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Editorial Note: Transition to a More Sustainable Food System

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The current animal-based food systems account for a significant portion of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, placing the planet on a path to 2.7 C warming by the end of the century. Richardson et al. (2023) discovered that food, the most significant industry of any economy, was breaching the safe planetary boundaries. It is the main driver behind land-use changes and biodiversity losses, and it causes 70% of the drawdown of fresh water.

The current food systems have demolished more value than they added because of hidden medical and environmental costs, which essentially entail taking value from the future to earn profits now. The global hidden health, ecological, and social costs of food systems could be up to 12 \$ trillion in 2020, according to a report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which was based on an analysis conducted by Dr. Steven Lord from the Oxford Environmental Change Institute. Dr. Lord, a senior economics researcher on the food system, found that nearly 75% of hidden costs were attributed to inadequate dietary habits, resulting in overweight and lifestyle-related diseases and short- and long-term productivity loss.

A shift to an environmentally sustainable (plant-based) food system can bring an estimated \$10 trillion in benefits annually by raising human health and reducing the impact of climate change. A shift in the food system can be difficult politically. Still, it can yield immense economic and social benefits and is envisioned to (Stern, 2006). The transition can be achieved by changing tax incentives and subsidies away from monocultures that are destructive on a large scale and depend on fertilizers, pesticides, and forest clearing. Instead, incentives for financial investment should be given to smallholders who could transform farmlands into carbon-reduction facilities and offer more room for wildlife.

Changing diets and investing in new technologies can increase efficiency and reduce emissions. This transition can limit global warming and the amount of nitrogen run-off from agriculture. Although change is not easy and feasible globally, the cumulative costs of not making changes can be a significant economic risk. Numerous studies have shown the benefits to health and the Environment of switching to a plant-based diet. Richardson et al. (2023) stated that demand for beef and other meats would decrease when hidden environmental and health costs were calculated into the price.

As per Stern (2006), the chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics, the economics of the current food system is unfortunately broken beyond repair. The hidden cost of this system harms human health, degrades the Environment, and

exacerbates inequality across the globe. The changing ways we consume and produce food are crucial in combating climate change, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring the foundation for a sustainable future. The time is now for this radical transformation.

The primary issue with the food transition plan is that food prices would increase (Richardson et al., 2023). This issue should be dealt with political skill and support for the poorest groups of society. Otherwise, it could lead to worldwide protests. The new reality of a plant-based food system can grab the attention of everyone seeking to create better health for the planet and the people. The world's food system is the key to the long-term future of humanity. As Editor-in-chief of the Pakistan Journal of Economic Studies, I invite academicians to research the constraints and cost-effective ways of this critical and need of the time transition.

Reference

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