



Pathways to Sustainable Food Systems in Palau

Check Against Delivery

Remarks by His Excellency Surangel S. Whipps, Jr.

President of the Republic of Palau

Food Systems Summit

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Alii and Greetings Excellencies, Distinguished Leaders, and Honored Guests.

Food systems have played a significant role in our lives. There are no economic transactions more basic to any society than those that involve food, and in Palau, it has long served to reinforce various relationships and continues to exemplify Pacific hospitality and warmth.

Regrettably, we are entering an era of unprecedented threats to our food security, which is compromising the health and persistence of our people. Yet, amidst the global pandemic and looming climate crisis, we recognize opportunities for international cooperation and coordination across sectors, transnational boundaries, and geo-political frontiers to share expertise about food and healthy diets.

High dependence on food imports represents a significant source of food insecurity for Palau. A short disruption in shipping results in rapid depletion of food stocks; certainly, a lengthy disruption from disasters along the existing supply chains would be catastrophic. Overnutrition, unhealthy diets, and dependence on food imports are significant concerns for Palau. These issues drive Palau's NCD epidemic and are linked across the SDGs. Since 2015, NCDs have accounted for 65% of hospital costs and almost 90% of our medical referral costs. Thus, central to boosting food security in Palau is optimal climate resilience to food supplies anchored by thriving sustainable local agriculture and aquaculture sectors.

Our food systems have undergone numerous transformations throughout Palau's history. Our recent national food systems dialogue reaffirmed that cultural traditions combined with modern



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technologies are critical for resolving the constraints of Palau's current food systems. Last week, Palau's ministers convened to demonstrate a national commitment to establishing a practical and harmonized pathway. We are optimistic that Palau's cultural traditions of cooperation and sharing, integrated with cultural principles of environmental conservation and a broad depth of knowledge of traditional farming and fishing practices can advance an effective institutional framework that promotes synergies and partnerships, expands learning and innovation, and improves local capacities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, even during these uncertain times, there are tremendous opportunities for action. As a small island developing state, Palau's environment is only second to our most valuable resources—our people. As leaders, it is our responsibility to make bold decisions and take compelling action individually and collectively to ensure the persistence of our peoples through effective food systems. Thank you. Kom kmal mesulang!