

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘Civil society’s contribution to the development of a comprehensive food policy in the EU’

(own-initiative opinion)

(2018/C 129/04)

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. The EESC reiterates its call for the development of a comprehensive food policy in the EU, with the aim of providing healthy diets from sustainable food systems, linking agriculture to nutrition and ecosystem services, and ensuring supply chains which safeguard public health for all sections of European society. A comprehensive EU food policy should improve coherence across food-related policy areas, restore the value of food and promote a long-term shift from food productivism and consumerism to food citizenship.

1.2. The current EU policy framework is not suited to making the transition to more sustainable food systems, in order to ensure the effective implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as of the right to food and the other human rights. While the current policy frameworks may have been successful in addressing individual problems, they do not provide the collective coherence needed to address the range of challenges that global and EU food systems are expected to face in the future. The EESC highlights that existing EU policy tools need to be realigned and harmonised in order to deliver environmentally, economically and socio-culturally sustainable food systems. The EESC also reiterates that a comprehensive food policy should be complementary to — not replace — a reshaped CAP ⁽¹⁾.

1.3. The EESC stresses the need to maintain a culture that values the nutritional and cultural importance of food, as well as its social and environmental impact. In this respect, the rich array of food and regional/local specialities available in the EU is a real asset and, as such, should be further valorised. A comprehensive food policy should foster an increased appreciation of food by consumers, promote food waste prevention and reduction, and help reintegrate and realign the price of food with other values. In particular, it should ensure fair prices for producers so that farming remains viable.

1.4. The EESC emphasises that all stakeholders across the food supply chain have a role to play in the development of a comprehensive framework, so as to achieve a fair distribution along the chain. No individual sector can do this alone. A comprehensive food policy should harness industry and retail power to accelerate the consumer shift towards sustainability. The transition to sustainable food systems also requires engaged consumers to become active food citizens. This also means

⁽¹⁾ EESC opinion on ‘A possible reshaping of the CAP’ (OJ C 288, 31.8.2017, p. 10).

that a comprehensive food policy must ensure that the European agri-food sector is able to sell at quality levels that maintain its position as the preferred choice for the vast majority of consumers.

1.5. The EESC acknowledges the increasing number of initiatives being implemented at regional and local level to support alternative food systems. These initiatives establish closer links between producers and consumers, create opportunities for local businesses and new jobs, and reconnect communities with their food. The EESC also highlights the role of cities in developing more integrated food policies. A comprehensive food policy should build upon, stimulate and develop common governance at all levels — local, regional, national and European. This would create an enabling framework for these initiatives to flourish, whatever their scale.

1.6. The EESC calls for a new smart system on sustainable food labelling. Policies have focused on nutrition and other health claims, but the EESC notes rising concerns about the lack of consumer information on the environmental and social impact of food. The food industry is aware that it can tackle environmental impacts up to a point, but ultimately consumers need to be engaged and information must be provided.

1.7. In order to support the establishment of a comprehensive framework bringing together EU food-related policies, the EESC proposes in the short/medium-term to create a cross-sectorial and interinstitutional task force, involving different Commission DGs and other EU institutions. This task force would be responsible for developing an Action Plan on Food Sustainability, with the aim of helping the EU implement food-related SDGs. The Action Plan should be developed through a participatory process involving stakeholders across the food supply chain, civil society and researchers. The EESC would suggest organising and developing a space for civil society to get involved and actively participate in this process.

1.8. In particular, the EESC recommends developing an EU sustainable food scoreboard, which would allow food systems challenges to be addressed through a multiyear approach, thereby promoting policy alignment at different levels of governance. The scoreboard would provide indicators and would thus encourage and monitor progress towards meeting targets set.

1.9. In the longer term, and depending on the task force's conclusions, the EESC encourages the Commission to explore the feasibility of creating a dedicated DG for Food, which would provide a clear centre for EU responsibilities on all food-related policies and be the source of regulation, legislation and enforcement as appropriate. Such a structure could be mirrored in all EU Member States with dedicated ministries on food.

2. Introduction

2.1. In its exploratory opinion on 'More sustainable food systems', prepared at the request of the Netherlands EU Presidency in 2016, the EESC called for a comprehensive food policy to promote a transition to more sustainable food systems and to ensure better coherence between food-related policy objectives (such as sustainable agricultural production, healthy diets, environmental protection, fairer trade relations, etc.). This opinion builds on its recommendations to further develop the rationale and the vision for a comprehensive framework.

2.2. In the meantime, the momentum for a more holistic approach to food policy has also grown. The UN has declared this to be the Decade of Action for Nutrition, acknowledging the need to reshape food systems to achieve healthier diets and improved nutrition. The High Level Panel of Experts of the Committee on World Food Security further emphasised this imperative in its September 2017 report ⁽²⁾. At EU level, the Committee of the Regions recently adopted an opinion calling for a comprehensive, sustainable EU food policy that links up different food-related policy areas. The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES Food) launched a 3-year participatory process with the aim of developing a vision for a common food policy by 2018, involving scientific groups, stakeholders, civil society organisations and policy makers. A wealth of cross-sectoral initiatives at national, regional and local level are already changing European food systems with the active participation of civil society.

⁽²⁾ HLPE, 2017. Nutrition and food systems.

2.3. The EESC believes that the implementation of the SDGs in Europe is key in the drive towards a comprehensive approach that encompasses different policy areas (agriculture, health, environment, trade, development, innovation, etc.) and governance levels (EU, national, local) and to achieving more sustainable food production and consumption patterns. The ongoing debate on the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is also a key opportunity to ensure coherence between a reshaped agricultural policy and other food-related policy objectives⁽³⁾.

2.4. Some Member States (e.g. Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden) are becoming increasingly active on food-related policies with regard to health, environment and sustainability. The EESC warns against a situation where a different approach in different Member States becomes detrimental to consumers and businesses. The EESC considers this as an additional reason to call for a comprehensive framework at EU level.

3. Diagnosis — what is not working under the current policy framework

3.1. Growing scientific evidence has emerged regarding food's impact on health, the environment and on society as a whole. The 'food world' which the CAP was created to address has become more complex. Europe has no shortages, a success that is due to the CAP and rising incomes as well as improved production methods in the agricultural sector. Food employment and value-adding has shifted from the land and sea to factories, the retail sector and food services. The health agenda has broadened from under-consumption; today, inappropriate diets due to social inequalities and 'new' food poverty still exist but are outweighed by mass-scale non-communicable disease. These include heart disease, strokes, diabetes and obesity. Cardiovascular disease (CVD) causes 1,8 million deaths in the EU each year, 37 % of all EU deaths⁽⁴⁾. In 2015, nearly 49 million people were living with CVD in the EU.

3.2. European social trends have also brought great change to foods, tastes and cuisines. Consumption patterns and lifestyles have changed since the CAP was created. A culinary transition has affected women in particular, since historically they took and often still take much responsibility for food in the home. Changes in food technology have had both positive and negative social effects. Choices may have improved but Europe's diverse and rich cultural heritage is sometimes weakened. Food companies' large marketing budgets have generally encouraged consumers to eat 'ultra-processed' foods. Industry figures show that Belgians, for example, consume two thirds of their calories from pre-processed, packaged foods — even more than the British⁽⁵⁾. Public health agencies are concerned about the excess consumption of processed foods high in salt, sugar and fats. These can be cheap, which acts as an incentive to people on low incomes, who already have worse than average health. Diet thus contributes to European social inequalities⁽⁶⁾. During and since the Great Recession, Europe has witnessed a growth of charitable food donations. The provision of such emergency food aid must not replace Europe tackling social inequalities which create diet-related ill health.

3.3. Food's impact on the environment has been documented and acknowledged. Climate change is a recognised threat, and the EU strongly backed the 2015 Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed in Paris. The EU has also ensured better environmental regulation and damage prevention, for instance through the Water Framework Directive. Nevertheless, European food tastes are driving consumption patterns which involve high levels of hidden or 'embedded' water usage, posing threats to Member States⁽⁷⁾, and requiring a more integrated approach to land, farming and water⁽⁸⁾. It is of concern, too, that Europe's soils are fragile. The EU Joint Research Centre's modelling suggests that soil erosion by water has affected 130 million ha of the surface area of the EU 27; nearly 20 % of the surface area has soil loss in excess of 10 tonnes/ha/year⁽⁹⁾. Biodiversity loss is marked on both land and sea, where stock diversity is reported to be

⁽³⁾ See footnote 1.

⁽⁴⁾ <http://www.ehnheart.org/cvd-statistics.html>

⁽⁵⁾ Euromonitor International, Passport Nutrition 2017.

⁽⁶⁾ Oxfam (2015) A Europe for the many, not the few.

⁽⁷⁾ E.g. Hoekstra & Mekonnen (2016).

⁽⁸⁾ OECD (2014).

⁽⁹⁾ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/soil-erosion-by-water-1/assessment>

under pressure⁽¹⁰⁾. Despite this, Member States continue to advise consumers to eat fish for nutritional reasons without being aware of the environmental consequences.

3.4. Economically, the last 60 years have been judged a success. Food is ubiquitous. The average proportion of household expenditure that goes on food has dropped from 30 % to 15 %. Consumer prices have decreased by the emergence of giant food retail chains. But now economists are asking whether food prices reflect the true cost of production, or whether they fail to reflect certain costs fully. The EESC notes with interest the FAO's ongoing work on full cost accounting of agricultural costs⁽¹¹⁾. Power imbalances in the food supply chain have also increased, leading to unfair trading practices and related consequences⁽¹²⁾ and the share of consumer price to farmers has decreased.

3.5. The tendency to overproduce has brought prices down but has also institutionalised food waste. Whereas consumers in low-income countries of the world waste an estimated 8 % of food, consumers in the EU waste around a third of what they buy. The EU-funded Fusions project estimates that 88 million tonnes of food are wasted annually in the EU, costing EUR 143 billion⁽¹³⁾. This cultural dimension to food waste is not fully addressed by the circular economy approach, or the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe, which are valuable for seeing food as a material entity, but fail to take account of its consumer or cultural value. A challenge for Europe is how to build a new concept of food citizenship around eating for sustainability.

3.6. Data and studies by both academics and the food industry have improved our understanding of how European food systems impact on society, the environment and health outcomes. Taken together, these suggest the need for a more integrated approach. While the current policy frameworks may have been successful in addressing individual problems, they do not provide the collective coherence needed to address the range of challenges that global and EU food systems are expected to face in the future. Food-related policies are largely developed in isolation from each other and often lack consistency. Policies at various governance levels are also disconnected from each other. One example which illustrates the need for a more integrated approach is antimicrobial resistance, which has spread through the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry and now threatens human health. The importance of an integrated food policy in relation to this issue was also highlighted by Commissioner Andriukaitis in a recent speech. Another example is the conflict between land use for food and land use for energy generation, housing and other pressures. Food waste, too, is partly an outcome of production efficiency gains; there is a constant and massive flow of food through the system. Appealing to rational consumer behaviour to resolve this does not work.

3.7. If the EU were 'reborn' today, it would create a comprehensive food policy that aims to create sustainable diets from sustainable food systems, linking agricultural production to nutrition and ecosystem services, and ensuring supply chains which safeguard public health for all sections of European society⁽¹⁴⁾. The policy challenge is how to engender the necessary change. Historically, EU policy has grown by a process of democratic modification, with more sudden change occurring due to crises, as happened with food safety in 2000, and the horsemeat scandal in 2013-2015.

4. Civil society's role in developing more sustainable food policies

4.1. The EESC notes that wide sections of European society recognise the new structural challenges to EU food governance. The EU could move from adapting policy and reacting to situations, to taking a proactive approach. The CoR sets important precedents in its recent opinion. The rise of a new interest in creating better food policy for EU towns and

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/fish-to-fork-a-need>

⁽¹¹⁾ www.fao.org/nr/sustainability

⁽¹²⁾ EESC opinion on 'Unfair business-to-business trading practices in the food supply chain' (OJ C 34, 2.2.2017, p. 130).

⁽¹³⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food_waste_en

⁽¹⁴⁾ Mason & Lang (2017). Sustainable Diets. Abingdon: Routledge.

cities should now be factored into rural concerns. Many European cities are engaged with actions through food policy councils, urban networks for sustainability and/or climate change action, and the WHO Healthy Cities programme. The signing of the 2015 Milan Urban Food Policy Pact reflects this interest.

4.2. Recently, various kinds of reorganisation of the food supply chain have occurred, with the aim of reconnecting producers and consumers and relocalising agricultural and food production. These include community-supported agriculture, short supply chains, alternative food networks, local farming systems and direct sales. Consumer cooperatives can also play a key role by ensuring a strong connection with the community as well as a social, educational and environmental focus. Public institutions have schemes which are also part of this process, e.g. through public procurement programmes for schools and hospitals encouraging the provision of local, organic food, as in Denmark and Malmö, Sweden. This fits the EU circular economy approach.

4.3. By establishing closer links between producers and consumers, more localised food systems and bottom-up initiatives could play an essential role in encouraging healthier and more sustainable food consumption. Civil society and local community involvement strengthens these connections, as may be seen in the many sustainable food initiatives in towns and cities across Europe. At the moment, however, EU-level policies are poorly equipped to learn from these experiments, let alone to support them when they are promising. A comprehensive food policy could therefore help both stimulate and develop common governance for these initiatives. Farm enterprises adapt to the market's demands, but are constrained by the nature of agricultural production; a shift in production systems takes time.

4.4. The food economy faces major technical, financial and social⁽¹⁵⁾ challenges that have been acknowledged by major investment programmes for innovation and technological progress. Europe has c. 289 000 food manufacturing companies, but 3 000 of these account for nearly half the EU market⁽¹⁶⁾. Studies suggest that resilient food systems need to maintain a mix of large and small farm enterprises. There are major fissures between Europe's largest food companies and the SME sector. These could be better integrated with social Europe. The digital economy offers opportunities for closer links between consumers and producers. Business welcomes progressive leadership on sustainability matters, and wants clear frameworks.

4.5. European citizens have a clear interest in ensuring that their food comes from sustainable sources. Labelling systems are not able to provide clarity simply because of the complexity of the issue. In a recent report prepared by Karl Falkenberg, it was suggested that the European food 'brand' should centre around sustainability, or 'living well and sharing fairly within the limits of the planet'⁽¹⁷⁾. This suggests social as much as environmental and economic emphasis. Some cultural issues are beyond the remit of European institutions, such as the tension between paid (in supply chains) and unpaid (in domestic kitchens) food work, but there are elements of the European food system which are central to the European concept of food (or 'brand'). Europe is famous for culinary and production diversity. This must not only be protected, but actively increased. The EU quality logo (PGI, PDO, TSG) system is useful, but only covers speciality food; it does not engage with the trends in mass food. Mr Falkenberg's suggestion that we should aspire to fairness surely should imply a 'New Deal' on wages and the fair treatment of migrant labour in EU food enterprises. These are sensitive but important issues through which a comprehensive food policy can provide practical support to social harmony in Europe.

4.6. A particular concern for parents and health agencies is the unequal financial investment in messages about food targeting children. WHO sees this as a priority issue because such a high proportion of these messages concern foods that are high in salt, sugar and fat⁽¹⁸⁾. With the shift from traditional to digital media forms, the case for a comprehensive

⁽¹⁵⁾ Freibauer, Mathijs et al (2011), 3rd SCAR report to EC.

⁽¹⁶⁾ <http://www.fooddrinkurope.eu/publication/data-trends-of-the-european-food-and-drink-industry-2016/>

⁽¹⁷⁾ Falkenberg K (2016). Sustainability Now! A European Vision for Sustainability. EPSC, issue 18, 20 July.

⁽¹⁸⁾ WHO European Region (2013) http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/191125/e96859.pdf

approach grows. An estimated US \$ 37 billion was spent on digital food advertising alone in Western Europe in 2016 ⁽¹⁹⁾. The EESC notes the recent call by consumers onto food and retail companies, asking them to stop using their brand mascots in advertising and marketing campaigns for foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar. In the absence of adequate action from industry, governments should consider introducing regulatory measures ⁽²⁰⁾.

4.7. The 50-year goal for EU food policy should be to promote the transition from food consumerism (characterised by waste) to food citizenship (characterised by care and responsibility). The transition to sustainable diets from sustainable food systems requires engaged consumers to become active food citizens. The EESC reiterates its proposal to launch a Europe-wide information and awareness-raising campaign on 'the value of food'. This will be necessary to ensure a long-term change in consumers' behaviour ⁽²¹⁾.

5. Vision — objectives and structure of a comprehensive food policy in the EU

5.1. Food policy is an overarching policy that organises and supports the framework of food systems, from primary production (farmers) through the production stage (processing) to consumption. It makes clear and overt what is often below the surface and covert. Because food features in so many areas of life, such as education, health, the environment, trade, social relations and culture, the value of having a comprehensive food policy is that society can clarify what it wants and what it can achieve from its food system. It connects what can otherwise too easily be disconnected and fragmented. The question of what we eat, how we eat and how we produce food today and at what cost has consequences for the future.

5.2. Food policy has a strong influence on the development of rural and urban areas. It creates jobs in all connected sectors such as agriculture and its technical infrastructure, food processing, transport, commerce, packaging, retailing and food service, etc. It affects the livelihoods of millions of EU citizens. The EU food manufacturing sector employs 4,25 million people; turns over EUR 1 098 billion; spends EUR 2,5 billion on research & development and has a surplus of EUR 25,2 billion on its trade in processed food ⁽²²⁾. Despite the economic significance of food to the EU economy, there is currently no EU food policy as such. Instead, food systems are shaped by a variety of distinct policy frameworks, as highlighted above.

5.3. A food policy fit for the 21st century must meet multiple criteria: food quality (such as taste, pleasure, appearance and authenticity); health (such as safety, nutrition, availability and knowledge); environment (such as CO₂, water, land use, soil, biodiversity, air quality and systemic resilience), social and cultural values (such as identity, equality of access, trust, choice and skills); sound economics (such as true competition and fair returns, decent jobs, fully internalised costs and reasonable, competitive prices); and good governance (such as democratic accountability, transparency, ethical processes and use of sound scientific evidence). All existing EU food-related policies can be viewed under these policy headings.

5.4. A comprehensive food policy must enhance resilient ecosystems and ensure that all stakeholders and participants in the food supply chain have a decent income both within and outside of the EU. Food prices do not reflect the full costs of production and health, environmental and social costs are mostly externalised. The pursuit of cheaper, more 'affordable' food must not short-change other features and effects of food production and consumption. A comprehensive food policy could help reintegrate and realign the price of food with other values.

5.5. A comprehensive food policy should bring existing and new policies together, with the ultimate objective of delivering sustainable food systems and healthy diets. This should not mean reinventing the wheel, by creating a completely new policy or appropriating new powers to the EU, as the aim is not to impose a single standard. Rather, it means adopting

⁽¹⁹⁾ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/237928/online-advertising-spending-in-western-europe/>

⁽²⁰⁾ Cartoon characters and food: just for fun? Position paper, BEUC, 2017.

⁽²¹⁾ See footnote 12.

⁽²²⁾ http://www.fooddrinkeurope.eu/uploads/publications_documents/Data_and_trends_Interactive_PDF_NEW.pdf

reforms at EU level to encourage new and more sustainable courses of action at all levels (local/municipal, regional, national and companies), as well as scaling up initiatives that are already taking place, thus providing more coherence. It means integrating measures at EU level with what can best be undertaken at other levels of governance. The case could be made for fiscal regimes that improve access to healthy diets through city planning and public procurement, thereby supporting local markets and employment.

5.6. A comprehensive food policy should also become a basis to end the unfair commercial practices in terms of dual and lower quality of products — namely the production and sales of foods of lower quality in different Member States despite the packaging being identical ⁽²³⁾.

5.7. To meet these goals, policy measures on both the supply and the demand side have to be coordinated. This means that the availability and affordability of food through sustainable food production must also be coordinated with increased access and empowerment of consumers to choose healthy and tasty diets. A combination of *legislative changes* to remove regulatory obstacles and provide fiscal incentives and *behavioural changes* driven by better information, education and awareness-raising of consumers and processors has to be developed. The main aim is to raise awareness of and support for the value of food at all levels and to support gradual but significant change. For example, salt reduction works best if it is done slowly but systematically, but there are no incentives for companies to reformulate their products.

5.8. On the supply side, for a comprehensive European food policy to be truly relevant for European consumers, it is essential that the food produced sustainably in the EU is competitive. This means that the European agri-food sector is able to deliver food for the consumers at prices that include extra costs for criteria such as sustainability, animal welfare, food safety and nutrition but also a fair return to the farmers, and at the same time maintains its position as the preferred choice for the vast majority of consumers.

5.9. The implementation of the SDGs provides a crucial framework for joint action, with the aim of feeding the world sustainably by 2030. Issues related to food and agriculture cut across the 17 SDGs. In particular, the WHO states that 12 of the SDGs require action in the area of nutrition. By its very nature, the implementation of the SDGs requires collaborative, holistic solutions involving different departments, ministries, sectors and the whole food supply chain. This offers great opportunities for EU leadership at continental level.

5.10. A comprehensive food policy should bring different approaches together with a view to implementing the SDGs and should incorporate existing multilevel and multisectoral governance to deliver an even more integrated policy-making process. Europe is developing positions on the different pillars of the food system, namely:

- Agriculture (a reshaped CAP ⁽²⁴⁾, accelerated development of sustainable production models, generation renewal, viable income for farmers, public goods for public money, animal welfare)
- Balanced territorial development/rural development (Cork 2.0 ⁽²⁵⁾)
- Sustainable processing (product reformulation)
- Circular economy ⁽²⁶⁾ (food waste, energy efficiency)
- Sustainable food consumption (food choices protecting health and the environment, leading role played by the retail sector)
- Social impact (fair distribution of wages and income, social protection)

⁽²³⁾ Results of the study by the University of Chemistry and Technology of Prague, 2015 <http://www.sehnalova.cz/soubory/rozdily-potravin/Prezentace.pdf>

⁽²⁴⁾ See footnote 1.

⁽²⁵⁾ EESC Opinion on 'From Cork 2.0 Declaration to concrete actions' (OJ C 345, 13.10.2017, p. 37).

⁽²⁶⁾ EESC Opinion on 'Circular Economy' (OJ C 264, 20.7.2016, p. 98).

- Cultural impact (regional/local identity)
- Health, nutrition (healthier diet/food safety)
- Environmental protection (soil ⁽²⁷⁾, biodiversity, water/air quality)
- Education (school education, value of food, how to cook, what is good food)
- Trade, including international trade (fairer trade practices in the food supply chain ⁽²⁸⁾, food sovereignty)
- Development (policy coherence for development).

5.11. This new comprehensive approach should be dynamic and involve stakeholders from across the food supply chain and civil society as a whole, ensuring accountable and transparent ‘food democracy’.

5.12. To summarise, a comprehensive food policy should be: 1. environmentally, socio-culturally and economically *sustainable*; 2. *integrated* across sectors and levels of governance; 3. *inclusive* of all areas of society; and 4. reinforce fair working conditions at all levels.

6. Roadmap — What steps are needed to achieve a comprehensive food policy?

6.1. Just as the founders of the Common Market in the 1950s saw food as being central to a better, more peaceful Europe, so today 6 decades later, the EESC highlights the need to begin the creating a more sustainable food system for Europe. The pressures are now well-known and have been evidenced. This will and must be tackled at local and Member State level. However, there is also a need for cross-European action.

6.2. The EESC suggests establishing a cross-sectorial and interinstitutional task force, involving different Commission DGs and other EU institutions, with the aim of developing an Action Plan on Food Sustainability, to help the EU implement food-related SDGs. The Action Plan should be developed through a participatory process involving stakeholders across the food supply chain, civil society and researchers.

6.3. The EESC sees an opportunity to organise and develop a space for civil society to get involved and actively participate in this process, building on the momentum created by the EESC’s expert hearings on this topic.

6.4. The JRC, DG Research and Member State research agencies are requested to develop an ‘EU sustainable food scoreboard’ to encourage and monitor progress towards meeting the targets set. A combination of new and old indicators will be required to incorporate and translate food-related SDGs and other international targets (such as for greenhouse gas emissions) into European settings.

6.5. The Commission, Parliament and Council are requested to explore the feasibility of creating a dedicated DG for Food, which would improve the coordination of tasks and responsibilities on all food-related policies, from common methodologies on lifecycle analysis to big food data and sustainable nutrition. This new DG would provide the necessary framework for prioritising food and be the source of regulation, legislation and enforcement as appropriate.

6.6. A new European Food Policy Council should be created. Some Member States already have such bodies (e.g. in the Netherlands and the Nordic Food Policy Lab). It would advise on the transitions which science suggests are needed to meet the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.

⁽²⁷⁾ EESC Opinion on ‘Agricultural soil use for sustainable food production and ecosystem services’, adopted on 18.10.2017 (not yet published in the Official Journal).

⁽²⁸⁾ See footnote 12.

6.7. The transition to sustainable European food systems requires that health, nutrition, environmental and economic advice be better integrated. The EESC supports the development of EU sustainable dietary guidelines, building on initiatives by Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and France to provide consumers and industry with clearer guidance on how to balance good nutrition with a lower environmental impact, and prevent false environmental and health claims, while factoring in cultural preferences. This should be reflected in a new smart system on sustainable food labelling.

Brussels, 6 December 2017.

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