

LABOR, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

This spotlight presents the top strategies for improving labor, equity, and inclusion, including addressing structural inequalities limiting access to land, resources, and opportunities for women, youth, and marginalized groups.

These findings represent survey input from 98 participants working in food security across 20 of the 22 [UN Statistical Division geographical regions](#). In the Regional Breakdown of Results section, responses are grouped into three clusters by [Human Development Index](#) (HDI) based on the geographies of participants' work: Less Developed Regions, More Developed Regions, or Most Developed Regions. For more information on our methodology and the full list of challenges and strategies, see the [Feeding the Future main report](#).

Labor conditions in food systems often mirror the broader equity of those systems. When work is safe and fairly compensated, it tends to signal a food economy that distributes opportunities and includes its smallest actors. Yet many food systems face a long-standing tension with technological change. Machinery, automation, and data-driven management increase productivity, but often at the cost of reduced labor demand. This concentrates power among fewer actors and widens gaps between those who benefit from tech adoption and those left behind. At the same time, technology can play a constructive role. When paired with

appropriate training and labor protections, it can help create safer, more dignified work environments.

While central to fairness and long-term resilience, Labor, Equity, and Inclusion challenges affect food systems more indirectly than other challenges. Where the primary goal remains ensuring consistent access to basic food, issues like job quality or worker protections may appear less urgent. However, food systems cannot be truly sustainable or equitable if the people who sustain them do not have dignified conditions in which to work.

OVERALL TOP STRATEGIES FOR LABOR, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

#1 Expand enforcement of labor protections to improve job safety and stability for agricultural workers

Given the widespread concern about labor conditions in many developing-country food systems, it is no surprise that this strategy ranks highly for improving Labor, Equity, and Inclusion. Agricultural employment is dominated by informal or day-labor arrangements that leave workers unprotected and exposed to income volatility. The International Labour Organization notes that agriculture has the [highest level of informal employment](#) worldwide—over 90% in many low- and middle-income countries—while the Food and Agriculture Organization highlights that rural jobs are often [precarious and poorly remunerated](#). Strengthening the enforcement of labor protections creates conditions for agricultural workers to access safer and more stable livelihoods.

#2 Expand access to mentoring, business development, and training for rural entrepreneurs and small agribusinesses

Expanding access to capacity-building for rural entrepreneurs and small agribusinesses is especially relevant in food systems, where small actors often struggle to scale production or enter higher-value markets. Recent evidence confirms this: a 2024 evaluation of [agribusiness training for coffee farmers](#) in West Java showed that empowerment and business-training programs significantly increased productivity and income. US farm management researchers have found that experience, knowledge sharing, and collaborative learning—core elements of mentorship—directly [improve performance per unit of input](#). Mentoring is not merely supportive; it is a driver of higher productivity and greater food system resilience.

#3 Expand access to savings and microcredit programs for cooperatives and other underserved actors

Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank were awarded the [2006 Nobel Peace Prize](#) for their pioneering efforts in providing small loans ([microcredit](#)) to the poor and creating economic and social development from below. In a food system context, such programs help cooperatives and small agribusinesses access the capital needed to purchase inputs, upgrade equipment, invest in storage, enhance processing, and improve productivity and stability. By reducing credit barriers for underserved actors, this strategy promotes equity but bolsters the resilience of entire food-value chains: not just providing capital but fostering community organization and repayment cultures that grow local economies from the bottom up.

#4 Build or expand regional supply chains through incentives for vertically integrated food companies

Strengthening regional food supply chains through greater vertical coordination can support the sustainable [inclusion of small producers](#) in higher-value markets. When supply chains are better organized, smaller actors gain access to shared processing, logistics, and quality-control infrastructure that they cannot develop individually. This can reduce market volatility and create opportunities to move beyond low-margin primary production. Under the right institutional conditions, participation in coordinated and vertically integrated supply chains can also promote higher standards and gradual improvements in working conditions.

#5 Improve communication and alignment between different groups working in food security

A [multi-actor approach](#) can improve Labor, Equity, and Inclusion in food systems. In many contexts, NGOs, religious institutions, businesses, and other community organizations [reach farther](#) than central governments and have a more accurate view of “on-the-ground” conditions for vulnerable populations. Local governments and institutions whose primary functions lie elsewhere—such as schools or community clubs—can also play a central role in coordinating aid, facilitating community governance, and ensuring that women, youth, and marginalized groups are represented in food security decisions.

REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF RESULTS: LABOR, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Although there was overlap between preferred strategies across the different region clusters, Labor, Equity, and Inclusion exhibited less overlap than most of the other high-level challenges in food security. This may reflect a gap in the structuring of this challenge category, with some survey respondents focusing more on labor impacts, while others focused on equity or inclusion. In the different regional clusters, these varied interpretations may have been more top of mind given the specific contexts of food security challenges in different geographies.

Rank	Less Developed Regions	More Developed Regions	Most Developed Regions	No Regions Selected
1	Expand enforcement of labor protections to improve job safety and stability for agricultural workers	Increase number of rural employment opportunities beyond traditional farming roles (e.g., bioenergy)	Increase the portion of value generation that comes from small farmers and local communities in the food system	Increase targeted training and technical support to farmers to improve productivity
2	Expand access to savings and microcredit programs for cooperatives and other underserved actors	Expand enforcement of labor protections to improve job safety and stability for agricultural workers	Increase tools available to smallholder farmers to leverage personalized data for daily farm operations	Develop new mechanisms to identify and prioritize climate-resilient investments
3	Expand access to mentoring, business development, and training for rural entrepreneurs and small agribusinesses	Increase targeted training and technical support to farmers to improve productivity	Expand access to mentoring, business development, and training for rural entrepreneurs and small agribusinesses	Speed up appraisal of assets like land and equipment to make it easier to issue credit
4	Improve communication and alignment between different groups working in food security	Increase national food system monitoring and evaluation to enhance national government decision making	Combine grants with low-interest loans and technical assistance to reduce financing risks ("blended financing")	Improve market access and reduce delivery delays by rehabilitating and upgrading transportation infrastructure
5	Build or expand regional supply chains through incentives for vertically integrated food companies	Combine grants with low-interest loans and technical assistance to reduce financing risks ("blended financing")	Expand enforcement of labor protections to improve job safety and stability for agricultural workers	Facilitate direct-to-consumer sales of fresh food through markets, cooperatives, or digital platforms

The top five and bottom five strategies for improving Labor, Equity, and Inclusion, clustered by region development level. The "no regions selected" category covers participants who did not enter demographic information in the survey. White cells are unique (only appear in one region) and colored cells are shared by two or more regions. For more information on clustering, see Annex A: More Detailed Methodology.