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OUR FOOD, OUR HEALTH, OUR PLANET

Manifesto for the 2024 European Parliament elections

This Manifesto, published in March 2023, reflects the common demands of 26 of EU Food Policy Coalition participants for better food systems in the EU. It has been endorsed by the following organisations:



THE NEXT EU ELECTIONS MUST BECOME A TURNING POINT FOR BETTER FOOD

In 2024, more than 400 million citizens from across the Union will have the opportunity to elect their representatives in the European Parliament and shape the agenda for the rest of the decade. The need to build a stronger, fairer and more resilient European Union is clearer than ever. Soaring food and energy costs are driving the highest inflation rates in decades, creating a cost-of-living crisis with severe impacts on the poorest and most vulnerable populations. This is taking place against the dramatic backdrop of climate change, with floods and droughts affecting large parts of Europe.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shed new light on the weaknesses of the European food system, highlighting low wages and poor working conditions along the supply chain, and the over-reliance of European food production on imported agricultural inputs. Rising costs for fuel, fertilizer and feed are pushing up food prices – in a context of highly concentrated markets and rampant financial speculation.

Targeted social policies are crucial to alleviate the impacts of the crisis on those most affected, particularly lower income households. But in the longer term,

concerted and far-reaching policy action is required at all governance levels – particularly the EU – to overcome the structural weaknesses and inequalities laid bare by today's crises, and build truly sustainable and resilient food systems.

European citizens have long demanded better food, as shown by several successful European Citizens Initiatives, and it is time to heed these calls. The EU must accelerate the shift towards locally-grounded agroecological food systems that respect social and labour rights, protect climate and the environment, provide healthy food for all and meet high animal welfare standards. EU subsidies must be used to reward and incentivise agroecological and organic farm and fisheries management, to make healthy sustainable food more affordable to all, to ensure generational renewal – in other words, they must be transformed into a tool for just transition. Prioritising the production of food over feed and fuel is key to cut costly import dependencies, reduce the footprint of our food systems locally and globally, bolster food security around the world, and build resilience to shocks.

To address today's mounting challenges, EU institutions must take a new approach and tackle food supply and demand at the same time. Until now, the Union has focused on market regulation and producer support, but it must now act decisively on consumption as well. The EU must ensure access to healthy sustainable diets for all, i.e., diets with lower intake of animal products, sugar, salt and fats, increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts – diets that can reverse the alarming rise of diet-related illnesses, slash greenhouse gas emissions, and deliver a whole range of social and environmental co-benefits. To achieve this dietary shift in the interest of people, animals and the planet, innovative policies are required to build food environments where the healthy, sustainable choice is the most available, affordable and attractive.

PROPOSALS ON EU FOOD POLICY FOLLOWING THE 2024 ELECTIONS

1. MAKE SUSTAINABLE FOOD A TOP-RANKING POLITICAL PRIORITY

Food is the basis of human life and a vital concern for citizens. As a major pillar of our societies and economies, food systems are becoming increasingly vulnerable to external shocks, while facing serious health and sustainability challenges. The EU's Farm to Fork Strategy represents a first step in addressing these issues, but bolder action at European and national level is urgently needed. Taking inspiration from the 2050 climate goals and binding commitments agreed by EU leaders, and the policy coherence and industry engagement it has unlocked, it is now time for all EU institutions to show strong political will and adopt an evidence-based long-term vision for sustainable food systems, with a focus on enhancing human health, environmental protection, animal welfare and social equity.

2. ADOPT A STRONG SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS LAW FOR THE EU

The new EU legislative framework for sustainable food systems, due in late 2023, aims to promote policy coherence at EU and national levels, mainstream sustainability in all food-related policies and strengthen the resilience of food systems. Newly-elected EU policymakers must break free from conflicts of interest and demonstrate their commitment to food system transformation by setting clear evidence-based, time-bound objectives and responsibilities within this framework law and ensuring its timely implementation. To accelerate the shift away from industrial animal products and towards more plant-based and organic diets, it is imperative for the new law to foster enabling food environments in which the healthy sustainable choice is the easiest one.

3. REINFORCE THE EU'S COMMON FOOD POLICY

The Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, adopted in 2020, is the EU's first ever cross-cutting policy initiative that addresses the entire food chain. The strategy must be expanded under the leadership of a dedicated Vice-President in the next five-year mandate of the European Commission, building on successes to date and addressing the blind spots, taking further steps to integrate different sectoral policies, and becoming a consolidated EU Common Food Policy. Under this framework, the EU must seek deep long-term transformation and place a much greater emphasis on the sustainability of trade and international food supply chains, food access and dietary changes which not only improve human health but also support better food production.

4. USE EU BUDGET FAIRLY TO SUPPORT MORE RESILIENT FOOD PRODUCTION

Considering that almost one third of the EU budget is devoted to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which has failed to achieve its environmental and social objectives, new guidance is needed from EU leaders to improve decision-making on EU expenditure and re-set the priorities governing the allocation of funding. To achieve sustainability, European food production systems need to be brought within the safe operating space of planetary boundaries, protect and restore the nature that sustains them and become more resilient to shocks. CAP funds must be repurposed to allow this transformation, including by supporting new entrants in the farming sector, and only rewarding Europe's excellent agricultural models where and when they exist. Similarly, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund must be used to support a much-needed *just transition* in this sector. The next EU budget for 2028-2034 must discontinue any harmful subsidies, prioritise expenditures with clear added value for the environment, climate, social equity, human health, and animal welfare, and be commensurate to the EU's ambitions on sustainable food systems.

5. ENGAGE ALL GOVERNANCE LEVELS IN FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

While significant progress has been achieved at the EU level in integrating the diverse policy areas related to food systems, a greater effort is now needed to work more coherently and effectively across governance levels. A major responsibility lies with national and subnational governments, which must not only implement EU policies coherently across government departments, but also play a greater role in building a common agenda for our diverse food systems. European political parties are in a unique position to help bring together diverse viewpoints and political priorities from across the Union, and to form the coalitions needed for effective EU governance – and therefore have a central role to play in this process. To facilitate the participation of engaged citizens and food producers in national and EU policy-making processes, grassroots sustainable food initiatives and local food policy councils must be specifically supported and their voices amplified in the relevant fora.