



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

## **Policy Majlis for Agrifood Systems Transformation in the Near East and North Africa: A policy dialogue convened by FAO**

*ADNEC Centre - Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: 7-8 October 2026*

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### **Introduction**

The FAO Policy Majlis, convened during Global Food Week in Abu Dhabi, will provide a focused and practical platform for policy dialogue on agrifood systems transformation in the Near East and North Africa. Taking place on 7 and 8 October 2026, the two-day event will bring together technical experts, youth representatives, researchers, innovators, financing partners and private sector stakeholders to exchange perspectives on the region's priority policy challenges, emerging solutions and investment needs. The dialogue will aim to identify actionable pathways towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

The event will focus on the region's agrifood systems challenges; the enabling role of science, technology and innovation; youth engagement and entrepreneurship; and the financing and investment landscape required to support implementation at scale. Discussions will draw on FAO's regional priorities and technical work, including rural transformation and inclusive value chains, food security and healthy diets, water scarcity and climate action, and resilience to multiple shocks.

### **Objectives**

The overarching objective of the FAO Policy Majlis is to facilitate a practical and inclusive exchange on priority policy directions for agrifood systems transformation in the NENA region, with particular attention to evidence-based decision-making, innovation, youth engagement, and financing and investment pathways that can accelerate implementation.

Specific objectives include:

- Discuss how science, technology and innovation can strengthen evidence-based decision-making, resource efficiency, advisory services and policy delivery.
- Position youth as partners in rural transformation, innovation, entrepreneurship and community-level action, while identifying the support needed to scale youth-led solutions.
- Explore the financing and investment landscape for agrifood systems transformation, focusing on enabling policy environments, investment instruments and public-private partnerships.
- Identify follow-up priorities to inform FAO's regional policy dialogue and partnership engagement.

## Agenda

**7 October 2026**

### **Agrifood systems challenges, STI and youth engagement**

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| <b>10:30 – 10:40</b> | <p><b>Opening remarks by FAO</b></p> <p><b>Abdulahakim Elwaer</b>, Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative and Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>10:40 – 11:40</b> | <p><b>Session 1: Agrifood Systems under Pressure: Evidence and Opportunities</b></p> <p><i>This session will discuss the key pressures shaping agrifood systems in the NENA region, drawing on recent regional and global evidence on food security and nutrition. It will explore how food insecurity, the rising cost of healthy diets, water scarcity, climate change, supply-chain disruptions, conflict-related shocks and economic uncertainty are influencing national and regional transformation pathways. The discussion will identify priority opportunities for strengthening resilience, advancing evidence-based policymaking, and mobilizing investment for more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.</i></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Ahmad Mukhtar</b>, Subregional Coordinator for GCC States and Yemen and FAO Representative in the United Arab Emirates</li></ul> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Mohammed Salman Al Hammadi</b>, Assistant Undersecretary for the Food Diversity Sector, Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, United Arab Emirates</li><li>○ <b>Anas A. Al-Nabulsi</b>, Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security</li><li>○ <b>Bérangère Boëll</b>, UN Resident Coordinator for the United Arab Emirates</li><li>○ <b>David Laborde</b>, Director of Agrifood Economics Division, FAO</li></ul> <p><b>Guiding questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <i>What are the most urgent pressures facing agrifood systems in the NENA region, and how are they shaping national transformation pathways?</i></li><li>2. <i>How can recent regional evidence on food security and nutrition be translated into stronger evidence-based policymaking?</i></li></ol> |

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|                      | <p>3. <i>What priority opportunities, partnerships and investments are needed to advance more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems across the region?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>11:40 – 12:00</b> | <b>Coffee/Tea break</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>12:00 – 13:00</b> | <p><b>Session 2: Science, Technology and Innovation for Agrifood Systems Transformation</b></p> <p><i>This session will examine how science, technology and innovation can support agrifood systems transformation in the NENA region, with a focus on the policy, institutional and investment conditions needed to move proven solutions from pilots to sustained adoption at scale. It will explore how stronger STI governance, science-policy linkages, research networks, advisory services, enabling regulations and partnerships can strengthen evidence-based decision-making, last-mile delivery, resilience, inclusion and sustainability. The discussion will identify priority opportunities for connecting public institutions, research systems, development partners, financing actors and the private sector around practical, country-led pathways for scaling innovation across agrifood value chains.</i></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Faten Adada</b>, Agriculture and Rural Development Expert, Day-to-Day Manager of Regional Priority on Rural Transformation Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa</li> </ul> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Tarifa Al Zaabi</b>, Director-General, International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA)</li> <li>○ <b>Rida Al-Shibli</b>, Executive Secretary, Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA)</li> <li>○ <b>Ahmed Al Suwaidi</b>, Al Dahra Chief Corporate Affairs and Chief People Officer</li> <li>○ <b>Josef Schmidhuber</b>, FAO Senior Advisor</li> </ul> <p><b>Guiding questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>How can science, technology and innovation support agrifood systems transformation in the NENA region, and what conditions are needed to move proven solutions from pilots to sustained adoption at scale?</i></li> <li>2. <i>How can stronger STI governance, science-policy linkages, research networks, advisory services and enabling regulations strengthen evidence-based decision-making, resilience, inclusion and last-mile delivery?</i></li> </ol> |

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|                      | <p>3. <i>What priority opportunities, partnerships and investment pathways are needed to connect public institutions, research systems, development partners, financing actors and the private sector around country-led innovation across agrifood value chains?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>13:00 – 14:30</b> | <b>Lunch break</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>14:30 – 14:50</b> | <p><b>Presentation and the Launch of SheGrow AI application</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Maggie Refaat</b>, FAO Gender Specialist, Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>14:50 – 15:50</b> | <p><b>Session 3: Youth Innovation and Intergenerational Action for Agrifood Systems Transformation.</b></p> <p><i>This session will position young people as partners, innovators and changemakers in agrifood systems transformation. Aligned with FAO's youth agenda and drawing on initiatives such as YALAFast, the session will highlight youth-led innovation, entrepreneurship, policy engagement and intergenerational collaboration.</i></p> <p><b>Youth representatives will engage in a dialogue moderated by the Youth Team.</b></p> |
| <b>15:50 – 16:00</b> | <p><b>Day 1 synthesis and key takeaways</b></p> <p><b>Ahmad Mukhtar</b>, the Subregional Coordinator for GCC States and Yemen and FAO Representative in the United Arab Emirates, will provide a closing remark for Day 1 and facilitate reflections discussions, drawing key messages and follow-up areas.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

**8 October 2026**

**Financing and investment landscapes for agrifood systems transformation**

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| <b>10:00 – 10:40</b> | <b>Hand in Hand Initiative and Investment Planning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Anthony Bennet</b>, Global Coordinator for the Hand-in-Hand Initiative at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>10:40 – 11:30</b> | <b>Session 4: Understanding the Financing and Investment Landscape.</b> <p>This session will examine the financing landscape for agrifood systems transformation in the NENA region. The discussion will consider how financing mechanisms, technical advisory support and impact-oriented investment can help mobilize resources for food security.</p> <p><b>Moderator:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Ahmad Mukhtar</b>, Subregional Coordinator for GCC States and Yemen and FAO Representative in the United Arab Emirates</li></ul> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Sheikh Majid Al Qassimi</b>, Co-founder and CEO, Soma Mater</li><li>○ <b>H.E Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair</b>, Chairman of the board of Trustees, Al Ghurair Foundation (TBC)</li><li>○ <b>Obaid Saif Hamad Al Zaabi</b>, Chairman of the Board, Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development</li><li>○ <b>Hassan Halawy</b>, Group CEO, Elite Agro Holding</li><li>○ <b>David Laborde</b>, Director, Economic Analysis and Policy Division, FAO</li></ul> <p><b>Guiding questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <i>What are the main financing gaps and bottlenecks limiting agrifood systems transformation in the NENA region, and how can public, private, climate and development finance be better aligned around shared priorities?</i></li><li>2. <i>Which instruments can most effectively de-risk investment and mobilize additional capital for agrifood systems?</i></li><li>3. <i>How can financing approaches strengthen food security impact?</i></li></ol> |
| <b>11:30 – 12:00</b> | <b>Coffee/Tea break</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>12:00 – 12:45</b> | <b>Session 5: From Policy Priorities to Investment-Ready Pathways.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

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|                      | <p>This session will discuss how policy priorities can be translated into credible investment pipelines through investment mapping, geospatial analyses, value-chain assessments, technical assistance and institutional coordination.</p> <p><i>Presentations followed by interactive discussion and Q&amp;A</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Tamas Vattai</b>, Nutrition and Food Systems Officer, FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa (SCOPE)</li> <li>○ <b>Mark Brown</b>, Innovative Finance Specialist (TIP)</li> <li>○ <b>Nadia Puerta</b>, Economist, ESA (HIH Geospatial platform)</li> <li>○ <b>Armen Sedrakyan</b>, Economist, SNG</li> </ul> |
| <b>12:45 – 13:00</b> | <p><b>Closing reflections and follow-up priorities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Ahmad Mukhtar</b>, Subregional Coordinator for GCC States and Yemen and FAO Representative in the United Arab Emirates</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |