Food is increasingly an urban issue. This is gaining broad recognition among local, regional and national governments, international and support organisations, civil society, the private sector, consumers and academia. Evidence for this recognition can be found in cities in all regions of the world, where policy and programme initiatives are being undertaken in various fields related to urban and peri-urban food production and supply – as many of the articles in this Magazine illustrate.

“Our ambition is not to grow to become the largest company, but to change the food supply chain. It is important that, everywhere in the world, we reduce our dependency on the global food supply chain and once again feel the connection with our food” (Willem & Drees – see article on page 57).

This recognition is also illustrated by international initiatives and declarations such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. In this initiative, the City of Milan is engaged in a process of bringing more than 40 cities together to draft an Urban Food Policy Pact that aims to build awareness of urban food systems, policies and practices and also to harness political engagement by cities in order to ensure future activities on related issues. The Urban Food Policy Pact will be announced at the Milan Expo in October 2015 (see also page 24).

Recent international declarations such as the March 2014 Call for Action and the April 2015 Seoul Declaration, signed by 96 mayors, call on cities and other stakeholders to “encourage sustainable urban food production projects and resilient city region food system programmes”. Other international viewpoints are given in the articles in this Magazine by 3Keel (page 5), Hussein et al. (page 8) and Mendle (page 12).

The 2007-2008 food price crisis, the economic crisis in Europe, and climate-induced disruptions to food supply have all contributed to such a call for more resilient urban food systems. In addition, an alarming increase in diet-related health problems (like obesity and diseases related to food quality) in many cities around the world have made it very evident that cities need to think about how to ensure access to sufficient, affordable, healthy and safe food for their populations.

Cities – as hubs of consumption – also increasingly recognise their responsibility in building more sustainable food systems that not only reduce food waste and provide decent livelihood opportunities for those producing, processing and selling food (in rural, peri-urban and urban areas), but also promote environmentally sustainable forms of food production.

Furthermore, cities are starting to see food as a driver for other sustainable urbanisation policies. Food is directly related to other urban domains, including transport (a large part of city transport is related to food supply and consump-
Urban Agriculture

reconnect different urban flows to allow the reduction, (Wiskerke, forthcoming 2015). These include the need to provisioning highlight other guiding principles for design -

Towards sustainable modes of urban and peri-urban food development and test a method for food system assessment and

The Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems aims to further research and design priorities, tools and methods. A research project recently started by RUAF Foundation, UN FAO and the project recently started by RUAF Foundation, UN FAO and the RuAF urban agriculture into urban policies and

New York City’s food strategy entitled “FoodWorks: A vision to improve NYC’s food system” is a perfect example of a City Council’s understanding of these responsibilities and relationships: ‘Although many of these problems are national and global in nature, there are immediate steps that can be taken within New York City to strengthen our food system. The city can facilitate urban-rural linkages, support a market for regional products, and use its institutional purchasing power to support small and local producers. Moreover, by helping green the city’s landscape, assisting companies with adopting new technologies, and exploring better distribution networks, we can begin to address the high energy usage and greenhouse gas emissions characteristic of our food system”.

Development of resilient cities and city region food systems requires both political will and the use of available policy and planning instruments: infrastructure and logistics, public procurement, licences, and land-use planning – as illustrated by the articles on Zurich (page 30) and Ghent (page 32). It also requires that city regions assess their own, context-specific, food dependencies and vulnerabilities, opportunities, and roles to be played by various food system stakeholders – and any potential pressure points. Where possible, each city region should then develop a variety of strategies by which to improve its food system. This Magazine includes a number of articles (see page 18 and further) describing a variety of food system research and design priorities, tools and methods. A research project recently started by RUAF Foundation, UN FAO and the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems aims to further develop and test a method for food system assessment and mapping in seven cities around the world.

Results of an on-going EC project called SUPURBFOOD: Towards sustainable modes of urban and peri-urban food provisioning highlight other guiding principles for design- and developing resilient city region food systems (Wiskerke, forthcoming 2015). These include the need to reconnect different urban flows to allow the reduction, recycling and reuse of food waste, urban organic waste and wastewater, energy and nutrients. Articles on Rotterdam (page 14), France (page 21) and Vigo (page 54) illustrate practices and policies that cities are putting in place to address these issues.

Another guiding principle is to create and enhance spatial synergies by achieving multiple benefits by using land for more than one purpose at a time, and by using food as a medium to link different urban policy objectives. Examples include the promotion of synergies for food production, flood risk reduction, storm water management and climate-change mitigation – as illustrated in the article on Rosario (page 48); promotion of multifunctional agriculture for education, food production and leisure in Rotterdam (page 14) and Zurich (page 30); or the promotion of integrated spaces and neighbourhoods as in Riga (page 60).

A final key principle is improved food governance and transparency in the food system. This can be brought about by strengthening direct-producer linkages through short food supply chains – see the articles on Willem&Drees (page 53), Rome (page 57) and Ecuador (page 68). Food governance can also be improved by setting up and strengthening new organisational and multi-stakeholder structures that facilitate involvement of different government departments and jurisdictions (local and provincial), of various stakeholders and those that link civil society activities and initiatives to more formal food policy and planning (see the articles on Bristol, page 26, and La Paz, page 70).

Cities will always be dependent on hybrid food systems; they will continue to source some food, for example, from distant locations and global food chains as well as from nearby rural, periurban and urban producers. Sole dependence on global food supply and systems, however, has increased vulnerabilities and risk as mentioned above. This Magazine gives recognition to incipient, innovative and longer-standing experiences in the field of city region food system development. We hope that this publication also becomes a tool for increasing local government and stakeholder prominence in national and international dialogue on sustainable urbanisation and food systems.

Upcoming issues of RUAF Urban Agriculture Magazine, on urban-rural linkages (in collaboration with ILEIA) and on integrating food and urban agriculture into urban policies and planning (in collaboration with the University of Buffalo) will share further experiences and cases to enrich this debate.

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References