culture that focuses on health and sustainability. Develop ability to be lifestyle mentor/coach for their customers.

5.6 artists and designers: Promote mindful eating among the population.

5.7 community organizers: Facilitate citizen participation in food system change.
Food Markets and the Good Food Hubs
The two together serve as “Food Oasis” of the city, making sure that no food deserts exist.

6.1 Community-Based Food Markets (“wet-markets”): After redesigns become plant-based markets to minimize risks for zoonotic diseases. Make fresh produce and healthy ingredients more accessible to everyone in the city. It is where the Good Food Hubs is located.

6.2 The Good Food Hubs: a community food lab/kitchen/studio/classroom/archive that are key to the vibrant urban food culture. It also hosts the People’s Food Council.

References


