

Response to the EU consultation on the Farm to Fork Strategy

Brussels, 16 March 2020

Slow Food strongly believes that a **comprehensive transition towards sustainable food systems is needed**¹, to address some of the existential threats we face. Together with other civil society organisations, Slow Food believes that **the Farm to Fork Strategy represents an important opportunity to deliver a coherent response to food-related challenges and pave the way towards an integrated, sustainable food policy for the European Union (EU) by:** ²

- Developing an inclusive and transparent governance and regulatory framework for policy coherence and transformation;
- Supporting a transition to food production that safeguards the environment, the climate, and our health;
- Driving a transition to sustainable, healthy diets by creating enabling food environments;
- Establishing a socially and economically just food system;
- Ensuring the welfare and health of farmed animals;
- Promoting participatory research and knowledge exchange for sustainable food systems;
- Driving global action for sustainable food systems;

In response to the consultation of the European Commission on the Farm to Fork Strategy we want to focus our attention on the following elements:

- The need to fundamentally change paradigm and move beyond the “feeding the world” narrative
- The importance of three principles that echo Slow Food’s mission to ensure everyone has access to good, clean and fair, namely:
 - **Protect and promote agrobiodiversity**
 - **Promote the development of agroecology**
 - **Establish fair supply chains and fair working conditions for all farmers, farmworkers, food artisans and in particular for migrant farm workers, youth and women**

Changing the narrative

In order to achieve an integrated Farm to Fork strategy ambitious enough to meet the objectives of the EU Green Deal, we need to see a radical change in the narrative, away from one of needing to “feed the world”. Indeed, framing the question of food security in terms of net volumes of food reflects the systemic and self-reinforcing logic of industrial food systems of increasing production (primarily of energy-rich, nutrition-poor crops) at all cost. The growth in productivity achieved by the industrial food system has not translated in global food security by any measure. Instead, we must shift towards a narrative that allows us to face head

¹ JULY 2019: CSOs joint letter to the newly elected President of the European Commission Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, calling for an integrated EU food policy and a new European Commission Vice-President responsible for ensuring the transition to sustainable food systems. ([link](#))

²DECEMBER 2019: CSOs Open Letter on the Farm to Fork strategy to Achieve Sustainable Food Systems ([link](#))

on the crucial questions EU citizens need answers to: how farming livelihoods will be secured; how to provide healthy, diverse diets; how to farm in a way that respect the Sustainable Development Goals; how to improve equity and social well-being. Tweaking practices will not provide long-term solutions. What Europe needs are diversified agroecological food systems, based on farming agrobiodiversity, with lower dependency on external inputs, stimulating social relationships and short-supply chains, to build long-term healthy agroecosystems and secure livelihoods.

To do this, Slow Food believes the Farm to Fork Strategy must:

I. Protect and promote agrobiodiversity

Why this is important

Biodiversity loss is one of the greatest environmental threats currently plaguing the planet. The loss of biodiversity does not only involve wild species, but also **agrobiodiversity**, namely the animal breeds and plant varieties which, since the birth of agriculture 10,000 years ago, have gradually and consistently been domesticated to be grown or raised to produce food.

Thanks to the selection performed by farmers over the centuries, local varieties and breeds have adapted to the local environment, becoming stronger, more resilient and demanding less external inputs, such as fertilizers, water, pesticides, veterinary care, than their conventional equivalents.

However, over the last 50 years, industrial agriculture has invested in an ever-smaller number of hybrid varieties and commercial animal breeds, selected and created to increase productivity, to the detriment of diversity and the connection to the collective knowledge and flavors of individual places. According to FAO estimates, **75% of agricultural crop varieties have disappeared and 20% of animal breeds reared for food, meat or milk, face extinction.** Monocultures as well as the introduction of GMOs and the widespread use of synthetic pesticides have heavily contributed to the loss of agricultural crop varieties.

Farmers, herders and fishers who cultivated biodiversity and defend it play a crucial role. For millennia, they have been working in harmony with ecosystems, not in competition with them.³

The EU must take important measures to support the farmers, herders and fishers who are protecting agrobiodiversity, promoting the ecosystem services provided by biodiversity, protecting the cultural heritage and supporting healthy local economies. In addition, supporting agrobiodiversity directly contributes to increasing the **diversity in diets**, essential to ensuring nutrition quality in diets.⁴

Slow Food's fight against agrobiodiversity loss

While agricultural biodiversity is certainly not the only component needed in a sustainable food system, a sustainable food system cannot exist without agricultural biodiversity.⁵ Agroecological models based on

³ Slow Food biodiversity https://n4v5s9s7.stackpathcdn.com/sloueuropa/wp-content/uploads/150220-Factsheet-biod_ENG_bassa.pdf

⁴ EAT-Lancet report (2019) [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)31788-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)31788-4/fulltext)

⁵ Biodiversity International (2017) https://www.biodiversityinternational.org/fileadmin/user_upload/online_library/Mainstreaming_Agrobiodiversity/Summary_Mainstreaming_Agrobiodiversity.pdf



biodiversity have also proven to ensure food security while providing numerous ecosystem services such as providing habitat and resources for pollinators and increased soil biological diversity, which in turn can increase nutrient status of soils.⁶

Slow Food aims to protect agrobiodiversity through an online catalogue of traditional breeds and varieties, as well as by supporting farmers, fishers and food artisans who protect agrobiodiversity. Research carried out on these projects demonstrates positive impact in terms of social, environmental and economic sustainability.⁷

To protect agrobiodiversity, the Farm to Fork strategy must:

- **Reward producers who cultivate and farm agrobiodiversity**, who preserve the traditional agricultural landscape (e.g. old vineyards), know-how (e.g. milling and slaughtering) and architecture (water mills, mountain dairies, old wood ovens etc.)
- Ensure the registration of seed varieties in **public registers** to safeguard endangered crops and make them available;
- Ensure that the conventional breeding of plants and animals is kept **free from patent claims**: re-think European patent law in biotechnology and plant breeding and set clear regulations that exclude conventional breeding, genetic material, animals, plants and food derived thereof from patentability;
- Support the swift implementation of the ruling by the European Court of Justice of 2018, clarifying that **new techniques of genetic engineering fall under EU legislation on GMO**, and ensure that Gene edited varieties go through usual risk assessment procedure, are traceable and are labelled;
- Uphold the Parliament resolutions of October 2016 and October 2017 **against the Commission's authorisation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)** and on efforts to facilitate the banning of GMO cultivation by Member States in line with the objective of protecting biodiversity, nature and soil;
- Support the development of a dedicated **legally binding framework covering the main soil threats**, including biodiversity loss, erosion, organic matter decline and contamination; integrate soil related UN Sustainable Development Goals into EU policies.

II. Promote the development of agroecology

Why this is important

Business as usual in food production has shown its limits. Slow Food believes agroecology is the way to achieve economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability in our food systems. It is necessary to address these challenges simultaneously since all the various elements are interconnected.

Agroecology is the application of the science of ecology (the science of how nature works) to the study, design, and management of sustainable food systems, the integration of the diverse knowledge systems generated by food system practitioners, and the involvement of the social movements that are promoting the transition to fair, just, and sovereign food systems (FAO, 2018; Gliessman, 2015). In other words,

⁶ Biodiversity International (2017)

https://www.biodiversityinternational.org/fileadmin/user_upload/online_library/Mainstreaming_Agrobiodiversity/Summary_Mainstreaming_Agrobiodiversity.pdf

⁷ Slow Food study on Presidia project <https://www.slowfood.com/slowneurope/wp-content/uploads/Ricerca-presidi-Europa-ENG.pdf>



agroecology is understood as a science, practice, and as a social movement, in line with the internationally agreed-upon Nyéléni definition.⁸

Agroecology represents an important turn in this direction, compared to other sustainable farming models:

- it is based on local plant varieties and animal breeds and draws on their **ability to adapt** to any changes in environmental conditions;
- it **avoids the use of synthetic chemical products** and other technologies that have a negative impact on the environment and human health;
- it uses resources efficiently (nutrients, water, non-renewable energy etc.) to **reduce dependence on external inputs**;
- it promotes traditional technical skills, promotes participatory and cohesive systems by **creating farmers' networks**, and incentivizes the sharing of innovations and technologies;
- it **reduces the ecological footprint** of production, distribution and consumer practices, thus reducing water and soil pollution as well;
- it boosts the adaptability and resilience of the production and livestock farming system by maintaining the diversity of the agroecosystem, **and can provide higher animal welfare standards**;
- it promotes farming systems based on **social cohesion** and a sense of belonging by reducing land abandonment and migration.

Evidence

There is a growing body of evidence on the success of agroecological practises throughout the world, including in Europe. At a local level, the life cycle assessment of Slow Food products grown under agroecological practises have proven to generate significantly less CO₂ emissions than their industrial counter parts.⁹ Case studies from various continents show that agroecological systems deliver additional mutually reinforcing benefits including greater resource efficiency, improvements in community livelihoods and nutrition, increased resilience to shocks, biodiversity enhancement.¹⁰ Finally, other studies such as “Ten Years for Agroecology” performed by IDDRI show that the scaling up of agroecology is possible and find that wholesale transition to agroecology would:¹¹

- feed the European population healthily
- reduce Europe’s global food footprint
- result in a 40% reduction in agricultural greenhouse gas emissions
- help to restore biodiversity and to protect natural resources

⁸ Nyeleni Declaration <https://www.foodsovereignty.org/forum-agroecology-nyeleni-2015-2/>

⁹ INDACO Study – GHG emission comparison between Slow Food products and industrial products https://n4v5s9s7.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ING_Indaco_schede-1.pdf

¹⁰ IPES-Food Report “Breaking away from industrial food and farming systems” (2018) http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/CS2_web.pdf

¹¹ IDDRI Ten Years for Agroecology study (2018) <https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/blog-post/agro-ecological-europe-2050-credible-scenario-avenue-explore>



To promote the development of agroecology, the Farm to Fork strategy must:

1. Support farmers in their transition to agroecological food production

- Reorient the **CAP to give support to small agroecological farms**; support for agroecological transition through **independent Farm Advisory Services**;
- Ring-fence 40% of the total **agricultural research budget for agroecological** and organic practices, in recognition of the importance of knowledge-based innovation;
- Aim to have at least **50% of land being managed under agroecology and organic** agriculture by 2050, with focus on small and medium farms;
- **On livestock:**
 - o Acknowledge that there is an **overproduction of meat products**, and an over **reliance on industrial livestock farming** with high costs for our environment, our health, animals' welfare, and meat industry workforce's livelihoods;
 - o Create a **dedicated action plan towards less and better production and consumption** of meat, dairy and eggs in the EU, to shift away from industrial farming and towards circular, extensive livestock production as part of mixed farming systems;
 - o Support **maximum livestock density levels** (number of animals a farm can have per hectare) to be implemented throughout the EU;
 - o Commit to **phase out the use of cages** in animal farming;
 - o Increase availability of **local/mobile slaughterhouses**;
- Aim for an **80% reduction of synthetic pesticide use by 2030** by strengthening tools under the CAP to support agroecology and organic agriculture, and strengthening the Sustainable Use Directive. Such a reduction in synthetic pesticide use can be achieved primarily through the following measures:
 - o **Food losses and waste** are curbed: 20% of the total food produced in Europe is wasted (Fusion 2016); reducing food losses and waste by readjusting food production to meet food demand would contribute to reduce, among other things, synthetic pesticide use;
 - o Agroecological practices, like **Integrated Pest Management**, become mainstream (support to agroecological farmers and to farmers transitioning to agroecology)

2. Make agroecological food accessible to all Europeans

- Aim for a 20% raise in numbers of CSAs (**Community-supported agriculture**) schemes in Europe by 2030;
- Make sure the necessary **infrastructure is present for peasant and agroecological models**: access to local markets and slaughterhouses, simplified and commensurate hygiene rules;
- Aim for at least 50% of local, seasonal products in **public procurement** by 2025.

III. Establish fair supply chains and fair working conditions for all farmers, farmworkers, food artisans and in particular for migrant farm workers, youth and women

Why this is important

The industrial food system is based on highly unequal power relations as very powerful actors from the private sector continue to dictate the terms of the system. This power imbalance has exacerbated the precarity of farm workers, especially of migrant workers, women and youth farmers. Higher concentration of land ownership among fewer farmers, the concentration of power over farming inputs (e.g. seeds) and the consolidation of power among few major food processors and retailers all point to highly unequal power relations in the food system.¹²¹³ These inequalities are further exacerbated for disadvantaged groups including women, youth and migrant workers who often find themselves at the margin of the food system.

The situation of women, youth and migrant workers and farmers cannot continue to be ignored. Food can be an excellent instrument to redress power imbalances, integrate minorities and disadvantaged groups, like migrants and refugees.

The Farm to Fork Strategy must work to better integrate them by establishing fair supply chains and working conditions.

Slow Food examples

Slow Food believes in the inclusion of minorities in the design of sustainable food systems.

Through the “**Recipes of Dialogue**” project, Slow Food provides citizens from different backgrounds with the practical tools to transform their culinary heritage into skills that they can use to become self-reliant and to grow the economy in the food sector. This is done through training sessions on how to start and run a food business that can promote the history of a migrant community, biodiversity, and the seasonality of local produce, elements that are key to ensuring that migrant communities can successfully integrate with their surrounding area and its existing residents.¹⁴

Regarding youth, the **Slow Food Youth Network** works to engage young people to co-construct local food systems and to educate themselves on the challenges we are facing today. For example, the **Slow Food Academy** is an interactive and versatile teaching programme with the goal to bring to young professionals a deeper understanding of the complexity of food systems and policies and of the various actors that shape them.

In all its projects, Slow Food highlights **the essential contribution of women to sustainable food systems**, whether they are farmers, cooks, artisans, consumers or activists.

¹² IPES-Food Report “Unraveling the food-health nexus (2017) [http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/Health_FullReport\(1\).pdf](http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/Health_FullReport(1).pdf)

¹³ IPES-Food Report “Towards a common food policy for the EU” (2019) http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/CFP_ExecSummary_EN.pdf

¹⁴ Slow Food Project “Recipe for Dialogue” <https://www.slowfood.com/food-the-recipe-for-dialogue/>



To establish fair supply chains and working conditions, the Farm to Fork strategy must:

1. Support the integration of youth, women and migrants

- Promote the **training of young farmers and young entrepreneurs** in the food system on agroecological farming and sustainable food systems with secondary school and university courses, short courses, lecture courses by farmers themselves and knowledge exchange;
- Facilitate the **setting up of new businesses by young people** by simplifying or speeding up red tape and envisaging incentives such as direct funding, tax relief, favourable insurance schemes etc.;
- Create a strategy specifically designed to improve the working conditions of **women and young farmers** which should aim to facilitate the setting up of new businesses by young people and women, by cutting red-tape and proposing incentives;
- **Fight the exploitation of the labour force** which often concerns migrant workers.

2. Promote the establishment of fair supply chains

- Review the rules that regulate supply chains to **give all producers fair bargaining power**, and promote the creation of market channels for small and medium scale producers including farmers markets and direct selling;
- Support the achievement of a **UN binding treaty** to hold transnational corporations to account for human rights violations and end their impunity;
- Ensure **that EU laws enshrine the duty of corporations to respect human rights** and the environment throughout their operations worldwide;
- Ensure that the principle of **Policy Coherence for Development** is fully implemented, minimising contradictions and building synergies between different EU policies to benefit developing countries and increase the effectiveness of development cooperation.

We thank you in advance for considering our comments and remain at your disposal for any question you may have.

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