



Event Summary

The IUNS-ICN 2025 Scientific Symposium entitled ‘*Advancing Nutrition and Sustainable Food Systems in the Nordic Region – Lessons Learned for Regional and Global Impact*’ aimed to bring along multiple stakeholder groups to discuss topics relevant to nutrition, climate change, and sustainable food practices in the Nordic region and possibilities to scale them up. This event attracted approximately 120 attendees from all over the world.

The event started with a welcome by the representatives from Nordic Nutrition Societies: *Maria Wik Markhus* (President of the [Norwegian Nutrition Society](#)), *Bryndís Eva Birgisdóttir* (Board member of the Iceland Nutrition Society), *Niina Kaartinen* (President of the [Finnish Society for Nutrition Research](#)) and *Camilla T. Damsgaard* (Board representative of the [Danish Nutrition Society](#)).

The Norwegian Minister of Fisheries and Ocean Policy, *Marianne Sivertsen Næss*, delivered the opening remarks via a [video message](#). She highlighted that both land- and ocean-based foods pay a vital role in delivering nutrition and resilience, and we need knowledge, research and scientific approaches across sectors and nations to successfully transform food systems.

The President of IUNS and Director of Food and Nutrition Division in FAO, *Lynnette Neufeld*, highlighted the importance of keeping nutrition on the political agenda, and collaboration

across different sectors, and the role of the UN Decade of Action – like Nutrition – to support this. She mentioned the science-based principles of healthy diets – adequate in nutrients, diverse, balanced in energy, and moderate in consumption of unhealthy foods, noting that while the principles are universal, healthy diets take many forms based on local food availability, affordability, and culture. She spoke highly of the actions done by the Nordic countries and the Global Action Network – Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition to define healthy diets in context and to advance needed actions to achieve access to and consumption of healthy diets in context.

The Director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, *Line Gordon*, highlighted the importance of food system transformation as food systems are one of the main drivers of transgressing planetary boundaries. She emphasized that changes would depend on shifting mental models and social norms in addition to regulations and innovations. She exemplified food system transformation through bundled actions where musicians, researchers and institutes developed plant-based ingredients for festival foods which outperformed traditional festival foods in climate impacts and nutrition values.

Camilla T. Damsgaard, Research Group Leader and Associate Professor in the Lifecourse Nutrition and Health Group, University of Copenhagen, described the Generation Healthy Kids Study and showcased how to introduce climate-friendly school meals to children. The study provided school meals for all children with a multi-component intervention design with 4 focus areas (including nutrition for balanced energy intake and healthier diets). She suggested that climate-friendly school meals can be accepted through gradual introduction, pedagogical tools and involvement of children.

Liisa Korkalo, Lecturer in the Department of Food and Nutrition, University of Helsinki, presented two studies to drive forward sustainability transformation in diets of children. In FoodStep Study, they designed a more plant-based menu and identified the biggest challenge being the acceptability of legumes. In MIRA2 Study, they looked in the critical nutrient intakes of children with different diets. She suggested that public food service planning and procurement can help healthier and more sustainable food transformation for children, and robust fortification policies and monitoring systems are essential to safeguard nutritional adequacy as we shift toward more plant-based diets.

Amund Maage, Head of Research in the Institute of Marine Research, Norway, highlighted the importance of aquatic foods in sustainable food systems and human health, particularly in Norway and other Nordic countries. He exemplified science-based efforts in Norway (e.g., monitoring programs, [Seafood database](#)) to ensure safe and nutritious aquatic foods, but more research is needed on the impact of fisheries and aquaculture on biodiversity.

During the panel discussion, we received 3 questions:

1. What change you would like to see to move things faster forward?

The panellists suggested: interaction between regulations and social acceptability, including plant-based items in school meals, coherence in policies from the production side and demand, shifting norms to improve acceptability, use gastronomy to make plant-based food taste good, and use more low trophic seafood.

2. To shift towards more plant-based in school meals, which practice is the best (to *Liisa Korkalo*)?

Gradual introduction of vegetarian-based meal to replace red meat-based meal that also fits with local food culture.

3. How to replace red meat with plant-based meat alternatives? And what about the iron bioavailability in plant-based food (to *Camilla T. Damsgaard*)?

Half meat half vegetables were used as ingredients for the meatballs. Bioavailability could be a concern. Iron contents in the meals were not assessed but children's iron intakes and status will be evaluated.

The event was closed by *Jutta Dierkes*, Vice President of the Norwegian Nutrition Society, delivering the key messages from the scientific symposium, including

1. Nutritionists should be more visible in food system dialogues.
2. Food system transformation is a smart investment and requires bundled actions by multiple actors.
3. Efficient regulations, innovations and shift in mindset and social norms are also crucial.
4. School meals should follow climate-friendly dietary guidelines and be introduced gradually accompanied by a pedagogical concept.
5. Shifting towards a more plant-based diet requires robust fortification policies and monitoring systems to safeguard nutritional adequacy.
6. Safe foods from the ocean with efficient monitoring system are important.
7. Increase in seafood consumption can promote both human health and sustainability.

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