



CASE STUDY

WWF FUTURE FOOD TOGETHER



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#sindesperdicio - Talking about the value of food in Colombia

Due to its macroeconomic policies over the past few decades, Colombia, with a population of 48 million people, has managed to solidify itself as a middle-income country with a degree of relative stability. However, it is one of the countries with the highest levels of poverty, income inequality, and labor market informality in Latin America. The country [uses 44% of its land](#) suitable for agriculture and has been considered one of the world's agricultural pantries. This represents an important challenge for the conservation of its biodiversity, as it is one of the twelve countries with the greatest biological diversity in the world with [85 major types of ecosystems](#) identified. Today, almost half of the country's ecosystems are threatened and increasing deforestation represents the biggest source of GHG emissions.

Despite its potential for food production, Colombia [struggles with hunger](#) with up to 11% of its population facing chronic malnutrition. The rate is significantly higher in rural areas. While the Colombian food production system is currently characterized by a mix of smallholder farming and large industrial agribusiness, the latter has been on the rise increasing its market share. Colombian agriculture is said to have the potential to meet domestic food demand, but this will require re-balancing priorities with the export industries of bananas, coffee, and flowers as well as palm oil, of which Colombia is the fourth largest producer of in the world.

Challenges and Objectives

Colombia's food system faces numerous challenges: poor planning, logistical difficulties such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient technical support to mostly small producers, and a high level of informality. Food loss and waste remain a huge problem throughout the chain, with around [34%](#) of food either never reaching the plate or being thrown in the bin. And consumption patterns are changing [toward more ultra-processed and less diverse foods](#). Increased urbanization, the globalization of Western diet and rising household incomes are increasing the share of consumers transitioning to a diet with a greater footprint. The potential to eat a healthy, low-carbon, diverse diet is real, but is not being achieved.

Trade-offs and Synergies

By aiming to change people's food consumption habits, the project entailed a challenging trade-off for the average consumer with regards to food's cultural dimension: the project "asked" from consumers that they change beliefs to which they were, knowingly or unknowingly, deeply attached to. The project's [research](#) revealed that unsustainable food choices were founded on preferences such as serving abundant plates, shopping choices that privileged food aesthetics and eating low quantities of fruits and vegetables, as well as beliefs that chemicals were the only way food could damage the environment.

Quick Facts

- Location: Colombia
- Duration: 2020 - 2023
- Organization: WWF Colombia



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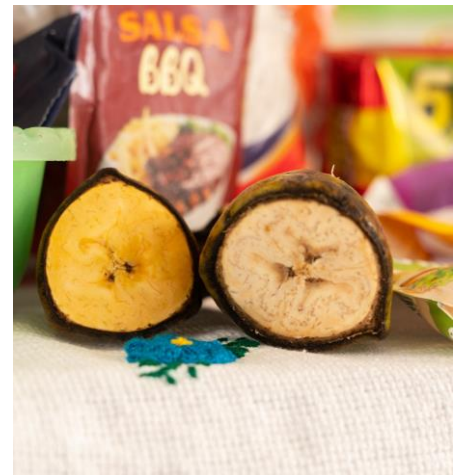
A huge opportunity to shift behaviors was identified, considering that 70% of Colombians had already started to make some changes in their diets in the past years, mainly motivated by a willingness to be healthier. In the SCP project's communication, pairing personal health with planetary health offered a unique opportunity to increase the consumption of a variety of locally produced non-ultra-processed food while simultaneously tackling food loss and waste. In doing this, however, a new trade-off manifested.

Another trade-off, and perhaps the most challenging, has to do with the promotion of more sustainable food products and the consequences this has over business profits as well as over producer and worker livelihoods. Changing food products and the way food products are created can have serious implications for those that profit, and those whose livelihoods depend on a certain supply chain. If demand shifts away from certain products, there may be investments and livelihoods that will be put in jeopardy and from which food system actors will require time and effort to recover from. This is why WWF and the SCP project advocate for just transition measures in food systems transformation policies.



Strategy

A value chain approach was adopted with the aim to integrate SCP principles into government policies, food sector business strategies, and consumer behavior. The project promoted the inclusion of goals for sustainable food production into national policies and international commitments. Focusing on the transformation of the business sector, the project worked with both the food industry and the retail sector to incorporate better practices in food production, reduce waste and generate more demand for sustainable products by informing and educating consumers on the need to take more sustainable consumption decisions. Through direct engagement with consumers, the project gathered information on the perceptions and beliefs behind everyday consumption that informed the design of both a communication campaign aimed at increasing awareness on the relationship between food and nature, as well as context-based strategies of behavioral change.



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Tools

- [Sustainable sourcing guidelines](#) were developed for five commodities: cocoa, milk, meat, palm oil and fish.
- The [vivesindesperdicio.com](#) website was developed into a directory of recommendations for avoiding food waste.
- [Research](#) was conducted in the country on Colombians' knowledge, behavior and beliefs regarding food and its relationship to nature.
- A training program was created for restaurants to reduce food waste, including communication to end consumers.
- A case study and a guide to best practices for avoiding waste in the retail sector were developed.
- The ["Value of Food" campaign](#) created spaces for interaction to different audiences, including journalists, digital influencers, restaurants, civil society organizations and international organizations to raise awareness on the relationship between food and nature.



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Lessons Learned

Leveraging the food-health-nature nexus helped the project team implement more effective advocacy and awareness raising actions, given that many consumers and other stakeholders are more reactive to the health and nutrition dimension because people’s lives have been coming more into touch with the health consequences of food. In Colombia, one out of three people do not consume fruit, five out of seven do not consume vegetables, while one out of four consumes fast food and one out of five consumes sugary drinks per week, trends which have negative health and environmental consequences, which the project team could associate.

This new perspective for Colombia enabled the private sector to become more actively involved and use the knowledge generated to make decisions and scale actions in order to reduce the impact of the prevailing dietary patterns. It also provided more consumers with an understanding of relationships of their consumption habits to current pressing international issues that may not have been evident to them. For instance, the harm caused by diet homogenization in the face of an inefficient food system that uses more land and strains ecosystems, or the way food waste contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. The data-based communication campaign was leveraged on a triad of information, tools and a call to action, leading people to act given the relevance for their own lives and inspired by their newly acquired evidence-based beliefs. Working both nationally and locally allowed us to influence at both scales, and to take advantage of the change of Colombian government as a key moment for advocacy.



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Results

The project succeeded in influencing key actors in the food system in Colombia with tools, information, and pilots that will enable them to scale up their positive impact and continue incorporating sustainability as an indispensable criterion in all of their future decision-making. At the governmental level, an agreement with the Mayor’s Office of Bogotá was achieved to create the first pilot program for waste reduction for the food service sector. With the “Value of Food” campaign, a combined audience of more than 20 million people was reached, who were able to broaden their vision of what it means to eat sustainably in Colombia and incorporate this knowledge into their daily practices.

Conclusions

Talking about changes in food consumption and production in Colombia, as in many other countries, is complex. Not only is the project touching on an issue intimately linked to emotions, traditions, and cultural values, but Colombians often only eat what they can, and not necessarily what they want. In a country with high indicators of inequality and poverty, it is a challenge to position sustainability as a factor that can be used to change consumers’ consumption patterns and buying habits. Nevertheless, it is imperative to understand that human health cannot be achieved without planetary health.

The project offered a unique opportunity to promote consumption patterns that any Colombian can adopt: reduce food waste, eat more local and varied food, and improve understanding of how food relates to nature, all in the context of the pandemic and rising food prices leveraged by high inflation. These principles also brought the private sector closer to getting involved as an indispensable actor in the transformation, generating shared knowledge that will become an enabler for the continuity of these change processes. Likewise, the establishment of a new government that took place during the project period offered a window of opportunity that was used to ensure that the food agenda, which had previously been associated only with agriculture and health, incorporated environmental criteria with the urgent character of the climate and biodiversity crises into key policy goals.



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