Open Letter from the International Agri-Food Network (IAFN)

Safeguarding Global Food Security Amid Disruptions in the Middle East

The International Agri-Food Network (IAFN) brings together international, regional, and national associations, farmer organizations, input providers and food companies, among others, across the agri-food value chain. Our members work every day to ensure that food, inputs, and essential commodities move efficiently and safely across borders.

The conflict in the Middle East and the resulting disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz have created new pressures on global supply chains at a time when markets are already strained. While much attention has focused on energy markets, the implications for fertilizers, agricultural commodities, and food security are equally significant. Pressure on agricultural inputs is also increasing. Supply disruptions and rising costs can limit access to innovation; including high-quality seeds and effective crop protection, reducing yields and resilience. Resulting input constraints risk amplifying production challenges and slowing agricultural innovation.

Fertilizers are indispensable to global food production. Research indicates that roughly half of the world's population depends on crops grown with manufactured fertilizers. The Middle East plays a central role in this system: in 2024, countries in the region accounted for 23% of global ammonia trade, 34% of global urea trade, and 18% of global ammoniated phosphate trade. Nearly 18.5 million tonnes of urea — the most widely traded nitrogen fertilizer — moved through the Strait of Hormuz in the same year.

Any prolonged disruption to shipping in this corridor would have ripple effects across fertilizer markets. Rising energy prices further compound these pressures, as nitrogen fertilizers rely heavily on natural gas as both feedstock and energy sources. Higher production costs in turn affect farmers globally, particularly in regions already facing elevated input prices.

Agricultural commodity supply chains are also being affected. Members report increased bunker prices, reduced fuel availability, and higher freight costs. The cost of trade diversion in the region has more than doubled, creating additional strain on import-dependent countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. For many of these

countries, fertilizer shortages and rising input costs could reduce yields and undermine food security over the longer term.

At the same time, Gulf countries themselves face structural food security vulnerabilities due to their reliance on food imports. Prolonged disruptions to shipping would therefore have consequences both within and far beyond the region.

Proposed areas for policy consideration and collaboration

Building on the analysis presented to the FAO Council at its 180th Session in Rome in April 2026, IAFN encourages governments, international organizations, and private-sector stakeholders to consider a coordinated set of practical measures. These measures could help reduce immediate risks to food and fertilizer flows, support farmers facing rising costs, and strengthen the resilience of agri-food supply chains over time.

Immediate priorities

- **Keep essential goods moving.** Strengthen coordination on contingency logistics for food, fertilizers, energy, and other agricultural inputs, including the exploration of alternative trade routes, and where feasible, expanded use of existing pipeline or overland infrastructure.
- **Avoid amplifying market stress.** Maintain open, transparent, and predictable trade, and avoid export restrictions on energy, fertilizers, or key agricultural commodities that could further increase input costs for farmers and food-importing countries.
- **Improve market visibility.** Use existing mechanisms, including the Agricultural Market Information System and relevant FAO and international agency platforms, to identify priority countries, tracking supply disruptions, freight costs, fertilizer availability and affordability, and price movements in a timely and transparent way.
- **Safeguard vulnerable countries and households.** Preserve humanitarian logistics channels wherever possible and prioritize food access for vulnerable households, particularly in Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries, and Landlocked Developing Countries.

Medium-term resilience measures

- **Diversify sources of supply.** Assess exposure to concentrated import dependencies for fertilizers, food commodities, and energy inputs, and expand procurement options

from North America, Latin America, North Africa, and other reliable suppliers in ways that support open markets.

- **Support farmers through temporary shocks.** Consider targeted and time-bound financial support, such as credit facilities, risk-sharing instruments, or input financing, to help farmers, maintain planting decisions despite higher input and transport costs.

Longer-term supply chain resilience

- **Strengthen agricultural research, extension services, soil health, and nutrient-use efficiency.**
- **Strengthen dialogue on maritime chokepoints.** Explore multilateral mechanisms that help maintain minimum trade flows for food, fertilizers, and essential agricultural inputs during periods of conflict or disruption.

The disruptions in the region underscore the importance of stable, predictable supply chains for agricultural commodities. Ensuring these flows remain open, transparent, and resilient is essential to safeguarding global food security.