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
AirClim - Air Pollution & Climate Secretariat
Akcj Demokracja
Alcohol Action Ireland
Anima International
Animal Equality Italia
Animal Protection Denmark
Aquatic Life Institute
Arbeiterkammer Österreich
ARCHE NOAH
Association Biom
Association Végétarienne de France
Associazione Consumatori Utenti
BioForum
Birdlife Europe & Central Asia
Birdlife Finland
Bond Beter Leefmilieu
Bos+
Buy Better Food Campaign
Cambiamento Agricoltura
Campaigns and Activism for Animals in the Industry (CAAI)
CECU
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CECU
CIDAMB
ClientEarth
Fundacja CultureLab
Fundacja Niech Żyją!
Fundacja NO.BA
Fundacja Noga w Łąpę. Razem idziemy przez świat
Fundacja Psubraty
GAIA
German Network of Food Policy Councils
Green REV Institute
Green Transition Denmark
IATP Europe
IFOAM Organics Europe
IPES-Food
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 Gardeners Sweden
natur&ëmwelt
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Netzwerk der Ernährungsräte e.V.
PAN Europe
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Polish Ecological Club in Krakow Gliwice
Polish Society for the Protection of Birds - BirdLife Poland
Pomona vzw
Reformaten
Rete Semi Rurai ETS
Safe Food Advocacy Europe
Seas at Risk
SEPANSO Aquitaine
Slovenian Coalition for Public Health, Environment and Tobacco Control
Slow Food
Solawi Isartal eG
Solidagro
Společnost pro zvířata
Stowarzyszenie BoMiasto
Sveriges Konsumerter
Swedish Horticultural Society
UFC-Que Choisir
Vienna Food Policy Council
Voedsel Anders
Voedselteams
Wegańska Inicjatywa Obywatelska
Wervel
West-Vlaamse Milieu federatie
World Animal Protection Nederland
World Food Institute e.V.
WWF EPO
ZERO – Associação Sistema Terrestrial
Sustentável
Zveza potrošnikov Slovenije
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