

Brussels 23 January 2024

Dear President von der Leyen,

I would hereby like to acknowledge the reply to my letter of September 29, 2023 on the forthcoming Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture in the EU, signed by your Head of Cabinet, Mr Björn Siebert. I would also like to **express my sincere concern about the lack of public health representation in the Dialogue.**

I thank Mr Siebert for taking time to reply. The content of his letter, however, together with the absence of an invitation to join the Dialogue, raises concerns. Most critically, there is no mention of health in the future of EU Agriculture, despite the requirement of the Treaty to include “in defining and implementing its policies and activities [...] a high level of protection [...] of human health” (art. 9 TEU).

The absence of a health dimension in relation to the future of agriculture, either by oversight or by design, is extremely concerning, for the reasons as summarised below:

- **Food systems and the diets they generate are major contributors to the disease burden in the EU.** The non communicable diseases that they contribute to are the largest cause of ill health and early death in the EU, going hand in hand with social and economic burden to our societies. To be addressed comprehensively, they require major dietary shifts that can only be achieved by creating health-conducive food environments, which in turn requires a dynamic collaboration between agri, food, and health sectors.
- There are the **enormous health risks associated with climate change, not least due to the significant contribution of agriculture.** Transforming agriculture and shifting diets will spawn additional health benefits achieved by reducing the health threats posed by climate change. Without the health sector in the Dialogue, this crucial aspect stands no chance of being considered.
- Equally significantly, **the major global health threat posed by increasing antimicrobial resistance requires a One Health approach.** With the 70% of antibiotic use located within agricultural / veterinary applications, a solution to this health challenge can only be achieved through active engagement of the agricultural sector.

Given these major issues, deeply rooted in scientific evidence and in which Europe should be taking the lead globally, the absence of health in a review of the future of EU Agriculture concerns us gravely.

I am convinced that you share the view that agriculture must support the health of the European citizens, and **I hope that your commitment to health will be demonstrated by issuing an imminent invitation for us to join the Strategic Dialogue.**

I hope we can count on you to ensure that the public health interests are represented in the future of agriculture and in the future of Europe.

Sincerely yours,

Dr Milka Sokolović

Director General, European Public Health Alliance