

Joint call to the Commission to not backtrack on the work on food systems

Open letter on the EU legislative framework for sustainable food systems and a strategic dialogue on the future of food

Brussels, 25 October 2023

Dear President von der Leyen,

We, the undersigned organisations, and distinguished academics, are writing to you to express our deep concern over the absence of the EU legislative framework for Sustainable Food Systems (FSFS), alongside other European Green Deal files such as on animal welfare, from the Commission 2024 Work Programme. Not presenting the FSFS proposal means breaking promises made to EU citizens, who increasingly seek affordable, healthy and sustainable food. It also seriously jeopardises the achievement of the European Green Deal's objectives. We therefore call on you once again to present an ambitious FSFS proposal before the end of your current mandate.

The organisation of a strategic dialogue on the future of EU agriculture must not divert your Commission from setting the course for a transition to sustainable food systems adapted to and mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss. With its promise to address the dysfunctionalities that affect all levels of the food value chain in their interdependencies, the FSFS is the best available tool to ensure a just transition for our farmers and fishers. Moreover, the dialogue must neither delay the legislative work on key files including on sustainable food systems and animal welfare, nor undermine the numerous past and current stakeholder consultations and dialogues. It should instead inform the legislative work of the Council and European Parliament on these files. In addition, the dialogue can serve as a platform to foster the acceptance of food system transformation and identify pathways for a just transition. To ensure this dialogue does not end up duplicating past and current consultations and reflection processes, we propose the following priorities:

1. Take a food systems approach

The strategic dialogue, as well as EU policy making in general, must take a holistic food systems approach instead of focussing solely on agriculture. We need to look at the entire food system from production to consumption and engage commercial actors such as food

processors and retailers, or farmers and fishers will be, unfairly, left to carry the burden of the inevitable adjustments to be made in the face of the twin climate and biodiversity crises.

Particularly, actors in the middle of the chain, like retailers, wield significant influence over both what and how farmers produce and what consumers purchase. These middle of the chain actors must therefore actively contribute to the transformation, sharing the responsibility for a sustainable and just food future. While the topics for debate should be co-decided with all the different actors around the table, we believe the dialogue should explore additional ways (including policies) to make sustainable, healthy diets easily accessible and affordable for everyone.

2. Inclusivity and equal representation

Recognizing the variety of stakeholders' concerns, it is in everyone's best interest and should be a common objective to contribute to a just transition to a sustainable food system that safeguards its social and environmental foundations. This means that along with farmers and fishers, the strategic dialogue should involve civil society at large, businesses from 'the middle of the chain', food services, scientists, think tanks, regional and local governments, as well as the general public. Further, the dialogue should adhere to the principle of equal representation, ensuring an equal balance between economic and civil society representatives.

3. Co-leadership: a cross-DG approach

The Commission should task a cross-DG team to supervise the planning, coordination, and execution of the strategic dialogue. To establish a unified EU vision for the future of food and food systems, a range of issues must be addressed that extend far beyond the realm of agriculture, including matters related to health, climate, environment, fisheries and trade. DG SANTE is in the lead on the legislative initiatives announced in the Farm to Fork Strategy, while the undeniable environmental and climate impacts of the food system fall within the remit of DG ENV and DG CLIMA's portfolio. A collaborative effort bears a much greater potential to foster essential policy coherence, a critical element currently lacking in the EU's food and farming policies, and recognised by [SAPEA \(2020\)](#) as being one of the main obstacles delaying a transition to sustainable food systems.

We therefore call on you to not fail EU citizens and undermine the credibility of your Commission, but stand by your promise to work towards an environmentally friendly, fair and healthy food system, as outlined in the Farm to Fork Strategy, and present an ambitious FSFS proposal within this term. The design of the strategic dialogue should complement, not hinder, legislative work, focus on food system transformation, as well as be inclusive and involve all relevant DGs, so the dialogue can contribute to the implementation of the Green Deal.

Yours sincerely,

Agroecology Europe	Coalition against hunger
AirClim - Air Pollution & Climate Secretariat	Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements
Akcja Demokracja	Compassion in World Farming EU
Alcohol Action Ireland	Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V.
Anima International	Djurens Rätt
Animal Equality Italia	European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
Animal Protection Denmark	EKPIZO - Consumer Association the Quality of Life
Aquatic Life Institute	European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
Arbeiterkammer Österreich	Ernährungsrat Berlin
ARCHE NOAH	Ernährungsrat Dortmund und Region e.V.
Association Biom	Ernährungsrat Frankfurt/Main
Association Végétarienne de France	Ernährungsrat Niedersachsen
Associazione Consumatori Utenti	Ernährungsrat Wuppertal
BioForum	Essere Animali
Birdlife Finland	European Community of Consumers
Bond Beter Leefmilieu	Co-operatives (Euro Coop)
Bos+	Eurogroup for Animals
Buy Better Food Campaign	EuroHealthNet
CambiamoAgricoltura	Fédération Française des Diabétiques
Campaigns and Activism for Animals in the Industry (CAAI)	Federazione Nazionale Pro Natura
CECU	Fern
CIDAMB	Fondazione Ecosistemi
ClientEarth	Forum Ökologie & Papier
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Italian Network on Local Food Policies
KLUG - Deutsche Allianz Klimawandel und
Gesundheit e.V.
Latvian Ornithological Society
LAV
Linked.Farm
Lipu - BirdLife Italy
Luxembourgish Consumer Association
Madre Brava
Münchner Ernährungsrat e.V.
NABU e.V.
National Organization of Leisure
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World Animal Protection Nederland
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This letter is supported by leading academics in the field:

Prof. Amandine Garde, Director of the Law & Non-Communicable Diseases Research Unit at the University of Liverpool, UK; President of the Law and Public Health Section, EUPHA

Prof. Erik Mathijs, KU Leuven, Belgium

Prof. Serge Hercberg, Professor Emeritus Nutrition, Sorbonne University Paris Nord, France

Dr. Mathilde Touvier, Head of the Nutritional Epidemiology Research Team (EREN), PI of the NutriNet-Santé cohort, Sorbonne University Paris Nord, France

Dr. Hanna Schebesta, the Netherlands

Prof. Piotr Skubała, Professor of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Silesia, Poland

Prof. Lorenza Paoloni, Ordinario di Diritto Agrario, Dipartimento Giuridico, Università del Molise, Italy

Prof. Vito Rubino, Professor of EU Law, University of East Piedmont, Italy

Prof. Pedro Resende, Instituto Superior Técnico, University of Lisbon, Portugal

Prof. Dr. Adanella Rossi, Associate Professor, University of Pisa, Italy

Prof. Alessandra Corrado, Associate Professor, University of Calabria, Italy

Prof. Davide Marino, Professor, University of Molise, Italy

Prof. Colin Sage, Associate Professor Faculty of Nutrition and Food Sciences, University of Porto, Portugal

Prof. Eloisa Cristiani, Associate Professor of Agricultural Law, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa, Italy

Prof. Mariagrazia Alabrese, Associate Professor of Agricultural Law, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa, Italy

Prof. Franca Marino, Associate Professor, University of Milan, Italy

Prof. Antonina Plutino, Associate Professor, University of Salerno, Italy

Dr. Jeroen Candel, the Netherlands

Dr. Tara Garnett, University of Oxford, UK

Assist. Prof Joana Lopes Teixeira Nogueira Santos, Assistant Professor in Economic and Business Sciences, Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo, Portugal

Assist. Prof. João Graça, University of Groningen, the Netherlands

Dr. Alessandra Manganelli, Research Associate, HafenCity Universität, Hamburg, Germany

Antonio Manzoni, Post-Doc Researcher Agri-food and Agri-Environmental Law, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa, Italy

Paulina Sobiesiak-Penszko, PhD, Institute of Public Affairs, Poland