

23 July 2025

The Honorable Miryung Song

Chair, APEC Food Security Ministerial Meeting
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Republic of Korea

Dear Minister Song,

ABAC is deeply concerned at what rising protectionism and trade uncertainty may mean for food security. The most recent figures released by the United Nations, for 2023, estimate that globally approximately 757 million people faced chronic hunger – a crushing burden which our region does not escape. These alarming figures are likely to have been amplified over the last two years by supply chain disruptions, trade uncertainty, and climate change impacts.

The need is clear: to ensure physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for our communities, APEC must not just maintain, but in fact redouble its efforts to build the open, fair, transparent, productive, sustainable and resilient food system envisaged in the APEC Food Security Roadmap Towards 2030.

Driving disaster resilient agriculture for a sustainable food system

Many APEC economies are highly exposed to natural and human-induced disasters, such as typhoons, floods, earthquakes, and wildfires, while lacking the capacity to respond effectively. Economically, this has resulted in tremendous losses in crop and livestock production, with lower- and lower-middle-income economies especially affected by the loss of agricultural output.

As climate change challenges accelerate, disaster risk reduction is an increasingly critical consideration. To reduce disaster-related losses and support the long-term sustainability of food systems across the region, APEC should invest in resilient agriculture systems, enable structured knowledge exchange between disaster-ready and high-risk economies, strengthen regional cooperation through joint capacity-building models like the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance or AHA Centre, and demonstrate policy leadership in embedding disaster resilience into economy-level and regional food security strategies.

Harnessing digital tools to ensure inclusive growth

Innovative digital technologies including AI, big data analytics, digitalized systems, digital payments and paperless trade can help to increase quality and yields, modernize distribution, reduce supply chain vulnerabilities and make trade more resilient. However, adopting coherent approaches for the deployment and utilization of digital technologies will be imperative to enable dynamic, innovative, and inclusive growth. APEC economies must take action to ensure the accessibility, interoperability, innovation, deployment and transparency of digital technologies – for example, by enabling cross-border data flows, data sharing and innovative services for smart agriculture and food production, promoting the use of global data standards in food trade, and by championing universal adoption of paperless trade for food and agriculture.

Facilitate holistic food trade reform

Protectionism in food trade remains a stubborn problem in the APEC region, with agricultural goods still facing tariffs on average three times higher than on non-agricultural goods, accompanied by a rising tide of non-tariff barriers. Protectionism both restricts vulnerable communities' access to food (including as part of a regional "food basket" in case of domestic production shortfalls) and undermines the livelihoods of producers – often smallholders – in exporting economies.

Food production and trade also have an important synergistic relationship with climate change and biodiversity. Production is both vulnerable to climate impacts; can contribute to carbon sequestration; and plays a role in emissions, with production-distorting subsidies in particular linked to worse environmental impacts. On the other hand, more sustainable production and trade practices can not only reduce emissions but can create a competitive edge for food producers, particularly in responding to regulatory requirements or changing consumer preferences.

APEC must continue to prioritize a holistic approach to food trade reform. This requires action on multiple fronts: first, championing the reduction and eventual elimination of the most environmentally-harmful agricultural subsidies and minimizing market distortions, including at the World Trade Organization's Ministerial Conference in March 2026; second, making progress towards realizing the Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) to facilitate a smooth flow of agricultural goods and services across the region, including by reducing non-tariff barriers consistent with ABAC's 2016 Cross-Cutting Principles for Non-Tariff Barriers; and lastly, creating an enabling environment for sustainable food trade, including through science-based, non-distorting non-tariff measures, consistent with the underpinning principles of ABAC's proposed Greener Trade Framework.

Fostering unity and APEC Leadership

Food is essential to the lives of all of us in the APEC region. Achieving food security requires collaboration and cooperation not only among policymakers, but also in concert with food producers, distributors, retailers and consumers, and across all 21 APEC economies – for example, through exchanging industry best practices, research and knowledge-exchange. In March 2025, ABAC delivered the *Future of Food Security Report*, outlining key insights and perspectives from business leaders, highlighting, once again, the importance of multistakeholder processes. Candid dialogue and partnership between the public and private sectors will be critical to making progress – indeed, that was the animating idea behind the APEC Policy Partnership on Food Security (PPFS). In that connection, we look forward to the resolution of this year's refresh of the PPFS Terms of Reference in a way that achieves a truly meaningful public-private partnership.

ABAC welcomes the opportunity to discuss this letter with you during the APEC Food Security Ministerial and related meetings which will take place in Incheon, Republic of Korea in August.

Yours sincerely,



H. S. Cho
ABAC Chair 2025
