



Making Better Policies for Food Systems



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Making Better Policies for Food Systems



What are the challenges and achievements of food systems? What is the role of policies?

Given the complexity of food systems, how can we develop coherent policies?

What stands in the way of better policies? How can we overcome those obstacles?



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Three detailed case studies

Seeds



Ruminant
livestock



Processed
food





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Food systems are facing a daunting triple challenge

- 1 **Food security and nutrition**
- 2 **Livelihoods**
- 3 **Environmental sustainability**

Resilience across these dimensions

Things are not black or white: food systems have important achievements as well as serious shortcomings

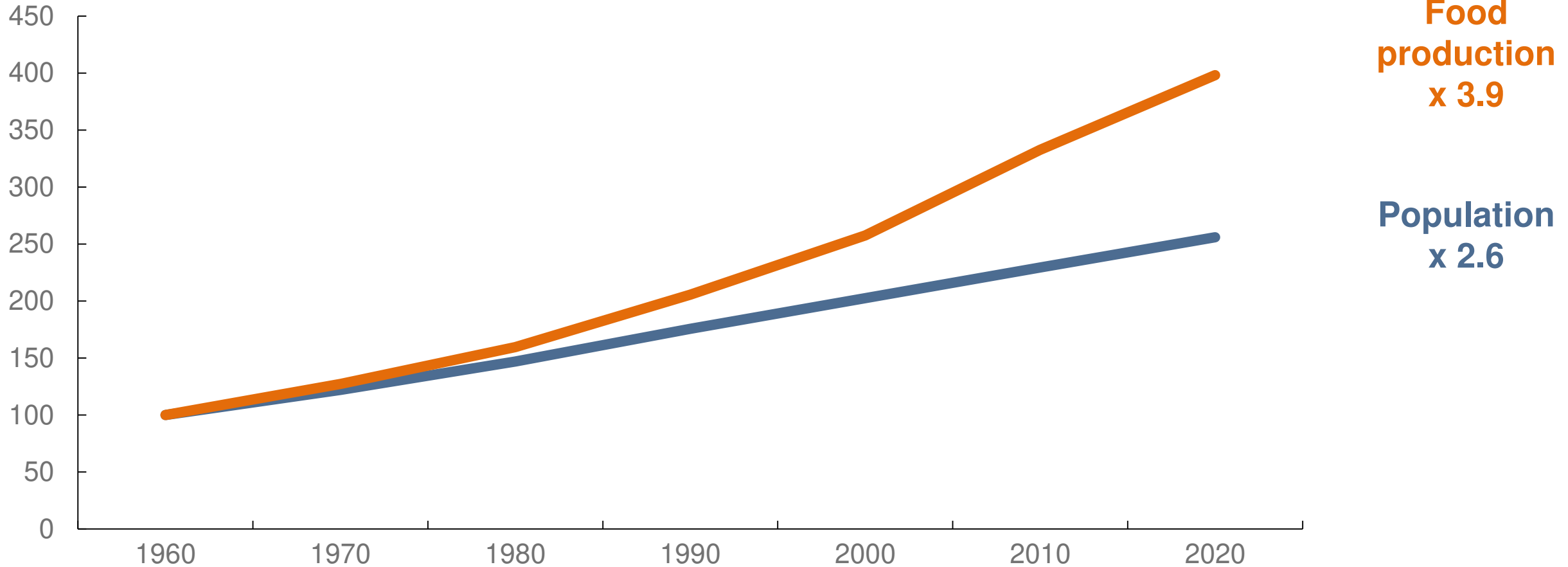
Better policies can make a difference: existing OECD work has identified many areas for improvement



Since 1960, world population has more than doubled – while food production has almost quadrupled

1960=100

1960 – 2020





Food systems exert important pressures on the environment; much of the damage occurs at the agricultural production stage

Land use

50%

of all ice- and desert-free land is used for agriculture

Deforestation

73%

of tropical and sub-tropical deforestation (2000-10)

Biodiversity loss

80%

of threatened land species are in danger due to habitat loss driven by agriculture

Water use

70%

of global freshwater use

Water pollution

78%

of global eutrophication

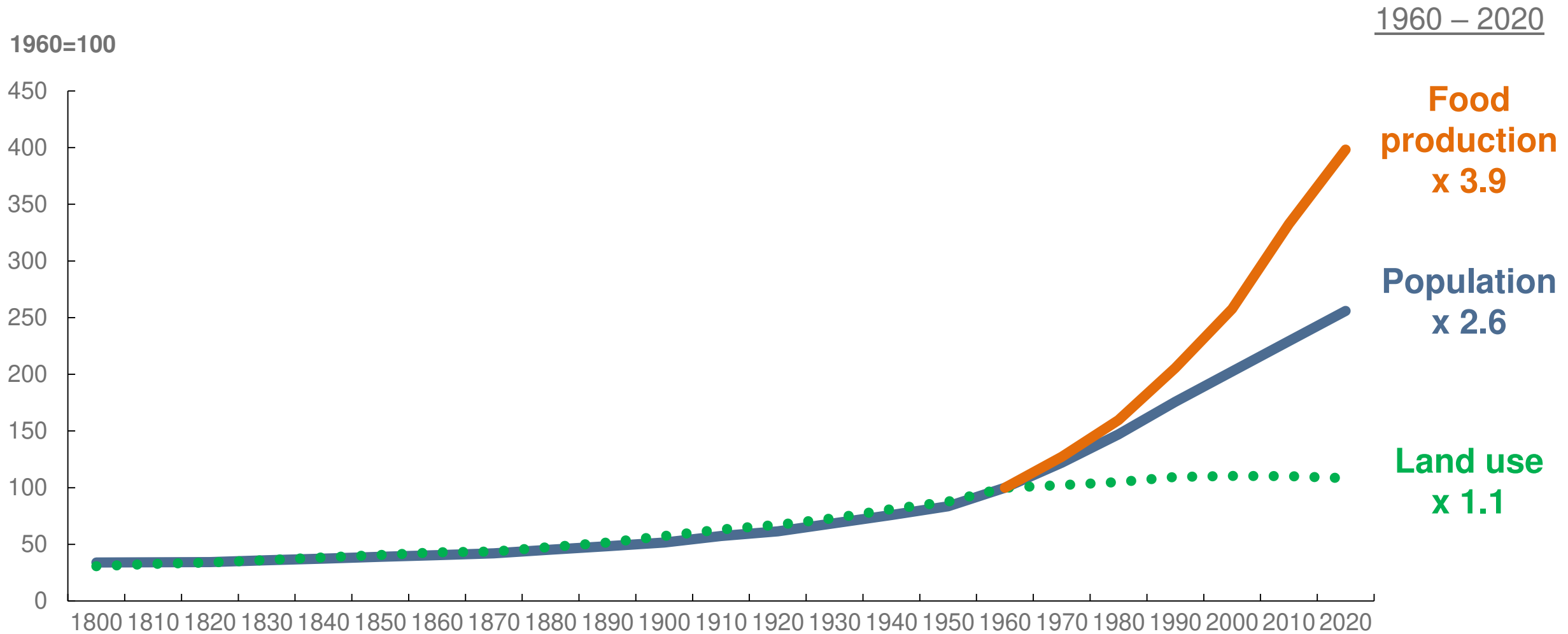
Global warming

21-37%

of man-made GHG emissions



Historically, greater food production meant greater land use; but there has been a “decoupling” since about 1960



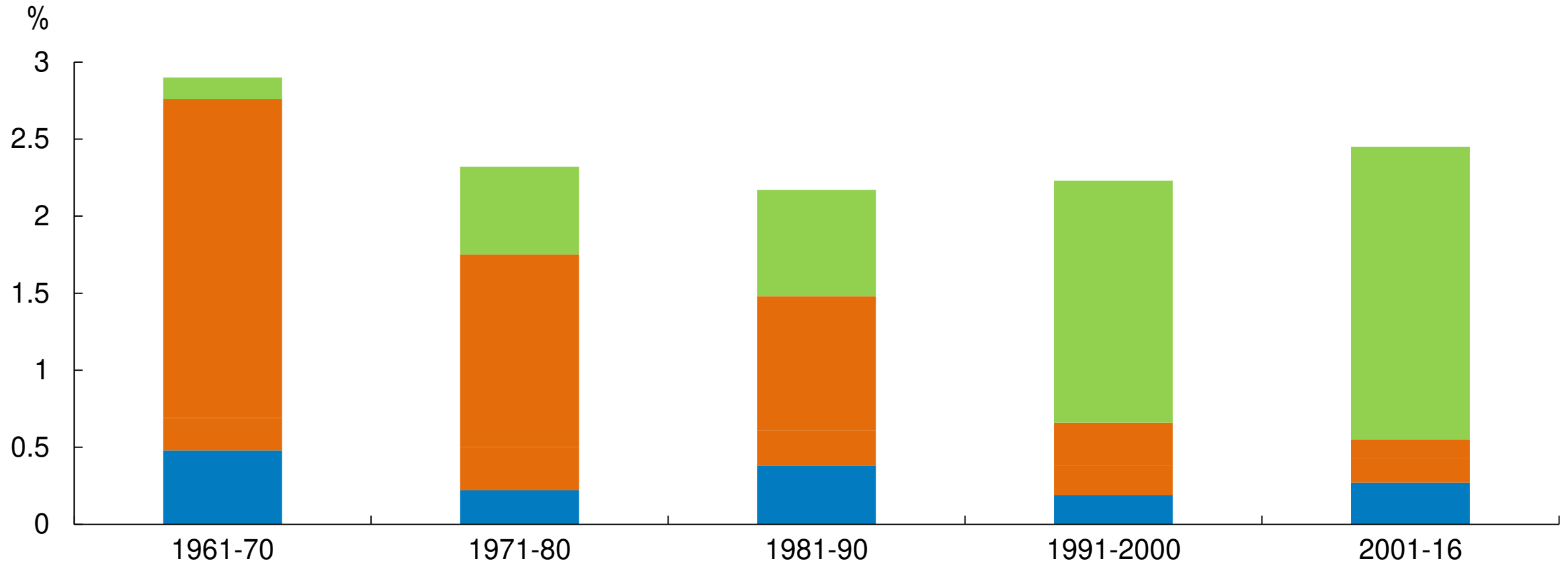
Source: Population data from Maddison's historical statistics for 1820-1940; UN Population Division for 1950-2030; 1800 and 1810 extrapolated from Maddison. Agricultural (crops and pasture) land data for 1800-2010 from the History Database of the Global Environment (HYDE 3.2), Klein Goldewijk et al. (2017). Global agricultural production data for 1960-2010 from FAOSTAT (Net Agricultural Production Index). 2020 value from the OECD/FAO Agricultural Outlook.



This “decoupling” was initially driven by greater use of inputs, but production growth increasingly comes from efficiency gains

Growth of global agricultural output, by source

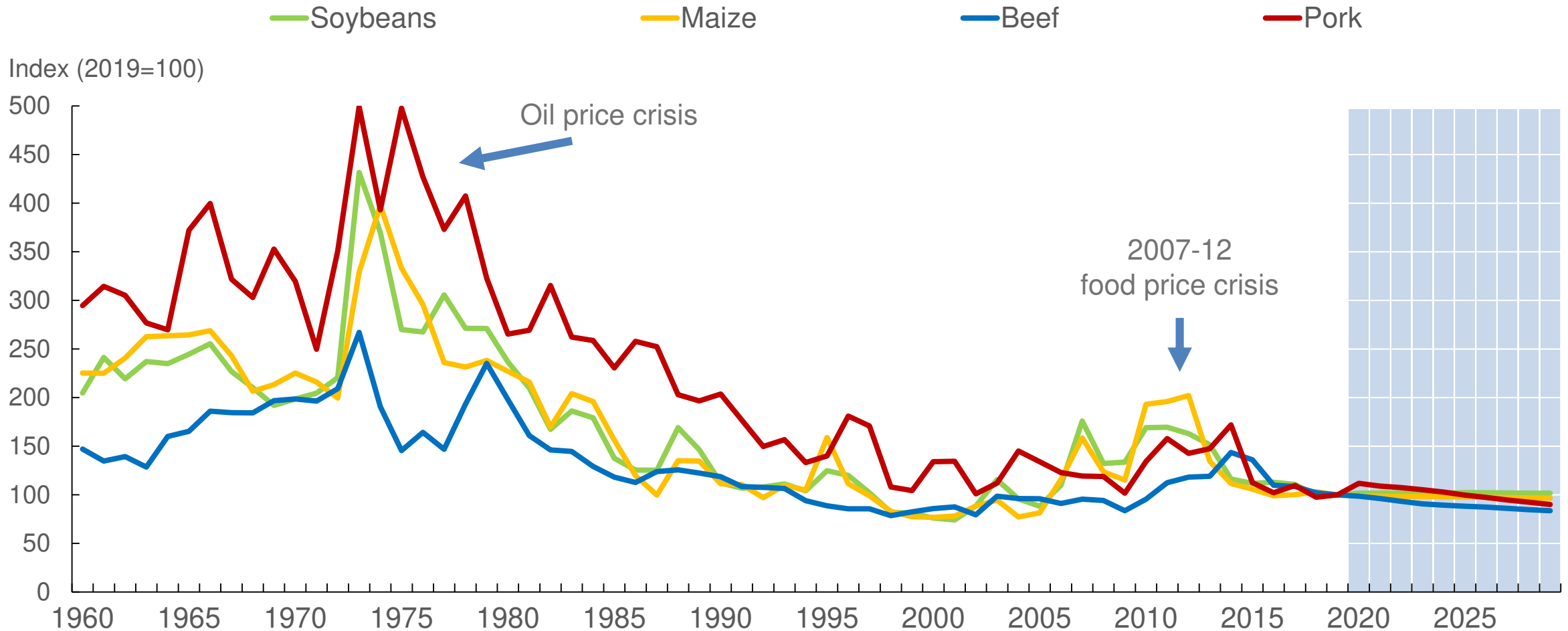
■ Using additional land ■ Using additional inputs (water, fertilizer, etc.) ■ Efficiency gains





Efficiency gains have also led to lower food prices – good news for consumers, but challenging for farmers

Long term evolution of commodity prices, in real terms

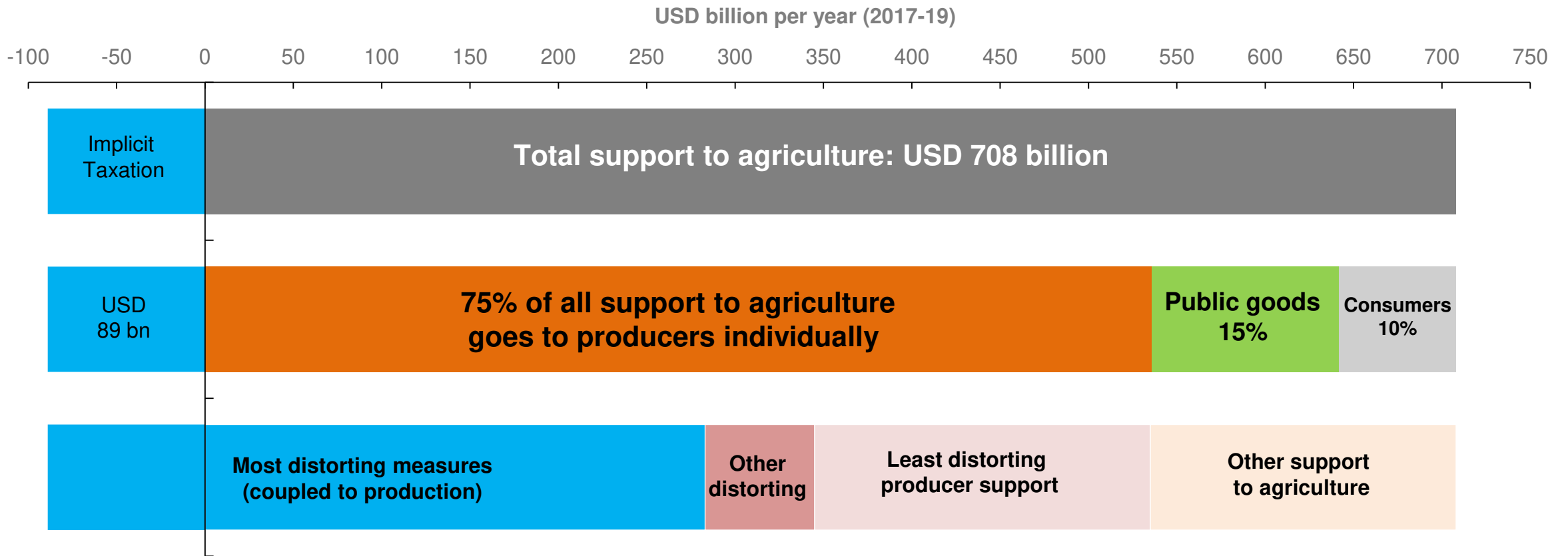


Source: OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2021-2029

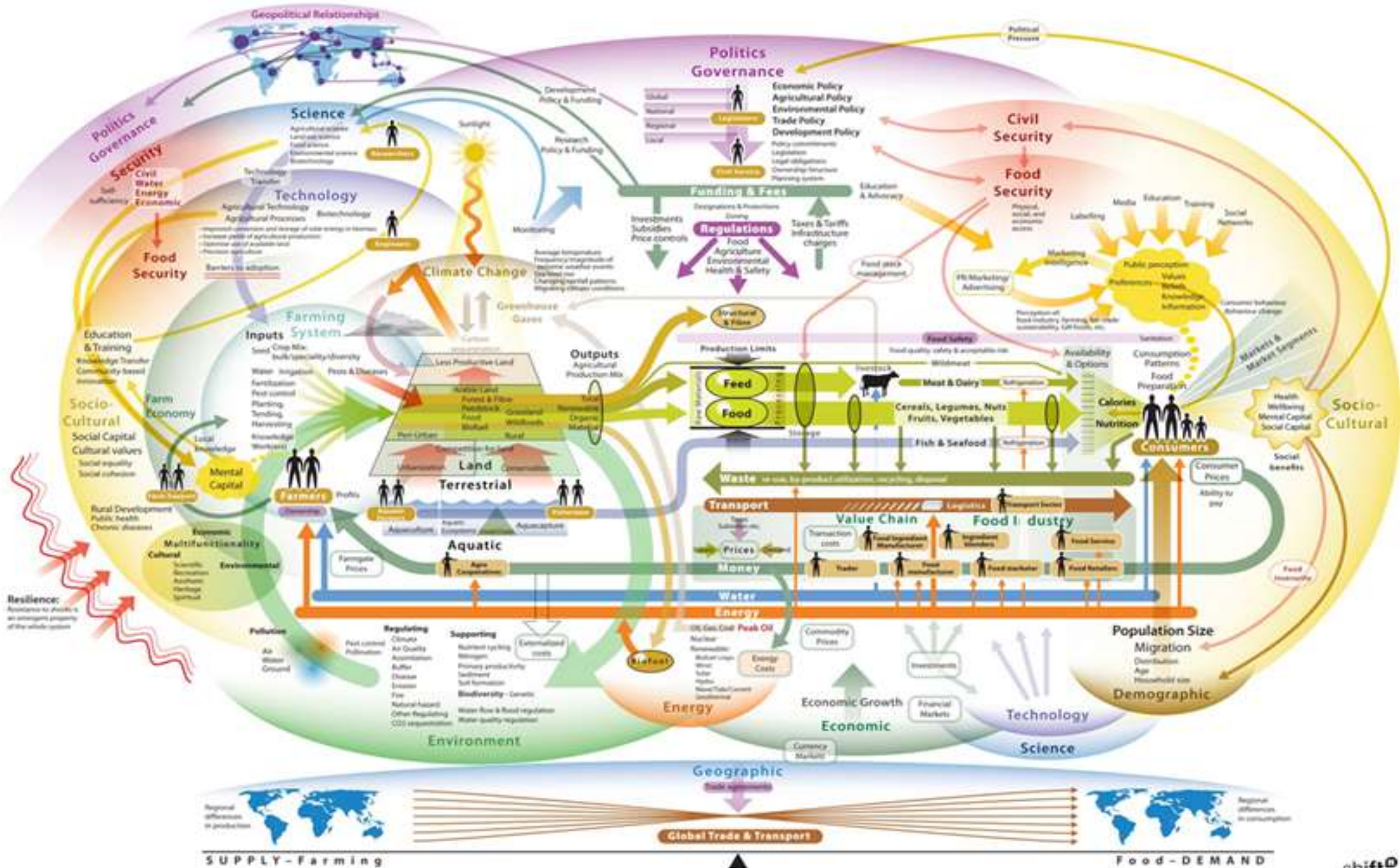


Agricultural policies are not effective at addressing the triple challenge – and often counterproductive

Support to agriculture across 54 countries



Source: OECD (2020), Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2020





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Make things as simple as possible – but not any simpler:
Some pragmatic principles for greater coherence

- 1 Be aware of possible synergies and trade-offs with other policy areas...**
- 2 ... but rigorously evaluate possible interactions (not all are real, or big enough to matter)**
- 3 Remember that synergies and trade-offs depend on the choice of policy instruments**
- 4 When there are synergies, one instrument is usually not sufficient – search for the best policy mix rather than a ‘silver bullet’**
- 5 Resolving trade-offs is not a purely technical question, but involves value judgments**



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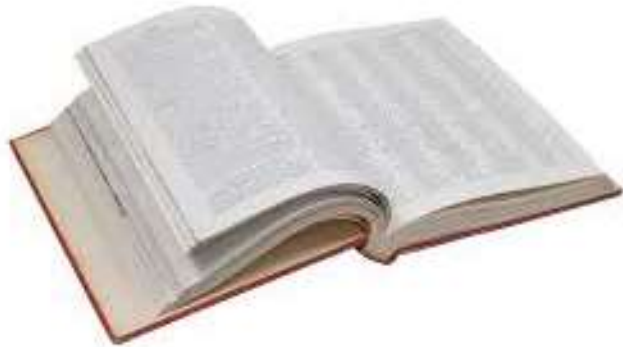
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Achieving better policies is made difficult by disagreements over facts, interests, and values

Facts



- Lack of data/evidence about problems, their causes and effects of policy responses
- Gaps between public perception and evidence
- Need to **build a shared understanding** of the facts

Interests



- Policy change creates winners and losers; special interests can capture policy processes
- Need to **promote transparency, accountability and a level playing field**

Values



- Many food systems issues are marked by value conflicts (e.g. GMOs, animal agriculture)
- **Creative adjustments** so policies are acceptable to people with different values
- Making difficult decisions through **deliberative processes**



The UN Food Systems Summit will be a catalyst for policy discussions on food systems, both globally and nationally



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