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INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY AS DRIVERS OF FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSITION

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The agri-food sector is key to economic prosperity and can promote human health and support environmental ecosystems, although it is currently threatening both. The current food system is a substantial driver of global environmental change, contributing to climate change, biodiversity loss, and severe environmental impact also related to the food waste and loss is occurring.

In this scenario, the policy initiatives of the United Nations (Agenda 2030, SDGs) and of the European Commission (e.g. the Green Deal, Farm to Fork strategy) have paved a route to accelerate the transformation of the agri-food systems towards its sustainability and to guarantee safe and healthy food for all at global level.

A paradigm change for the profound transformation the food system needs is required by leveraging a disrupting and systemic innovation connected with future technologies. A number of innovations resulting from scientific and technological advancements, ranging from the agricultural practices to the food production, from land use and emissions to improved waste management, from novel food sources to improved diets, are increasingly available.

The potential of innovation for a transition towards a sustainable food system depends on various factors including their level of readiness, local development, regulations, cultural and a societal recognition of their value. A close interplay of all the stakeholders of the complex agri-food system including policymakers and societal players to enable transformation to occur is needed. Innovation and sustainability are key driving forces to be implemented and integrated in a modern food production system, where quality and safety are pillar objectives and food security has to be guaranteed.

In this framework, academia plays a main role not only as accelerators of innovation but also as training providers of a skills and competences to the next generation of professionals, scientists, managers and leaders meet the challenges of the ecological transition of the food system.

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