



DISRUPTIVE DIALOGUE OUTCOME DOCUMENT

Leveraging Healthy and Sustainable Diets Through Agricultural Policy Reform

DOCUMENT COMPILED BY:
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Introduction

This Disruptive Dialogue focused on how policy – in particular agricultural policy reform – can leverage a transition towards healthy and sustainable diets. Discussions were stimulated by presentations from Nikolai Pushkarev (European Public Health Alliance), Sue Dibb (Eating Better), David Baldock (Institute for European Environment Policy) with an invited response by Jessica Fanzo (UN Food and Agricultural Organization) and facilitated by Aileen Robertson (University College Copenhagen). All participants actively contributed with their expertise and experience to the discussion.

Key Insights

Healthy and sustainable diets are increasingly recognized on the public policy agenda as dietary patterns that support good nutrition, as well as better environmental and social outcomes. A key element of healthy and sustainable diets is shifting the balance towards more plant-based eating and reduced consumption of animal products. A ‘less and better’ approach to meat and dairy consumption in high consuming countries can provide win-wins for health, environment, climate change, animal welfare, resource use and farming livelihoods. This approach also includes an equity dimension by allowing increased consumption among people where animal products can provide valuable nutrition and help address malnutrition challenges.

The OECD calculates agricultural support as worth EUR 556 billion per year across 51 countries [[OECD, Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2018](#)]. There is an opportunity to realign such large-scale agricultural funding towards outcomes that support healthy and sustainable production and consumption as part of delivering public goods for public money. Currently, various opportunities exist to reshape agricultural policy in this direction, in particular through reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the European Union (EU), post-Brexit in the UK, and globally through developing strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It has been difficult to directly include health in agricultural policy reform as these sectors often are approached in silos. However, agriculture is linked to health through various impacts on determinants such as air, water, soil and biodiversity quality, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), climate change, food safety, occupational health, farm incomes, agrochemicals use, nutrient quality and the relative availability of different food groups. These determinants are important factors influencing healthy and sustainable diets.

There is a new and vigorous debate in Europe about the future of agricultural policy. This debate includes the potential to reduce the conceptual divide between agricultural policy and the goal of transitioning towards healthy and sustainable diets. The opportunity arises from a proposal to adopt a ‘performance-based’ approach to the payment of CAP funds. Under current plans, several key objectives are set at EU level, while Member States should produce comprehensive ‘strategic plans’ which set out how they will meet those objectives, including through target setting. One of the objectives is to “improve the response of EU agriculture to societal demands on food and health, including safe, nutritious and sustainable food, as well as animal welfare” [[Article 6 CAP proposal](#)].

This framework presents the opportunity to develop specific objectives for healthy and sustainable diets, including concrete national level targets, supportive and aligned policies, and appropriate indicators and mechanisms to monitor progress. Setting targets in agricultural policy has transformative potential – this will help deliver healthy and sustainable dietary objectives and support policy makers to work across silos. This aligns with the increasingly recognized need to shift from ‘agricultural policy’, with its primary focus on production, towards ‘food policy’ with a wider focus on food and agricultural systems in order to better realize the potential for system-wide synergies.

Setting a target under the CAP of achieving a minimum consumption of 400g of fruit and vegetables a day, as recommended by the WHO, could be an example of such transformative target setting. While there are existing mechanisms under the CAP to influence the attainment of this target, these will probably not be sufficient, encouraging policy-makers to look for new ways of using CAP funds and looking for coherence and synergistic relations with other policy fields.

It was highlighted that policy making will always feature trade-offs and involve making difficult decisions between sustainability, health outcomes and short-term economic growth. The following next steps were identified to advance a holistic approach to these challenges by including healthy and sustainable dietary objectives in agricultural policy reform:

Next Steps

- “Don’t mourn – Organize” (Joe Hill, 1915). It is important to demonstrate support for change from all stakeholders. Change can happen at a policy level when politicians feel pressure from society. It is therefore essential to engage citizens, consumers, farmers and policy makers in interdisciplinary dialogue, including between policy sectors like environment, agriculture, climate and public health, to explore win-win solutions.
- There is a need to identify a clear and engaging ‘elevator pitch’ for policy makers and food businesses for integrating healthy and sustainable diets into agricultural policy and highlight the win-wins to help navigate complexities.
- Food based dietary guidelines can provide a starting point for policy with a number of countries now integrating sustainability into their dietary guidelines. There is a need for such guidelines to underpin agriculture policy and it was suggested that FAO could consider strengthening its call on member states to support this.
- Climate change policy needs to put agriculture and animal farming center-stage in both addressing the impacts and providing opportunities for mitigation e.g. through soils, pasture and agro-forestry. There is a lack of information on the climate impacts of various diets, as well as few nutritionists working on the linkages between nutrition and climate.
- The SDGs provide an important focus and framework for healthy and sustainable diets, cutting across almost all goals.
- Nutritional diversity has been reduced by agricultural policies globally – currently three plant species make up 2/3 of our diets. The Agrobiodiversity Index currently trialed by Bioversity International [<http://www.bioversityinternational.org/abd-index>] can help assess dimensions of agricultural biodiversity to guide policy and investments for mainstreaming agricultural biodiversity in sustainable food systems.
- FAO & WHO will host a sustainable diets workshop in January 2019 focusing on metrics, building on the forthcoming report of the EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet and Health. The development of appropriate tools to measure success and evaluate new policies is essential.
- Encourage EAT to focus on engaging policy makers in this area and developing policy solutions in their future work and events.

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