

Food Security Program Participates in EAT Stockholm Food Forum 2016

The AUB Food Security Program (FSP) has participated in a major international gathering on the topic of sustainable food systems, held June 13-14 in Stockholm, Sweden. AUB was one of the selected academic institutions invited to participate. What was this event, and why did FSP participate? FSP Coordinator Rachel Bahn answers those questions.

What is EAT?

The [EAT Foundation](#) is an organization with a mission to apply experience in health, science, policy and sustainability to convene experts and decision makers who can jointly transform the way humans eat.

What is the EAT Stockholm Food Forum?

The [EAT Stockholm Food Forum](#) is an annual gathering of leaders from science and academia, public policy, business, and civil society who seek to advance the sustainability, security, and equity of our food systems. This year's Forum focused on consumption and production patterns, cities, accountability, and technology and innovation across the food industry.

Why is there such emphasis on sustainable food systems right now?

The United Nations collectively adopted the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) in 2015. This is a set of 17 goals that will drive our global development agenda from now through 2030. These very broad, very ambitious goals seek to improve living conditions for billions around the globe – ranging from issues like tackling poverty and hunger, to improving in health and well-being, to achieving gender equity and peace and justice, to tackling climate change and using our land and water resources appropriately. Many of these goals relate directly to our food systems – thinking about how we produce food and manage the resources needed to do so, how we distribute food, how we connect food production to nutrition, and more. In short, we will not achieve the SDGs if we cannot improve the sustainability of our food systems.

Why did FSP participate in this event?

If FSP wishes to be a leader in the field of food security and sustainable food systems, particularly within the Middle East and North Africa, we have to engage actively in the global discussion and interact with other leaders in the field. We need to learn directly from the experiences of public policy makers and private companies and non-governmental organizations that are working toward a food system that delivers not only enough food for everyone, but safe and nutritious food that can be produced in ways

that improve or at least maintain our shared environment. The European countries in particular are further ahead in addressing sustainability, and there is a lot from their experience that we might consider and apply within our own communities in MENA. We need to challenge ourselves by thinking about what steps we can take in our own communities: Do we have adequate programs to minimize food waste in our homes, schools, and businesses? What are we doing to increase the consumption of protective foods like fruits, vegetables, and legumes and reduce intake of processed foods? How are we informing consumers about the environmental impact of their diets, so they can make better food decisions?

What was one highlight of the EAT Stockholm Food Forum?

A real highlight for me was the launch of the EAT Nordic Cities Initiative, because we heard concrete examples of action at the human level. This launch centered on a discussion with mayors of four different cities in Scandinavia – representing more than 2 million people – who laid out the measures they have taken in their communities to improve the quality and sustainability of food while reducing food waste. Some are using the power of public procurement to incorporate more local and organic food into their public schools; to raise the “food literacy” of children through activities in school learning gardens and cafeterias; to educate cafeteria workers on nutrition and safe food handling standards; and others, to reduce the reliance on animal proteins in favor of vegetable proteins in their city hall cafeterias. These solutions might not be the right fit for every community – for example, the mayor of Oslo acknowledged that there is enough food available for everyone in his community, so his efforts can be on nutrition quality and sustainability – but the mayors on the panel explained how they are the right steps for their own communities.

[Videos](#) from all of the sessions have been posted on the EAT website, so anyone can watch on demand!

What comes next?

The EAT Initiative has set itself an incredibly ambitious agenda for the coming years, and it’s exciting to see the many channels through which they are working to improve sustainability of food systems. This includes the establishment of the new [EAT C40 Food Systems Network](#) to tackle urban food and nutrition security, and a joint [partnership with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development](#) to improve the sustainability of our food by engaging more closely with the food industry. The EAT Stockholm Food Forum is scheduled to meet again in June 2017, when EAT has pledged to share updates on how it will have moved forward with its goals.

Locally, for the FSP, the next steps are to share what we have heard and learned at the EAT Stockholm Food Forum here on the AUB campus and with our partners; and work to implement those lessons in our program, our research, and our own community.