

‘Covid exposed so much that was broken’: How can we remake our post-pandemic food system?

The United States spends \$1.1 trillion a year on food. But when the impacts of the food system on different parts of our society — including rising health care costs, climate change and biodiversity loss — are factored in, the bill is around three times that, according to [a report](#) by the Rockefeller Foundation, a private charity that funds medical and agricultural research.

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Health impacts are the biggest hidden cost of the food system, with more than \$1 trillion per year in health-related costs paid by Americans, with an estimated \$604 billion of that attributable to diseases — such as hypertension, cancer and diabetes — linked to diet.

In calculating the financial burden of environmental problems, the researchers evaluated direct environmental impacts of farming and ranching on greenhouse gas emissions, water depletion and soil erosion. They also looked at reduced biodiversity, which lowers ecosystems’ productivity and makes food supplies more vulnerable to pests and disease. They determined the unaccounted costs of the food system on the environment and biodiversity add up to almost \$900 billion per year.

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“Covid exposed so much that was broken,” [World Wildlife Fund’s Melissa Ho] said, “but building back better means supporting producers and connecting the dots to health, environment and business viability for farmers.”

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