

Three steps towards a healthy food future

Submission to the Informal EU

Agriculture Council 30-31 May 2016

May 2016

european public health alliance





Three steps towards a healthy food future

The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) welcomes the discussion on the future of the food and agricultural system initiated by the Dutch Presidency of the EU.

In light of the upcoming Informal Council of EU Ministers of 30-31 May and following on the conference 'Towards a Sustainable Food Policy' of 11 March co-organised by EPHA and EEB hosted by the Netherlands Permanent Representation to the EU,¹

EPHA calls on Member State delegates:

I. To acknowledge that:

- The food and agricultural system is vital for the well-being of present and future generations. Good nutrition underpins a healthy life. Despite agriculture's major contribution to the fight against food deprivation in Europe, the current food system fails to deliver on key challenges facing society and is itself a driver of profound long-term risks.
- Unhealthy diet is the single largest risk factor for the entire burden of premature death and disease in the EU. Harmful alcohol consumption is also a leading risk factor, marking the impact of food and drink on public health.²
- Cardiovascular disease is the main cause of death in the EU with unhealthy diet as core contributor. Nearly a fifth of all cancers are diet or alcohol-related. Type-2 diabetes is increasing dramatically with major consequences for human well-being and health budgets. Overweight and obesity rates are higher than ever and still on the rise. Liver mortality could be greatly reduced by tackling alcohol overconsumption. All these trends are marked by widening health inequalities.

¹ 'Towards a Sustainable Food Policy'. Conference Report. <http://bit.ly/1YVEjoC>

² Global Burden of Disease (EU, 2013) <http://ihmeuw.org/3sn7>



- Agriculture is a key contributor to climate change, antibiotic resistance and biodiversity loss which risk undoing the last century's gains in public health and threaten a post-antibiotic era where routine medical interventions may become life-threatening. It also contributes to air pollution, annually killing at least 400.000 people in the EU through respiratory and other chronic diseases, and occupational and wider risks due to agrochemicals use.
- This situation can be remedied if the food system is allowed to evolve to its full potential.
- The current approach of an agricultural policy coupled with various disjointed policies covering the supply chain, trade, environment and consumption is no longer appropriate for addressing today's societal challenges. A more coherent approach bridging production and consumption is required. For this reason the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) in its report 'Towards a food policy' concludes that *"the time has come for an explicit, comprehensive food policy"*.³
- A food policy approach to the food system has great potential to find multicomponent answers to the public health, environmental, economic and cultural challenges our societies are faced with today.
- A move towards a food policy approach to the food system involves, among others, a re-evaluation of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) through a Health Impact Assessment to find synergies between the promotion of better agriculture and better health. An exercise of such importance and consequence is best achieved through a formal REFIT procedure to be conducted in preparation for the post-2020 CAP reform debate.

"If we can get it right on food, we will have come a long way to getting it right for people and the planet."⁴

³ Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (2014) Towards a food policy. <http://bit.ly/1No8ld3>

⁴ A. Demaio et. Al (2016) Human and planetary health: towards a common language. The Lancet. <http://bit.ly/1KcbABm>



II. To focus efforts on the main bottlenecks preventing a healthy, sustainable and economically viable food and agricultural system:

1. How to ensure that population-wide consumption patterns match sustainable dietary guidelines?
2. How to ensure access to healthy diets for all and fair incomes for farmers in an employment-generating agriculture?
3. How to ensure that demand for sustainable dietary components is matched by a sustainable food supply?
4. How to promote greater diversity in the agricultural system while faced with an increased power concentration in the supply chain?
5. How to ensure trade policy is supporting and not undermining progress towards sustainable diets in the EU and worldwide?
6. How can research and innovation, macro-economic and social policies, taxation and finance and other non-sector specific regulatory frameworks contribute to the necessary food system transitions?
7. How can governance structures be reshaped to implement an agenda of increased policy coherence overcoming organisational fragmentation?



III. To prioritise actions that can deliver multiple simultaneous benefits to society, including:

- Employ financial and regulatory incentives to create healthy food and drink environments in line with Member States' commitments under the World Health Organisation (WHO).⁵ Financial incentives can encourage innovation and promote positive behaviour while providing additional revenues for public budgets. Incentives can also contribute to tackling health inequalities.
- Promote more plant-based diets while diminishing the appeal of processed and red meat. Dietary change is one of the most cost-effective means of cutting greenhouse gas emissions and reducing health system expenditures on chronic diseases.
- Capitalise on the co-benefits of expanded fruit and vegetables production. Horticulture is both the most labour-intensive form of farming and provides products lacking in citizens' diets. This while ensuring safe conditions for agricultural workers.
- Foster short food supply chains as promising strategies to increase added value for farmers, boost local economies, improve the quality of diets and satisfy consumer demands. Public procurement can act as an important lever in this.
- Create an enabling environment for the progressive implementation of agro-ecological innovations in farming and aquaculture, including through transdisciplinary research and innovation in partnership with farmers, educational curricula, farm advisory services, the creation of market opportunities and through programme-based incentives as part of a clearly articulated and evaluated sustainability strategy.
- Introduce safeguards during negotiations of trade and investment treaties to allow for the protection of well-defined food policy aims.
- Foster better livestock management practices in the context of reducing farm antibiotics use.
- Nurture public leadership aimed at overcoming organisational barriers and promote transdisciplinary research and policy making.

⁵ Vienna Declaration on Nutrition and Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020 (2013) <http://bit.ly/1rKy5WJ> & European Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2015–2020 (2013) <http://bit.ly/1D7kfyl>

About EPHA

EPHA is a change agent – Europe’s leading NGO advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA is a member of, among others, the Social Platform, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), the High Level Forum for a Better Functioning Food Supply Chain and the Better Regulation Watchdog.

EPHA's Transparency register number is 18941013532-08.

Further reading

Towards a Sustainable Food Policy
[>>read more](#)

Report: A CAP for Healthy Living
[>>read more](#)



european **public health** alliance

www.eph.org

Rue de Trèves 49-51
1040 Brussels
BELGIUM

TEL: +32 (0) 2 230 30 56

FAX: +32 (0) 2 233 38 80

MAIL: epha@epha.org