



Slow Food®

**A SLOW FOOD APPROACH TO
GOOD, CLEAN & FAIR
FOOD SYSTEMS IN THE EU**

POSITION PAPER
APRIL 2023

April 2023

Position paper: A Slow Food Approach to Good, Clean and Fair Food Systems in the EU

Authors

Madeleine Coste and Nina Wolff (Slow Food)

Comments by

Cristina Agrillo (Slow Food), Rubén Franco-Pescador (Slow Food), Ernst Hart (Netherlands), Janina Hielscher (Germany), Shane Holland (United Kingdom), Glenn Makuta (Brazil), Marta Messa (Slow Food), Carolina Modena (Slow Food), Yael Pantzer (Slow Food), Marcela Ramos (Chile), Sara el Sayed (USA), Wolfgang Schatz (Germany)

Layout

Alice Poiron

Editing

Jack Coulton

Photos

© Stefan Abtmeyer © Targ Pietruszkowy, © Slow Food Archive, © Matteo Croppo, © www.wolfganghummer.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
SLOW FOOD VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS	4
SLOW FOOD'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A STRONG SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS LAW	9
A food systems approach	9
A clear vision for the transition of agri-food-systems to agroecology	9
A One Health approach	9
A justice-driven and rights-based approach	10
An evidence-based and precautionary approach to innovation	10
A participatory governance structure and robust monitoring	10
Enabling food environments that make sustainable food choices the easiest and default option	12
CONCLUSION	16



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 🌀 The European Union needs a strong Sustainable Food Systems law to ensure coherence and consistency between food, environmental, health, agricultural and trade policies, and set the direction of travel for good, clean and fair food systems. It represents a key step towards a Common Food Policy for the EU.
- 🌀 Food systems can only be sustainable if they are healthy, socially and culturally adequate, environmentally friendly, resilient, ethically sound, and economically viable. These 6 dimensions must be addressed together, in a coherent manner, whilst minimizing tradeoffs.
- 🌀 The EU sustainable food systems law must have an overarching objective to promote a transition to agroecology, a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems.
- 🌀 The Sustainable Food Systems law must set out objectives and measures to improve food environments, with policies to boost the production of healthy and sustainable food and its availability in public canteens, support the development of short supply chains, ensure labeling and advertisements promote sustainable food options, and make healthy and sustainable diets affordable to all.
- 🌀 The Sustainable Food Systems law should take a One Health Approach, as human health is intrinsically linked to the health of animals, plants, and the planet.
- 🌀 The Sustainable Food Systems law should prioritize the needs of people, especially women, youth, indigenous people, and the most marginalized, over corporate interests, in order to ensure food justice and to support equal participation.
- 🌀 A transformation of the governance of European food systems is necessary to transition to systems that work for people, the planet and animals. Civil society must be involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of the rules that determine the functioning of EU food systems.

INTRODUCTION

It is one of the most critical challenges for the EU and for the entire world community to create resilient systems for sustainable and healthy food. In order to withstand current and future crises, it is imperative to set sustainability standards aiming at secure food systems that provide good, clean and fair food for all, while operating within planetary boundaries¹, conserving biodiversity and natural resources and respecting animals' welfare. At the same time, this is the only way to ensure the prosperity of a sector of great importance to the European economy and culture and to generate long-term income and well-being for food producers and farm workers. An effective sustainable food systems legislation will significantly contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and to implementing the European Green Deal, and thereby meet the expectations of European society.

European citizens, in particular the young generation, are increasingly voicing their frustration with the shortfalls in environment and climate governance, with two thirds of citizens being open to changing eating habits that are harmful to the environment². Against this background, an EU Sustainable Food Systems law could become an important milestone for both the European and global food transition. It is an opportunity for the EU to set the tone and lead the way in a highly relevant strategic issue of our time.

The future Sustainable Food Systems Legislative Framework proposal by the European Commission must take the form of a law, and provide the fundamental conditions for a transition to sustainable food systems, bringing us one step closer to a Common Food Policy³ that addresses all aspects of our food future. To do this, the EU must seek coherence and consistency between food, environmental, health, agricultural and trade policies and adopt a truly holistic approach.

SLOW FOOD VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

The bottom line is quite simple, yet challenging: **sustainable food systems must enable all people to enjoy sustainable and healthy diets**. Sustainable food systems require food environments⁴ that ensure that those foods, beverages and meals that contribute to sustainable and healthy diets are the most easily available, accessible, affordable, pleasurable, and widely promoted ones. In order to achieve this desirable goal, the interaction of different aspects of sustainability should be looked at in an integrated and holistic way that addresses the multidimensional nature of food systems.

There are large overlaps between the usual three criteria of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental) and the three core values of the Slow Food philosophy (good, clean and fair). In conceptual terms, they cover six dimensions that are deeply interrelated⁵.



THE
6
DIMENSIONS OF
GOOD, CLEAN AND
FAIR FOOD SYSTEMS

ONE HEALTH

The One Health approach recognizes the complex interconnectedness between the health of people, plants, animals and the planet. The health of a population can never be guaranteed if the health of plants, animals, and the planet is not also taken into account. This requires building sustainable food systems based on cultivating and protecting biodiversity and local food varieties, healthy soils and climate-friendly food production.

AGROECOLOGY

Slow Food promotes agroecology, a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. More than just a set of agricultural practices, it can play an important role in changing social relationships, empowering farmers and privileging short productive chains.

GOOD

Healthy

Sustainable food systems take a **One Health approach** and contribute to improving health and wellbeing by recognizing that food systems promote health not only by shaping **easier access** to, and clear information about healthy diets and food quality while providing **educational opportunities** for children and adults, but also by **promoting sustainable food production methods**⁶ which protect the health of the planet and of animals.

Slow Food defines a healthy diet as one that **promotes human health and respects that of the planet, favoring a wide variety of foods of plant origin, whole foods, and minimally processed foods, produced locally using sustainable methods**. An additional key component for a healthy diet is the pleasure provided by the rediscovery of the five senses and by the conviviality of common meals, which are important opportunities for building social connections and exchanges.

Socially and culturally adequate

Sustainable food systems provide access to food that adequately satisfies the **sociocultural needs** of all. They should prevent and oppose the creation of inequalities within the food system, including those based on gender, race or class. They should also improve the **social fabric** of urban and rural communities. Early childhood care and schools play a critical role in giving all children access to good, clean and fair food and thus help reduce inequalities between children of different socio-economic status, providing food education to children whose eating habits are shaped in their early years and will persist into adulthood.

Culture remains a paramount underlying factor influencing citizens' food choices, as well as an important link to traditions and cultural representations. However, in an era where global supply chains are standardizing the food that is most easily accessible to consumers, the link between citizens and their food culture deserves to be restored and better protected⁷. Sustainable food systems must promote access to healthy and sustainable diets that are also **culturally appropriate and culturally diverse**.

C L E A N

Environmentally friendly

Sustainable food systems contribute to the health of the planet by respecting **planetary boundaries**, i.e. respecting the planetary environment, the climate and biological and cultural diversity, all of which are fundamental to our capacity to produce food.

The key to sustainable food production lies in the transition from industrial farming to agroecology. An agroecological Europe is possible⁸, and is necessary to achieve long-term food security.

In order to keep within planetary boundaries, a sustainable food system will also require a drastic reduction in industrial animal farming and food waste. This requires shifting towards low impact, mostly plant-based diets with reduced animal proteins that only come from sustainable food and farming systems. The animals raised in these systems should be included in extensive, circular, and mixed farming models with a higher potential for animal welfare, generating healthier ecosystems and lower CO2 emissions.

Resilient

Sustainable food systems are **resilient**, meaning they are capable of adapting to change, recovering quickly after any disruption and reorienting towards more sustainable outcomes. As public health crises, climate change, plant diseases, price shocks, and geopolitical challenges multiply, resilient food systems are critical.

By focusing on biodiversity and the knowledge of local farmers, **agroecology** can be a systemic solution for building resilience. Likewise, local food systems based on short supply chains can bring many benefits to farmers, citizens and the environment. For example, by cutting out some, or all, of the intermediate stages between producers and consumers - such as wholesaling and distribution, food producers can regain an active role in the food system, working in food supply chains that are 'independent' of the wider system, and more adaptable to change.

Short supply chains also allow a more direct exchange between consumers and producers, fairer prices for all, and the reduction of both food waste and the environmental footprint associated with long supply chains.

F A I R

Ethically sound

Sustainable food systems should reflect the **values** of the societies they serve, such as democracy, transparency, solidarity, equality, human rights, inclusiveness, intergenerational justice and animal welfare.

Food systems must ensure **food justice**, i.e., ensuring that everyone has access to sustainable and healthy food. They must create working conditions that respect human beings and their rights, recognize the vital role that food producers play from farm to fork, and promote farming systems that respect animal welfare. They should empower marginalized or economically vulnerable consumer groups. Attention must be focused on ensuring that the sustainability of local food systems is not achieved at the expense of food systems in other regions, whether at national or international level, but that a global fair transition is promoted.

Food systems should produce food that is ethically-sound while promoting responsibility among producers and consumers by requiring comprehensive consumer information, for example through transparent labeling and responsible advertising that empower consumers to make sustainable choices.

Economically viable

Sustainable food systems are based on a fair playing field for all and have legal and financial framework conditions to incentivize the production of healthy and sustainable food. They ensure that food-related business is economically viable and contributes to **healthy economies** by creating jobs that provide sufficient income, increasing farm- and food-worker revenues and providing safe labor conditions. Small scale food producers, often neglected, must receive adequate support.

In many regions of Europe, centralization, and the loss of regional supply chain infrastructures (e.g., processing hubs, slaughter facilities) has made farmers ever more reliant on large buyers and has undermined the viability of small-scale farms and food businesses. Meanwhile, small-scale farmers face de facto exclusion from potentially lucrative public procurement contracts for reasons of volume, price, and process: small-scale producers struggle to compete with traders and large-scale economic players in terms of established processes, experience with tenders, working capital and access to finance.

In order to strengthen sustainability and diversity within food systems, short food distribution chains involving a limited number of operators committed to local economic development and social relationships should prevail, and small businesses should be given preference over “big food”, e.g. by facilitating their market access. Regional circuits keep added value within the region and allow **true and fair prices** for both (small-scale) farmers and consumers.

SLOW FOOD'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A STRONG SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS LAW

For too long, EU food policies have been made in silos. The Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy have focused on increasing productivity, driving the EU food system towards overproduction, overconsumption, overexploitation of fish populations, food waste, and dumping in third countries. At the same time, the social and environmental dimensions of the food system have been addressed in separate policy areas, with no overarching direction of travel nor consistency. This has resulted in policy incoherence, conflicting objectives and gaping loopholes.

The **food systems approach** outlined in the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy represents a promising move towards addressing these incoherences. The Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) law must be the first legislative medium to concretely translate these cross-cutting commitments into EU law. The EU must urgently adopt a comprehensive and consistent policy approach to bring all food system sectors and players, from production to consumption, within a coherent framework tracing the path to sustainability for the whole EU food system.

Slow Food recommends that the EU Sustainable Food Systems law follow the 7 following priorities:

1 A food systems approach

The SFS law must promote a true transition by taking a **"food systems approach"** that entails addressing the interconnections between different policy areas including food production, processing, distribution, and consumption, within and outside the EU, recognizing that these are all parts of a complex food system which must be governed holistically.

A food systems approach is needed for the EU to ensure **policy consistency*** between different sectoral food-related policies, to develop policies that reconcile the multiple aspects of sustainability, that minimize trade-offs and that deliver "co-benefits" by tackling multiple goals simultaneously such as protecting biodiversity, ensuring fair incomes for farmers, and promoting healthy diets.

To this end, the SFS law must act as **high-level framework law**, that lays down an overarching set of definitions, guiding principles and objectives (including time-bound quantitative targets) for EU food systems, and promotes policy consistency by binding all existing and new food- and farming-related policies together, including the Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy, environmental and climate policies, health policies, cultural policies, and trade policies, to align with these definitions, principles and objectives.

2 A clear vision for the transition of agri-food-systems to agroecology

The SFS law should have the **explicit objective of driving the transition towards diversified agroecological food systems**, based on farming agrobiodiversity, with lower dependency on external inputs, to stimulate social relationships and short supply chains, build long-term healthy agro-ecosystems and secure livelihoods.

To promote the development of agroecology, the SFS law must enable EU food policies to 1) support farmers in their transition to agroecological food production, and 2) stimulate demand for agroecological food, and 3) make agroecological food accessible to all Europeans.

3 A One Health approach

The SFS law must take a **One Health approach** which recognizes that the health of people, animals, plants and the planet are deeply interconnected, and must ensure that action is taken to provide healthy and sustainable diets for the entire population. These diets must be capable of satisfying the nutritional needs of all, while simultaneously ensuring that they have a low environmental and climate impact and positive effects on biodiversity⁹.

* Policy consistency is a principle in EU law, as laid down by art. 13.1 TEU and Art. 7 TFEU.

4 A justice-driven and rights-based approach

In order to ensure food justice and support equal participation, the SFS law should be designed to prioritize the needs of people, especially women, young people, indigenous people, and the most marginalized, over corporate interests. In addition, the crucial role of local citizen initiatives and in food systems transformation must be better recognized and supported.

In the face of the challenges imposed by the climatic, environmental, and geopolitical crises, it is essential that the new law takes a **human rights-based approach**, protecting and reinforcing people's substantial rights and securing long-term food security. The right to a healthy environment, including the ability of current and future generations to access healthy and sustainable food, has been recognized as a human right, at the global, EU and Member State level. Safeguarding and protecting the human right to healthy and sustainable food must become one of the core objectives of the new legislation, with the clear consequence that unsustainable food production practices must have no part in European food systems¹⁰.

In addition, the new law should guide by example by strengthening the fulfillment of procedural rights – such as procedural environmental rights protected by the Aarhus Convention – since these empower citizens and civil society to take part in the democratic governance of EU food systems. In this regard, it must contain specific provisions on rights to access information, public participation and access to judicial remedies.

5 An evidence-based and precautionary approach to innovation

The SFS law must be **evidence-based** and **leverage the traditional knowledge** generated and held by farmers, fishers, forest-dwellers, food processors, cooperatives, consumer groups, civil society movements, members of indigenous groups and other practitioners. This principle is still largely ignored in policy making today despite a growing appreciation of its importance for the sustainability of food systems and food security¹¹.

The law should also seek to prevent **conflicts of interest** and increase **transparency** in policy-making and implementation to avoid the capture of decision-

making processes by powerful lobbies, ensuring the transparent use of evidence.

Finally, the law must ensure that research and innovation in the food sector follow the **precautionary principle**, one that promotes responsible innovation by preventing purely 'technological fixes' for economic interests with high risks for the environment and for society. Research and innovation must instead focus on delivering the societal transition needed to empower food systems change, including through social innovation.

6 A participatory governance structure and robust monitoring

The transformation of food systems is not possible without transforming their governance, notably by **involving civil society** in the design, implementation and monitoring of the rules that determine the functioning of such food systems. Robust mechanisms for public participation should ensure that all players in the food system are involved and that the interests of consumers and agroecological producers are placed at the center of EU food policies. Involving stakeholders from the realms of science, small-scale production, and civil society in the elaboration of the new law could favor solutions that serve public interest; the participation of civil society would enable the European public to identify with a new EU policy that will have a major impact on people's everyday lives. It would help to win the acceptance and trust of the population in the context of the necessary transformation process. In addition, the crucial role of citizen initiatives and local levels of governance in food systems transformation must be better recognized and supported.

The law should create a **robust monitoring and evaluation framework** based on benchmarks, progress indicators and the latest scientific evidence. It must also include effective accountability and enforcement mechanisms to ensure the timely implementation of actions by all players concerned and secure progress towards the vision and targets pursued. Coordinated multi level action will entail a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities between EU institutions, Member States, regions and cities, and should encourage the creation of food policy councils at different levels of governance.



HOW CAN POLICY IMPROVE FOOD ENVIRONMENTS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE DIETS?



SET SUSTAINABLE STANDARDS FOR FOOD AND IT'S PACKAGING.



INTRODUCE LABELS THAT MAKE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES CLEAR AND ATTRACTIVE.



ENSURE THAT THE FOODS BEST ADVERTISED AND DISTRIBUTED ARE THOSE THAT ARE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE



IMPROVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT, SO THAT FOOD BOUGHT AND OFFERED IN SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS IS HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE



FOSTER LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS, TO ENSURE EASY ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD.



ESTABLISH FAIR FOOD PRICES AND ENSURE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE DIETS ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL.



CHECK AND IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS, TO ENSURE THE PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

7 Enabling food environments that make sustainable food choices the easiest and default option

The SFS law should drive the creation of **enabling food environments** to ensure that sustainable foods, beverages and meals that contribute to healthy diets are the most easily available, affordable, accessible, convenient, desirable and widely promoted¹². Fostering enabling food environments has the potential to significantly accelerate the transition to sustainable food consumption patterns by recognizing that the most effective and equitable way to change food behaviors is to change the structural factors that drive food choice.

The SFS law must create **clear responsibilities** and shift the burden from consumers onto larger and more powerful players, prioritizing binding measures rather than voluntary commitments. Because of the significant influence they exercise on food systems, agri-food businesses – especially those characterized by a higher concentration of power – should be required to step up their efforts to effectively contribute to sustainable food systems.

Local authorities should also be given responsibility and be supported in developing healthy and sustainable food environments, given their proximity to citizens and their direct influence over canteens in public settings, urban and neighborhood planning, infrastructure including regulations for restaurants and markets, alternative food distribution models, the regulation of advertising in the public space, and other areas.

- **SETTING SUSTAINABLE STANDARDS FOR FOOD AND ITS PACKAGING**

The food that is available to citizens must become increasingly healthy and sustainable. This should be done by establishing minimum sustainability criteria, for all food products produced in, and imported into the EU, gradually eliminating the least sustainable foods. To do so, it should first ensure a transparent dialogue between policy makers, scientists, producers, including small-scale producers, and citizens, regarding the definition of sustainability, the indicators used to assess it and their respective importance.

The SFS law should set minimum sustainability standards to ensure that food produced in and imported into the EU is good, clean and fair.

GOOD

Minimum standards should be set to favor diets that promote human health and respect the planet, favoring a wide variety of foods of plant origin, whole foods, and minimally processed foods, all produced locally using sustainable methods. Standards must also be set to ensure the safety and dignity of food producers and workers, including minimum wage and labor regulations, safety standards and enforcement mechanisms.

CLEAN

Minimum standards should be set to promote agroecological practices and to phase out industrial farming and those practices that are most damaging to the environment and biodiversity. Minimum standards should be set to, among other aims, drastically reduce the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers and antibiotics, ban the use of highly toxic pesticide, preventing food waste, and to promote proven solutions such as agroecology while preventing the use of “techno-fixes” such as new GMOs. Minimum standards should also apply to food packaging, wherever packaging is necessary. To ensure resilience, minimum requirements should be set to encourage the development of short supply chains and to promote locally produced food.

FAIR

Minimum standards must be set to ensure fair prices for consumers and food producers, as well as fair balance of power in the food system. Moreover, standards must be set to ensure the fair treatment of animals, for example by banning the use of cages, ensuring sustainable feeds, ending live animal exports out of the EU, and setting stricter rules for intra EU transport with the aim of eliminating factory farming.

- **INTRODUCING LABELS THAT MAKE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES CLEAR AND ATTRACTIVE**

Labeling is an important element of food environments, since consumers rely on it to make choices. However, the lack of a robust and transparent labeling system has led to a rapidly growing number of labels, preventing consumers from making conscious food choices and not properly rewarding food producers who work in a sustainable way. Additionally, due to weak legislation, greenwashing and misleading health and nutrition claims are prevalent, nudging consumers to purchase unhealthy and unsustainable food. To **empower citizens to make sustainable food choices, the EU should adopt a harmonized labeling framework**, applicable both to EU and imported products. This must be developed in a transparent way, independent of commercial interests, and must be science-based. The **evaluation of the sustainability of products must account for the methods of production, integrate a holistic approach to sustainability, and push for a transition to agroecology**, in line with the Farm to Fork Strategy targets such as those on organic foods, and the use of pesticide and fertilizers¹³.

It is important that the sustainability labeling framework does not undermine other widely recognized labels, such as the organic and FairTrade logos, or replace the explicit labeling of Genetically Modified Organisms or “New Genomic Techniques”, currently regulated under Directive 2001/18/EC, as per the European Court of Justice Ruling of 2018.

Finally, it is important for the sustainability labeling framework to ensure that no extra costs or administrative burden be placed on small-scale producers, with these instead shared fairly among food system players.

- **ENSURING THAT FOODS BEST ADVERTISED ARE THOSE THAT ARE HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE**

Food environments exert influences that operate not only at the time of individual choice, but long before that through exposure to food. Consumers are made aware of food many times a day in multiple ways: **advertising** represents a considerable exposure factor for adults, but also for children and young people. In addition to classic advertising, there are increasingly other, less obvious communication methods such as sponsorship and events marketing, and to a greatly increasing degree online methods and so-called “game advertising”. The food industry almost exclusively advertises unhealthy foods that contain a lot of sugar, fat or salt, favoring the development of obesity and cardiovascular diseases. Consumers are thus significantly more often exposed to advertisements for foods and beverages with an unfavorable nutritional balance than for those that contribute to healthy and sustainable diets. Scientific studies have shown that marketing for food in various media increases consumption. Advertising for fast food and snacks has a particularly strong influence. This is problematic because advertising combined with the availability of products change the social norm, i.e. the perception of what is perceived as “normal”, typical and acceptable.

The new legislation must clearly turn the tide by introducing comprehensive advertising restrictions on unhealthy foods, instead setting a course for the promotion of healthy and sustainable food.

It is important to note that the WHO includes advertising restrictions among the most important measures to be taken against the obesity epidemic. Since eating habits are formed in childhood and adolescence and then retained to a high degree in adulthood, marketing in media and formats that reach children must become a focus of the new legislation and should be restricted on the basis of the nutritional criteria provided by the World Health Organization (WHO)¹⁴.



- **IMPROVING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT SO THAT FOOD BOUGHT AND OFFERED IN SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS AND OTHER PUBLIC CANTEENS IS HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE**

Given the sheer volume of meals eaten in schools, hospitals and other public institutions every day in the EU, **public procurement rules**¹⁵ are an important opportunity for the SFS law to promote sustainable food. Public procurement can also contribute to durable changes in eating habits and preferences, particularly when combined with food education in schools.

Although regional and local authorities play a key role, the **EU SFS law must better support local authorities, as well as help steer the market towards sustainable options in favor of environmental, health and social objectives**. The SFS law should provide the basis and outline of an adequate governance system to uptake public procurement for healthy and sustainable food at all levels of governance, from EU to local level, reflecting national and regional specificities. The law should also urgently clarify the conflicting status quo in terms of local food procurement and find a balance between fair competition and fair food systems.

The SFS law should provide the framework for setting minimum mandatory criteria for public procurement and include targets to promote:



Examples of targets that public canteens should meet are further developed in the Food Policy Coalition “Manifesto for establishing minimum standards for Public Canteens across the EU”¹⁶.

- **FOSTERING LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS TO ENSURE EASY ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD**

As a part of food provision, in particular, the **SFS law must provide the means to develop alternative distribution systems** across Europe to increase and facilitate access to sustainable diets. This includes farmers’ markets and community-supported agriculture which provide numerous benefits : they support local communities and high-quality jobs, ensure healthy and sustainable diets by protecting biodiversity, they put consumers in direct contact with producers of fresh, local, seasonal foods, and create spaces and events to educate consumers of all ages, as well as producers and professionals in the food sector. The CAP must urgently be reoriented to support small-scale farmers but also to facilitate the establishment of small-scale processing facilities and mobile slaughterhouses, countering their alarming rate of closure in recent decades and maintaining and developing rural economies and communities. The CAP, being the main production-side legislation should fall under the remit of the SFS legal framework, in order to ensure that its objectives are aligned with the objectives of the latter to enable the shift towards sustainability. Having the production-side and consumption-side legislation under the same framework will increase policy coherence.

- **ESTABLISHING FAIR FOOD PRICES & ENSURING THAT HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE DIETS ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL**

Although awareness of the benefits of healthy and sustainable diets is more prevalent, **price constitutes a key dimension of the food environments** within which consumer choices are made, especially among low-income households. In 2020, 8.6% of Europeans faced “food poverty” and were unable to purchase a quality and nutritious meal every other day. Food affordability has become a growing source of concern for European citizens, due to rising food inflation following the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s war on Ukraine, and rising prices due to extreme weather events¹⁷.

Although recent research shows that adopting a healthy and sustainable diet is not necessarily more expensive than an average diet¹⁸, the **SFS law must include measures to ensure that everyone can access a sustainable diet whilst ensuring fair prices to food producers**. It should aim to shift towards true-cost accounting in order to align food prices with the true cost of food and to lower the relative price of the more sustainable food options, enforcing the “polluter pays” principle.

Other measures to adjust the price of food, at least in the short term, include the use of food taxation: increasing taxes on unhealthy, ultra-processed food while reducing or removing taxes on healthy and sustainable foods like fruit, vegetables, pulses and nuts. Social benefits could also be tied to local, sustainable food such as that sourced from farmers’ markets, to support vulnerable households in buying quality food.

- **PROMOTING FAIRER INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

The impact of trade policy on food systems is often underestimated, and **it is essential that the transition in the EU is not achieved at the expense of third countries**, in particular in the Global South, but rather contributes to supporting the development of sustainable food systems across the globe. Indeed, trade liberalization and the failure to introduce effective supply chain governance has allowed the global food industry to drive down prices and conditions in-line with the cheapest and least-regulated practices around the world. This is made worse by the ever-increasing market concentration of multinational agri-food industries, which gives them huge price-setting power.

The EU’s trade policy must be brought in line with the objectives of the Farm to Fork strategy and the principles and objectives of the SFS law. This means fundamentally rethinking EU trade policy, moving away from the current focus on ever-increasing imports and exports which are driving environmental degradation, human rights violations and animal suffering, as well as disrupting local food markets. Achieving sustainable, healthy and fair food systems in the EU and in partner countries must be an explicit objective of EU trade policy. Environmental and social policy, including animal welfare safeguards, should be binding and enforceable. **The SFS law should make sure that trade policies promote agroecology and support dignified living conditions and a fair income for farmers, supporting non-EU countries to strengthen the resilience of their own food systems**. The SFS law should require the introduction of binding ‘mirror measures’ in relevant EU legislation while taking due account of the situation of smallholder farmers in the Global South to ensure reciprocity of standards in importation and exportation. Liability mechanisms for traders importing raw agrifood products and seafood into the EU should also be strengthened by expanding corporate accountability instruments across food chain sectors.



A close-up photograph of several yellow pears, some of which are covered in small water droplets, suggesting freshness. The pears are arranged in a cluster, with some in sharp focus and others blurred in the background. The lighting is warm, highlighting the golden-yellow color of the fruit.

CONCLUSION

The future Sustainable Food Systems Legislative Framework proposal offers a unique opportunity to initiate an overarching Common Food Policy for the EU that would overcome the sectoral approach of current policies. The legislation should set out a clear and comprehensive vision of food sustainability and how to achieve it, and should provide an adequate and binding legal response to the multiple challenges that put long-term food security in the EU at risk. It is therefore imperative that the law integrates the most appropriate approaches that have already been formulated for the design of resilient, sustainable and healthy food systems by intergovernmental organizations, scientists and other experts, and that would enable all people in the EU to enjoy sustainable and healthy diets. As well as adopting a food systems-based approach, the EU should prioritize agroecology, human rights, a one-health and a precautionary approach, extensive civil society participation and robust monitoring. A state-of-the-art design requires the enabling of food environments to be placed at the center of the new legislation.

Without binding legislation and a clear vision of food system sustainability, the shortcomings of our food systems are likely to worsen for players all along the food chain, and opportunities for co-benefits in terms of health and environmental sustainability are likely to be missed. Europeans are now looking to the EU institutions to take the lead in securing good, clean, and fair food for all: for those who farm it, fish it, produce it, sell it, prepare it and eat it.

References

- 1 J. Rockstrom et al., "A safe operating space for humanity," *Nature* 461 (2009): 472–475.
- 2 BEUC report "One bite at a time: consumers and the transition to sustainable food" https://www.beuc.eu/publications/beuc-x-2020-042_consumers_and_the_transition_to_sustainable_food.pdf
- 3 IPES-Food report "Towards a Common Food Policy" https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/CFP_FullReport.pdf
- 4 Food Policy Coalition brief "Food Environments and EU Food policy" https://www.slowfood.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Food-Environments-for-SFS_EU-FPC.pdf
- 5 F. Galli et al., Study "A transition towards sustainable food systems in Europe Food policy blue print scoping study" (2018) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325248769_A_transition_towards_sustainable_food_systems_in_Europe_Food_policy_blue_print_scoping_study
- 6 Slow Food position paper on Food & Health https://www.slowfood.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/EN_position_cibo_e_salute_SHORT_OK-3.pdf
- 7 Slow Food and Europa Nostra joint policy brief "Food Is Culture" https://multimediar.k.slowfood.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/1_Policy_Brief.pdf
- 8 IDDRI study "An agroecological Europe in 2050: Multifunctional agriculture of healthy Eating" <https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/study/agroecological-europe-2050-multifunctional-agriculture-healthy-eating>
- 9 See endnote 6.
- 10 Client Earth briefing "Guaranteeing the access to healthy and sustainable food for present and future generations" <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/guaranteeing-the-access-to-healthy-and-sustainable-food-for-present-and-future-generations/>
- 11 The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2019/04/Traditional-Knowledge-background-FINAL.pdf>
- 12 Food Policy Coalition brief "Food Environments and EU Food policy" https://www.slowfood.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Food-Environments-for-SFS_EU-FPC.pdf
- 13 Joint Food Policy Coalition open letter on concerns over PEF methodology for agri-food products <https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Joint-letter-on-concerns-over-PEF-methodology-for-agri-food-products.-MAR-2022.pdf>
- 14 WHO Regional Office for Europe Nutrient Profile Model <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2023-6894-46660-68492>
- 15 Food Policy Coalition paper: "Sustainable Public Procurement of food: A goal within reach" https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sustainable-public-procurement-of-food-a-goal-within-reach_EU-FPC-website.pdf
- 16 Food Policy Coalition Manifesto for establishing minimum standards for public canteens across the EU https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Manifesto-for-establishing-Minimum-Standards-for-Public-Canteens-across-the-EU_final.pdf
- 17 European Parliamentary Research Service, Ensuring food security and the long-term resilience of EU agriculture <https://epthinktank.eu/2023/01/30/ensuring-food-security-and-the-long-term-resilience-of-eu-agriculture/#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20food%20inflation,the%20main%20contributor%20to%20inflation.>
- 18 BEUC Report "Sustainable food made easy: The consumer perspective on the EU Sustainable Food Systems Framework initiative" https://www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/BEUC-X-2022-108_Sustainable_Food_Made_Easy.pdf



ABOUT SLOW FOOD

Slow Food is a global movement acting together to ensure good, clean and fair food for all. We cultivate a global network of local communities who defend cultural and biological diversity, promote food education and advocate for more just and equitable food policy.

Slow Food has grown to involve millions of people in more than 160 countries.

www.slowfood.com



Funded by the European Union

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor CINEA can be held responsible for them.