

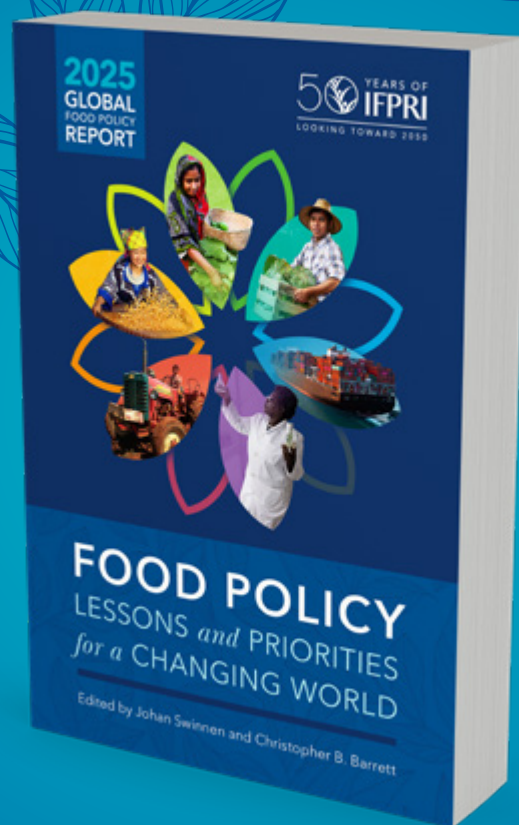
2025  
GLOBAL  
FOOD POLICY  
REPORT

50 YEARS OF  
IFPRI  
LOOKING TOWARD 2050

# FOOD POLICY

## LESSONS *and* PRIORITIES *for a* CHANGING WORLD

Edited by Johan Swinnen and Christopher B. Barrett



As IFPRI marks its 50th anniversary this year, our 2025 Global Food Policy Report takes a sweeping view of the past half-century, reviewing the evolution of both policies and policy research, highlighting lessons learned, and presenting key considerations for addressing the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow. Policies play a key role in advancing food systems and the health of all people and the planet. While many factors influence policymaking, evidence-based food policy research is crucial for informing policy choices, policy implementation, and policy adaptation.

Food systems have changed dramatically over the past 50 years, with food policy research both advancing and responding to this rapid evolution. In 2025, our food systems look vastly different than in 1975—from a huge expansion of private sector activity in food value chains, rapid growth in trade, and the advent of numerous new technologies to substantial changes in people’s livelihoods and diets. Poverty and hunger have declined significantly, but we are facing a new food crisis. Once again, rapid growth in food demand is outpacing expansion of the food

supply and generating price shocks that imperil the health and nutrition of billions. A slowdown in development momentum, a rapid rise in rates of overweight and obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases, the growing impact of climate change and environmental degradation, and increasing incidence of market volatility and conflict have heightened the urgency for food policy research to address these challenges and renew progress.

IFPRI was established in 1975 to provide policy research aimed at ending hunger and poverty. The Institute’s mission

remains the same today, but we face a much different scientific, political, and global context. Since its founding, IFPRI has been in the vanguard in developing theory, methods, strategies, tools, and especially empirical evidence to support sound policymaking around agriculture and food systems. While many of today's challenges existed in 1975, our food systems, our knowledge of their broad impact and many interlinkages, and our goals have evolved over these years, introducing not only new complexities but also better tools and greater capacity to inform food policy for a brighter future.

The 2025 Global Food Policy Report, *Food Policy: Lessons and Priorities for a Changing World*, reviews the food policy lessons from the past 50 years, drawing on research from IFPRI, partners, and colleagues, and reflecting on the impact of this work on food systems in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The report's chapters use these lessons to identify critical food policy research needs through 2050.

## FOOD SYSTEMS AND FOOD POLICY: 1975–2025

The Green Revolution, already underway for a decade in 1975, induced unprecedented growth in agricultural productivity through the development and widespread release of high-yielding varieties of staple crops to meet basic caloric needs, and resulting growth in the world food supply helped to feed billions of people. Policies played an important role in facilitating this beneficial diffusion of new agricultural technologies. Agricultural development was widely understood to be closely linked to broader economic growth, with agricultural productivity growth providing the key catalyst for broader growth. However, other investments were needed, including in rural infrastructure, inputs and irrigation, services, natural resource management, and sectoral and macroeconomic policies. In addition, by the early 1970s, concern was growing about the social and environmental spillovers resulting from rapid agricultural transformation—necessitating a wider focus on policy.

The 1972–1975 world food crisis made it clear that simply increasing the physical supply of food, although necessary, was insufficient. Poverty was—and remains—the primary driver of food insecurity. Reinforced by the 1974 World Food Conference, which recognized food security as a pressing policy issue, and by the work of Amartya Sen, which showed that adequate food intake depends not only on food production but also on individuals' access to food,

this expanded understanding of food security transformed thinking about the necessary policy environment for ending hunger. Raising incomes, especially for poor people, became the key objective in global development strategies. No purely technical fix could sustainably resolve the food crisis that emerged in the early 1970s—the moment called for appropriate policy designs and reforms.

The macroeconomic crises of the 1970s and the resulting LMIC debt crisis in the early 1980s, as well as the waning of the Cold War, also led to a major rethinking of interventionist economic policies and the state's role in food systems. State control of agricultural markets had been widespread since the 1960s, especially in the developing world, and high subsidy levels in higher-income countries were distorting domestic and global markets. While government intervention in markets through price controls, subsidies, and parastatals reflected the common belief that the private sector could not ensure an adequate, cheap supply of food in LMICs, the new prevailing wisdom held that governments should end market-distorting policies so as to unleash the private sector's economic growth potential. The 1980s and 1990s thus saw a wave of market-oriented liberalization and state pullback from the agrifood sector, strongly promoted by donors and development banks. Large-scale, market-oriented economic reforms in China starting in the late 1970s and in Viet Nam in the mid-1980s vividly demonstrated the potential for policy reform to support agricultural transformation, economic growth, poverty reduction, and rapid improvements in food security.

In the 1990s, new trade agreements and the creation of the World Trade Organization intensified globalization, which had been stimulated by advances in transportation and information and communication technologies that accompanied domestic market liberalization. On the supply side, liberalization and globalization led to expansion of food value chains—especially the growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises in the midstream—and to increased trade in agricultural commodities as well as greater investments in the food and retail sector by domestic and foreign private companies. On the consumer side, governments and humanitarian food assistance shifted away from supporting poor populations through large-scale food subsidies toward social protection programs, often centered around cash transfer programs, to address poverty directly and thus reduce food insecurity.

Liberalization of the agriculture sector necessitated a broader understanding of agricultural transformation. The focus of technology innovations, policies, and investments had to expand from on-farm agricultural production to

the whole agrifood system, including the rapidly growing off-farm components of food value chains, and respond to changing consumer demand as countries became wealthier and more urbanized. Policy attention to off-farm components was expected to strengthen on- and off-farm linkages to accelerate diffusion of improved agricultural practices and technologies and add value to postharvest farm output.

The world saw a remarkable reduction in undernourishment and poverty, even as the global population reached 6 billion people in the mid-2000s and urban areas expanded rapidly. Global poverty rates declined significantly, with the share of those in extreme poverty falling from 44 percent to 21.5 percent between 1981 and 2005. Agriculture shrank as a share of GDP as economies grew, and workforces began shifting off-farm, many into downstream and urban components of expanding food value chains. No country's path to agricultural development was the same, and progress stemmed from many different factors, including reforms to property rights, improved productivity in staple crops and livestock, better management of natural resources, expansion of markets, diversification of agricultural production, reformed trade and fiscal policies, and improved nutrition.

Unfortunately, this success induced complacency, and policymakers shifted their attention and resources elsewhere. Foreign aid for agricultural R&D fell, and although some emerging economies, such as China and Brazil, increased their investments, public investments in agricultural R&D in African countries remained well below their agreed-upon target levels. Moreover, while food security improved in many developing countries, poverty and hunger persisted, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of people facing hunger almost doubled since 1979, and market volatility was increasing. Globally, average agricultural productivity growth fell by nearly half in the new century, with surges in international grain prices causing global food crises in 2007/08 and 2011/12, and COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war further disrupted agrifood markets in the 2020s. In the wake of these recent crises, many LMICs still face a double burden of high food price inflation and large external debt.

Overall, the steady progress in reducing food insecurity and poverty has slowed and even reversed course since the 2010s, and the nature of food systems challenges has evolved. Global increases in conflict and in displaced populations over the past decade have raised the prevalence of acute malnutrition in affected areas. At the global level, nutrition and public health research has drawn attention to the high prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies,

especially among women and children, often coinciding with the rapidly rising rates of overweight and obesity and related noncommunicable diseases. Sustainability is a growing concern as environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity have become more severe, and climate change effects, especially extreme weather events, are increasingly disrupting food systems. Growing evidence on the roles of gender norms and inequities, intrahousehold decision-making, and community resource management in shaping food system outcomes, as well as the needs of a rapidly growing youth population, are also changing expectations of the role of policy and policy research.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Today, multiple factors still contribute to hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, including price shocks, climate change, conflicts, and the impacts of inefficient and unsustainable food production. Just as policy research helped overcome challenges a half-century ago, it can likewise help empower consumers, producers, and policymakers to make better decisions that will facilitate healthy, equitable, resilient, and sustainable food systems transformation in the coming decades. While the chapters of this report point to many specific areas for further study, they also highlight an imperative for research to address several broad challenges that cut across sectors.

**FOCUS ON RESILIENCE AND INCLUSION FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND PLACES.** Food policy research must focus on conflict- and disaster-affected areas, where poverty and malnutrition are concentrated and multiple crises are likely to reinforce fragility. Renewed attention to resilience has emerged amid increased volatility in food systems, caused not only by weather-related shocks but also by shocks related to conflict, disease, and macroeconomic policies. Recognition of differences in vulnerability to malnutrition and other risks has elevated attention to inclusion, and underscores the need for contextualized solutions that address the often-intersecting needs of the poor, women, youth, and other marginalized and vulnerable populations.

**IMPROVE DIETS, NUTRITION, AND FOOD ENVIRONMENTS.** The main nutritional challenges today, including in LMICs, are micronutrient deficiencies and overweight and obesity. Food policy research must identify and address both commercial and political drivers of unhealthy food environments and ways to most effectively shift behaviors of all food system actors toward healthier dietary patterns.

**TAKE ON THE CHALLENGE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES.** The rapid development of new technologies has profound implications for the distribution and ownership of these digital innovations, food systems governance, and small-holder inclusion. New information and communications and digital technologies have extended the private sector's reach into even remote, low-income rural areas. This creates many new opportunities for improving lives and livelihoods, but it also raises concerns about privacy and a widening gap between those with digital access and those without. The dawning artificial intelligence (AI) era within food systems magnifies these concerns, just as it multiplies opportunities for accelerated innovation.

**ENGAGE WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO MEET FOOD SYSTEM GOALS.** Increased investment is needed in R&D throughout food value chains—and food systems more broadly—to boost the availability and accessibility of healthier, more sustainable foods. The private sector is an essential investment partner for multiple reasons, including the growing size and importance of post-farmgate value chains and the sector's key role in developing disruptive technologies, from AI to alternative proteins to vertical farming.

**LEVERAGE PUBLIC INVESTMENTS.** Public investments will remain important in some areas, and novel public-private partnerships and other new forms of financing are needed to mobilize these resources. There is significant room to engage public sector and civil society institutions and to use available sources of public funding more effectively. A high priority is to repurpose existing public support for agriculture to better support sustainable, healthy food systems.

**PARTNER FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND POLICY-MAKING.** Achieving policy reforms is complicated by the siloed institutional structures of governments and donors, which separate agriculture, environment, health, and trade decisions, with no authority that spans food systems. These broad issues can best be addressed by developing a range of partnerships and maintaining a local presence in key countries, all while remaining connected globally.

**BUILD AND MAINTAIN HUMAN CAPITAL.** As improved technologies and market access become ever more knowledge-intensive, human capital formation remains key. The future food policy research agenda must be closely linked to capacity sharing and capacity maintenance activities to enhance partners' ability to adapt and scale research findings and to identify follow-on research needs. For an international research organization such as

IFPRI, success may mean becoming steadily less visible or transitioning to a different role as local partners take on much of the work.

Although crucial details differ dramatically today, the task ahead for IFPRI and other research organizations in 2025 is the same as it was in 1975: to marshal the best possible research. But now policy research must help chart a transformation toward healthier, more equitable, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems throughout the world. Just as the initiatives begun 50 years ago confronted the challenges of that moment and generated historically unprecedented advances in agricultural productivity, food security, and poverty reduction, today's research can help us navigate the challenges and opportunities of the decades ahead.

## LESSONS AND PRIORITIES FROM FOOD POLICY RESEARCH

The chapters of the 2025 Global Food Policy Report analyze topic areas crucial to food policies for ending hunger and malnutrition. Each chapter provides both a historical review of the past 50 years and a current assessment of the challenges and opportunities anticipated up to 2050, featuring IFPRI's past and present contributions to research, policy, and practice.

### Pathways to progress

Section 1 examines the role of food policy research and agrifood system development in creating pathways for reducing poverty and malnutrition. Policy research organizations must show progress in their stated missions, but assessing impact can be difficult, involving challenges in attributing influence, evaluating the importance of specific research to outcomes, and understanding gaps in research and methodology. Chapter 2 examines **IFPRI's impacts over the last 50 years**, based on independent assessments that have yielded evidence on the benefits of IFPRI's research, engagement, and capacity sharing. These benefits include improvements to policies, programs, innovations, and investments that have subsequently led to greater food security, healthier and more diverse diets, better livelihoods, and increased environmental sustainability. The chapter synthesizes case studies of policy research impact through four impact pathways, considering different interventions and geographies. IFPRI's experience highlights how policy research organizations can measure their impact and overcome impact assessment challenges for the future.

**Agricultural transformation** has long been central to improving access to food, reducing poverty, and stimulating economic growth, but agriculture's role in structural change and economic development is evolving in the modern context. Chapter 3 explains the shifting paradigms in our understanding and approaches to agricultural transformation, which continue to redefine discourse, research, and action. It takes a close look at Asia's Green Revolution, a model of successful transformation, and considers how the region's experience can offer lessons for other LMICs. Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa also provides insights on how agriculture's role is evolving in this different context.

## Sustainability

Section 2 focuses on sustainability and natural resources along with the tenure rules and markets that shape farming decisions and practices. **Climate change** is a major challenge of our time, with global and far-reaching effects on and from agriculture and food systems. As climate change has become a central focus of food policy research, studies have expanded from modeling global and national impacts on agriculture to assessing risks to households and individuals and options for policy response. Chapter 4 reviews the evolution of this research, reflecting on IFPRI's major contributions to understanding climate change impacts and identifying promising policies and investments for mitigation and adaptation in food systems.

Chapter 5 expands on the discussion of climate change to consider the broader **intersection of agri-food systems and ecosystem health**, including land, water, and energy systems. Despite global attention to biodiversity loss and natural resource degradation, progress in understanding and addressing these problems has been slow at best. Over the last 50 years, research has evolved amid growing recognition of the importance of ecosystem services and the role of property rights, institutions, and governance for environmental outcomes. The chapter highlights how taking a systems view can best provide evidence and policy approaches that can balance agricultural production with environmental sustainability.

Secure **tenure of land and natural resources** is critical for ensuring equitable, inclusive, efficient, and sustainable production of food and resilient rural livelihoods. Over the past 50 years, research and policy on land tenure and property rights has evolved substantially, deepening our understanding of the importance of resource tenure and of the range of tenure forms across

societies, resources, and time. Chapter 6 examines foundational concepts and key lessons from research on tenure, highlighting the impact of tenure systems on farming practices and investments in resource management, and on the effects of tenure reforms, especially for women and youth.

**Food value chains** play a critical role in food systems by linking agricultural input providers to farmers and producers to consumers. In recent decades, the economic, demographic, and policy context of food value chains in LMICs has changed enormously, offering a host of new off-farm opportunities in rural areas, with policy research evolving to address this changing context. Chapter 7 discusses the major drivers and revolutions that have shaped the growth, structure, and importance of food value chains to economies, employment, and diets, and looks ahead to key trends that will continue in coming decades.

## Supporting farmers

Section 3 explores key instruments used to support livelihoods at the farm level: agricultural extension services, crop breeding, and agricultural insurance. **Agricultural extension and rural advisory services** play a key role in the agrifood systems of many LMICs by supporting farmers' efforts to enhance productivity, strengthen resilience to shocks, and conserve the natural resource base on which these systems depend. These services have changed significantly over time, with extension becoming more pluralistic in methods and providers. Chapter 8 applies IFPRI's "best fit" conceptual framework to examine the global evolution of agricultural extension and rural advisory services, including the shift from a "transfer of technology" approach to a more sophisticated "facilitation for innovation" paradigm.

**Crop genetic improvement** has greatly enhanced agricultural productivity, food security, and economic opportunities for smallholder farmers globally. Although early crop improvement programs focused primarily on maximizing yields, they have expanded considerably over time, with research playing an important role in both documenting gains and highlighting challenges. Chapter 9 explores evidence on the contribution of crop improvement to productivity, nutrition, environment, and poverty outcomes, as well as the hurdles to farmer uptake of new varieties and ways to overcome this challenge.

Farm households face many market and production risks, affecting their livelihoods, food security, and economic well-being. **Agricultural insurance** is intended

to help protect households from risk, but many agricultural risks are difficult to insure against. Although insurance products have evolved substantially in recent decades, farmers' insurance preferences and capacity to pay vary greatly, and demand for these products remains low. Chapter 10 examines how policy-oriented research has refined insurance products to promote farmer use and uptake, and explores how new technologies and product bundles are creating opportunities for increasing coverage.

## Transforming lives and livelihoods

Section 4 analyzes how policies can reduce vulnerability and inequities, including the role of social protection, ways to address different forms of malnutrition, the impacts of conflict, and the importance of gender.

**Social protection programs** to reduce poverty, food insecurity, and vulnerability in LMICs have become increasingly widespread. Over the last 50 years, social protection policy has evolved from a focus on food-based subsidies and rations to include conditional cash transfer, graduation, and economic inclusion programs. Chapter 11 examines the evolution of these programs and discusses the contribution of research to changing program approaches and policies, highlighting IFPRI's role in providing evaluations, evidence, and recommendations.

The last half-century has also seen major changes in the nature of malnutrition around the world, as well as in our understanding of its manifestations and key drivers, the people most affected, and the policies and programs developed to address it. Research has provided strong evidence of the importance of diverse diets and early childhood nutrition for lifelong well-being, and has generated evidence of what works, how, and at what cost for improving nutrition through agriculture, social protection, education, and women's empowerment programs and policies. Chapter 12 reviews the **evolution of nutrition in both policy and programming**, with particular attention to the intersection of nutrition with agriculture, food systems, and multisectoral approaches.

More than ever before, hunger and undernourishment are concentrated in **fragile and conflict-affected areas** around the world. As the incidence of conflict grows and climate change compounds fragility, projections show that two-thirds of the world's poor will live in these places by 2030. Chapter 13 reflects on the evolution of food policy research conducted in these areas, highlighting how shifting approaches helped to clarify the linkages between conflict and hunger and how evidence has informed the

integration of short-term relief with longer-term efforts to build peace and resilience.

Research on gender in development has evolved in parallel with the growing awareness of women's role in economic development, the importance of gender relations both within and outside the household, and the recognition that women's empowerment and gender equality are important goals in themselves. Chapter 14 examines the **evolution of gender research** in the context of the development discourse on gender, with a focus on agrifood systems. It highlights the need for intentional gender programming and transformative approaches to improve women's empowerment and achieve gender equality in the longer term.

## Effecting change

Section 5 examines macro-level factors related to governance, trade, public investment, and finance that determine whether and how policy change occurs. Policymaking is shaped by **political economy and governance factors** such as incentives, institutional structures, ideological biases, and power dynamics. These factors intersect with trends affecting the international development policy landscape, with important implications for agriculture and food policy. Chapter 15 examines the key areas of decentralization, agriculture and food policy reform processes, political economy of distribution, and state capacity, as well as the need to build effective and legitimate global institutions for food systems governance.

**Agrifood trade** plays a key role in ensuring food security, providing smallholders and rural traders with better prices for their products in bigger and higher-value markets, improving efficiency in the production and use of natural resources, and increasing consumer access to safer and more diversified and nutritious foods. Global agrifood trade has tripled since 1975, driven in part by a growing trade in processed foods, and LMICs have shifted from taxing agriculture to providing positive support and protection. Chapter 16 reviews the evolution of trade research, with a focus on the contributions made by IFPRI and others, and considers how trade policy analysis can contribute to more sustainable food systems transformation in the future.

Innovation in agriculture offers a solution to many pressing development problems in LMICs, particularly low productivity and poverty, but innovation is unevenly distributed, along with accompanying gains in productivity and welfare. Chapter 17 reviews the evolution of **research on technical change and public policy**, including

how research has supported priority-setting and policy-making, helped address complex food systems problems through multistakeholder innovation platforms and partnerships, and identified barriers and enabling policies to scale promising innovations.

Theory and practice around the **financing of agricultural and food production** have evolved over the last 50 years amid agriculture's changing role in supporting economic growth and rural development, as well as in changing perceptions of the most critical food and nutrition problems facing LMICs. The recent shift toward food systems approaches has expanded the objectives of financing to include environmental and social objectives and led to new institutional arrangements and financing instruments. Chapter 18 examines key financial challenges in LMIC agrifood systems and highlights policy options to mobilize future financing for food systems transformation.

## Regional developments and priorities

Around the world, tremendous strides have been made in addressing food systems challenges over the last 50 years, with policy research playing an important role in supporting evidence-based solutions. The regional section of the Report examines the evolution of food policy and research in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, highlighting how key lessons and impacts can inform future research.

Food systems in **Africa** have undergone significant transformations over the past four decades, with notable improvements in agricultural productivity and food security, but persistent challenges remain. Chapter 19 examines how Africa's agrifood policy landscape has evolved in response to complex challenges, including food insecurity, climate change, and socioeconomic disparities. It explores research-based solutions to these challenges, and underscores the necessity of systemic, inclusive, and evidence-based approaches to address the agrifood system challenges projected for 2050.

Since the countries of **Central Asia** gained independence in 1991, the region's food systems have undergone significant transformations shaped by political and economic reforms, institutional shifts, globalization, climate change, and labor migration. Chapter 20 examines how food policy research developed evidence to inform market-oriented reforms and agricultural transformation, ultimately leading to substantial reductions in poverty, food insecurity, and undernutrition. It also assesses the complex forces of socioeconomic and environmental change that face the region in the lead-up to 2050.

Food systems in **South Asia** have evolved tremendously over the past 50 years, marked by progress in establishing agricultural growth linkages, policymaking and investments in agriculture, and institutional innovations. Chapter 21 highlights how research has played a critical role in shaping national policies on food security, rural development, and nutrition. Looking ahead to 2050, research on climate change, digitalization, diets and nutrition, and gender inequities will be needed to support South Asia in continuing to build sustainable and resilient food systems that deliver equitable and sustainable outcomes.

Over the past half-century, the food systems of **East and Southeast Asia** have been shaped by economic growth and structural transformation, extreme weather events, and unique agricultural landscape and value chain dynamics. Chapter 22 examines how aligning research outputs, financial programs, and regional cooperation initiatives with national policy frameworks has led to regional improvements in food security, nutrition, and livelihoods, though important challenges remain. Looking ahead, food systems transformation in the region requires a multisectoral approach, including cross-cutting foresight and integrated approaches that combine disruptive technologies, participatory governance, and scalable solutions.

**Latin America and the Caribbean** has experienced significant changes in its food systems, while also facing both long-standing and new challenges since the 1970s. The region plays a key role in global food security and nutrition, as well as in stabilizing the global climate and conserving biodiversity. Moving forward, the region must overcome the hurdles created by economic and political instability, climate change, and deep-rooted structural inequalities. Chapter 23 draws on research by IFPRI and partners to outline the evolving food systems landscape in the region and present policy options and research priorities for the years ahead.

Over the past 50 years, food and agricultural policy in the **Middle East and North Africa** has alternated between the dual aims of prioritizing efficiency and economic growth and efforts to ensure national security through food self-sufficiency and wide provision of staple commodities. Chapter 24 summarizes the trends in policies and outcomes as the region moved from heavy state intervention to a period of liberalization, first examining agricultural production and related policies and then the role of consumers and food and nutrition policy, before concluding with emerging policy issues and research priorities.

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INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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IFPRI is a CGIAR Research Center

1201 Eye St, NW, Washington, DC 20005 USA | T. +1-202-862-5600 | F. +1-202-862-5606 | Email: [ifpri@cgiar.org](mailto:ifpri@cgiar.org) | [www.ifpri.org](http://www.ifpri.org) | [www.ifpri.info](mailto:www.ifpri.info)



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