Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'More sustainable food systems'
(exploratory opinion)
(2016/C 303/08)

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On 16 December 2015, the upcoming Netherlands presidency of the Council of the European Union decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on:

More sustainable food systems
(exploratory opinion).

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 11 May 2016.

At its 517th plenary session, held on 25 and 26 May 2016 (meeting of 26 May 2016), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 152 votes to 1 with 1 abstention.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 Recognising the urgent need to tackle the multiple economic, environmental and social consequences of food production and consumption, the EESC calls on the European Commission and Member States to develop a clear EU policy and implementation plan for building a sustainable, resilient, healthy, fair and climate-friendly food system, which encourages cooperation and mutual understanding among all stakeholders along the food supply chain. Better coherence and integration of food-related policy objectives and instruments (e.g. on agriculture, environment, health, climate, employment, etc.) must be ensured taking into account the three pillars of sustainability.

1.2 A transition to more sustainable food systems encompassing all stages from production to consumption is greatly needed — producers need to grow more food while reducing the environmental impact, while consumers must be encouraged to shift to nutritious and healthy diets with a lower carbon footprint. The EU should step up efforts to implement the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs), as they provide a crucial framework for joint action to feed the world sustainably by 2030.

1.3 The EESC acknowledges that no food production system alone will safely feed the planet, but a combination of different conventional, innovative and agro-ecological practices could help better address the environmental and climate implications of current food production systems. In particular, a mixture of precision agriculture, involving further development of ICT and satellite systems, and agro-ecology could complement conventional agriculture by providing a set of principles and practices intended to enhance the sustainability of farming systems, such as better use of biomass, improving storage and mobilisation of biomass, securing favourable soil conditions, fostering crop diversification and minimising the use of pesticides. Further promotion of closed agricultural models could lead to fossil-fuel-free agriculture. The reform of the CAP has introduced a combination of measures (greening, agri-environment-climate schemes, etc.), which can be considered as a step in the right direction.
1.4 A stable and reasonable income for all operators along the food supply chain is necessary to ensure sustainable and steady further investments in agri-environmental technologies and climate-friendly techniques.

1.5 Food waste prevention and reduction is a shared responsibility for all players in the food chain. The EESC welcomes the Commission's plan within the circular economy package to create a stakeholder platform to help frame the necessary measures and to share best practice on food waste prevention and reduction. The EESC calls on the Commission to investigate how the food use hierarchy is being applied in practice in the Member States, including with regard to economic incentives that might provide mixed signals to businesses. Supporting the effective application of the waste hierarchy, the EESC also calls for a review of Regulation (EC) No 1069/2009 such that food not fit for human consumption can be used as animal feed where it is safe to do so.

1.6 Sustainable food choices must be promoted by increasing their availability and accessibility to consumers. The consumption of sustainable food products should be encouraged by creating a stronger market demand, via green public procurement or other approaches. The EESC calls on Member States to revise national dietary guidelines to reflect sustainability and to support food education in school curricula. The EU should also promote origin labelling, the development of labels that clearly convey the sustainability aspect of food products as well as EU-wide visual advertising campaigns for healthier food and diets.

1.7 EU policies, in conjunction with specific research and innovation programmes, combined with financial incentives to food producers, should:

— promote the gradual transition to fossil-fuel-free agriculture models,

— support a more efficient use of resources, including land, water and nutrients, across the whole production system.

1.8 A transition to sustainable food systems requires a comprehensive food policy, integrated with a broad-based bioeconomy strategy, not an agricultural policy alone. Rather than engage in a polarising debate, interdisciplinary thinking is needed, bringing together the DGs of the Commission, a wide range of ministries and institutions in the Member States, together with local and regional governments and stakeholders across food systems, to tackle the interconnected challenges highlighted in this opinion. The EESC hopes that the interdependence of food production and consumption will be recognised and that a suitable European policy approach including different private initiatives will be developed charting a course towards sustainability, health and resilience. However, the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy will also play an important role in the EU in the future.

2. Introduction

2.1 Acting upon the referral from the Netherlands presidency of the EU, the EESC is drawing up this opinion to highlight civil society's increasing concerns about the environmental, health, economic and social impact of food production and consumption, and the related challenges of feeding the earth's growing population in a resource-constrained world. Food is a central part of all our societies; is both dependent on, and affects, natural resources; has an impact on public health; and plays a pivotal role in the European economy, being the Union's biggest sector in terms of employment and contribution to GDP.
2.2 According to the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security, a sustainable food system is defined as ‘a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised’ (1). The transition to more resilient and sustainable food systems therefore concerns all of the interrelated and connected activities that go into producing, processing, transporting, storing, marketing and consuming food. The role of global consumption trends as a driver of the way food is produced and the types of food produced is also recognised.

2.3 The EESC will tackle the issue of sustainable food systems in a holistic manner and will mainly focus on the EU context, although the external implications will also be considered as the EU is the largest exporter and importer of agricultural and food products on the global stage.

2.4 A communication on sustainable food was expected in 2014, but was later withdrawn from the Commission’s work programme. The EU action plan for the circular economy of December 2015 took up some of these issues and included food waste reduction as a key priority, thus reflecting the commitment made by the EU and Member States in the context of the 2030 UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) to halve per capita food waste at retail and consumer level, and reduce food losses along production and supply chains (SDG 12.3).

3. Main challenges of current food systems

3.1 The UN International Resource Panel identifies food production as having the highest environmental impact of any sector in terms of resource use at global level (2) — however in the EU this is much lower. Food systems use many natural resources, including land, soil, water and phosphorus, as well as energy, for the production of nitrogen fertiliser, processing, packaging, transportation and refrigeration. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it also has an impact on the environment at the global level, including on biodiversity loss, deforestation, land degradation, water and air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. The continued loss of agricultural biodiversity at farm level remains a matter of serious concern (3). Globally, a majority of fisheries are fully or over-exploited. Managing all of these resources efficiently and sustainably is therefore necessary to ensure a continued supply of healthy and affordable food.

3.2 Globally, a third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted, representing up to 1,6 billion tonnes of food and generating 8 % of global greenhouse gas emissions (4). Producing food that will not be eaten contributes more than 20 % of global pressure on biodiversity and consumes close to 30 % of all of the world’s agricultural land.

3.3 Annually, around 100 million tonnes of food is wasted (5) in the EU, forecast to increase by 20 % by 2020 without preventive action. Food waste in Europe is generated across the supply chain, with a concentration at household level estimated at 46 % (6). It should be noted that the retail and manufacturing sectors have made significant efforts to improve food waste prevention and reduction over recent years. Efforts to enhance production and supply chain sustainability make little sense without emphatic action to reduce waste.

(2) http://www.unep.org/resourcepanel/Portals/24102/PDFs/PriorityProductsAndMaterials_Summary_EN.pdf
(4) FAO (2011): Global food losses and food waste.
(5) The UN definition of food loss and waste can be found at: http://thinkeat.save.org/index.php/be-informed/definition-of-food-loss-and-waste
3.4 Very little is currently known about food losses and food waste generation at farm level (7). Food losses and waste, for example, can be generated due to lack of modernisation in some farms, order cancellations and commodity price volatility, resulting in the ploughing under of crops when it is not economically viable to harvest (but at least this has a positive impact on the environment as it contributes to improve soil organic matter content) or dumping and composting of food that cannot be resold. Another significant challenge is, and will increasingly be, major climate change impacts on weather conditions, and outbreaks of possible diseases. If we factor in these impacts, there is a lot of what could be considered as food waste every year. Compared to the rest of the world, the EU has been very active in addressing this issue, and therefore should support the dissemination of its good practices and know-how in this field.

3.5 Food systems are one of the causes of climate change: they are also set to be significantly affected by it (8). Climate change will have consequences for the availability of basic natural resources (water, soil) leading to significant changes in conditions for food production and industrial production in some areas (9). Extreme climate conditions such as flooding, droughts, fires, and strong winds, as well as the further climate-related spread of plant and animal diseases, already affects food production and will do so even more in the future.

3.6 Undernourishment today coexists in the world with the effects of an overabundance of food in certain parts of the world. Some 795 million people go hungry, while the number of overweight/obese people has reached more than 1.4 billion adults globally, representing about 30% of the total adult population; while obesity-related health conditions are rising rapidly in both developing and developed countries (10). These figures show profound imbalances in the way that food is produced, distributed and consumed. Population growth, and a forecast 82% increase in global meat consumption by 2050, will exacerbate both problems (11). During the past 20 years, as countries around the world have experienced urbanisation and economic growth, a nutrition transition has occurred, changing the face of food production and consumption. Worldwide, eating patterns are shifting to more composite products, more meat and dairy, more sugar and drinks containing sugar (12). At the same time more people have a sedentary lifestyle contributing to a lack of physical activity.

3.7 Livestock plays an important and indispensable part in food systems, as a source of high quality protein and other nutrients such as vitamins and minerals. Livestock also plays a significant role in on-farm and regional nutrient cycles, and in protecting open and diversified countryside, permanent grassland and semi-natural habitats, as well as preserving biodiversity. It also provides people with income, assets and livelihoods. At the same time, the EU also has a lot of agricultural land that in practice is suitable only for livestock grazing. However, over the last 50 years we have seen a more than fourfold increase in global meat and egg production, and milk production has more than doubled. During the same period, there was just a twofold growth in the global human population (13). It should be noted that the composition of the demand has also changed and that the increase in meat, milk and egg production is linked to income increase, whereas the prices have remained low.

3.8 Taking into account plant-based food grown for humans, plant-based feeds grown for livestock, and plant-based food crops used for seeds and industrial purposes such as biofuels, the world currently produces one and a half times the food needed to feed today's population, likely enough to feed the 2050 population. However, current levels of global food waste, and the production of animal feed to sustain increasing meat consumption, create a demand for a significant increase in food production. In order to feed the world sustainably in 2050 and beyond, a combination of productivity and optimisation gains on existing agricultural land and fisheries that is compatible with the stability and quality of the environment, with workplace health and safety and with social justice, as well as a shift towards sustainable diets, and a sustained reduction in food loss and waste is needed.

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(13) FAOSTAT, 2015.
3.9 Increasing prices of agricultural products and agricultural inputs and price volatility over the past decade have been challenging food security and the robustness of the food system, while raising serious concerns for both consumers and producers. On the one hand, high end prices have not resulted in higher income for food producers, on the contrary, the reduction or stagnation of their income is exerting downward pressure on labour, threatening the income stability of all operators. On the other hand, the economic crisis has eroded the purchasing power of consumers. A stable and reasonable income for all operators along the food supply chain is necessary to ensure sustainable and steady further investments in agri-environmental technologies and climate-friendly techniques.

3.10 Recent developments in agricultural markets, especially the dairy sector, provide clear evidence of such potential imbalances, where the cause is not only oversupply in the market, but also politically-driven bans in previous export markets. Future stability will largely depend on the resistance of the supply base to shocks, of which climate change is the most prominent. Farm diversification, innovative financing, income insurance schemes and other innovative market management tools offering protection from climate or market turbulence should be strongly promoted by EU policies.

3.11 The social and redistribution effects of food prices need to be looked at from a producer’s as well as from a consumer’s perspective. Nowadays, many consumers cannot afford to pay for the highest quality food. Over recent years, the power relations in the food supply chain have changed, leading to a progressive concentration of food manufacturers and retailers in the market and thus to a shift in bargaining power, mostly to the advantage of the retail sector and to the detriment of primary producers. This issue will be addressed in a separate EESC opinion on ‘A fairer food supply chain’.

3.12 As the emphasis in world trade increasingly turns to bilateral and mega-regional negotiations in the absence of a conclusion of the WTO ‘Doha Round’, it is essential that environmental and climate implications, food quality and health standards, the wider sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) standards, as well as the production process (the ‘industrial ecosystem’ in which production takes place, working conditions, the cultural context of production and labour relations) are fully taken into account. For the EU, it is imperative that any relocation of food production to third countries must be avoided where this would be solely or mainly due to the legal basis for food production being not as demanding as that in the EU. EU policies have a key role to play globally in encouraging the safe and healthy production of food, and prohibiting the import of any foodstuffs where these do not meet SPS or European food safety standards.

3.13 For the last 140 years, producers’ cooperatives have clearly demonstrated that they are more resilient to turbulence in the agricultural markets and help avoid relocation of food production. Therefore, further, even stronger, sector- and region-orientated promotion of cooperation between producers and cooperatives, especially small ones, is vital. In particular, specific emphasis should be put on those sectors and regions where cooperation is low.

4. Key areas of intervention for a transition to more sustainable food systems

Promoting more resource-efficient and climate-resilient food production

4.1 Reducing the environmental impact of agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries, including greenhouse gas emissions, requires changes in the way food is produced. The adoption of more sustainable practices is needed to halt the depletion of natural resources, as well as to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. Several measures could benefit productivity while increasing environmental sustainability and resilience to climate change, such as increasing the diversity of plant and animal varieties, improving cattle through breeding, plant breeding, enhancing the functionality of agro-ecosystems and water management, promoting and applying research and innovation, optimising soil function, facilitating knowledge transfer and training, and promoting technological changes through investment support. Further development of EU satellite systems and big data centres should be promoted in order to facilitate early detection and prevention or preparedness for extreme weather conditions and different diseases. Precision farming should also be promoted.
4.2 Maintaining the family farm model in Europe is also essential and would require the promotion of generation renewal on the farm, to face an ageing population. This would have a positive impact on job creation in rural areas. It is also important to be able to maintain diversified agricultural production across all regions of the EU. Particular attention should be paid to disadvantaged farming regions. Different types of farms should be recognised and specific targeted tools should be put in place for this purpose.

4.3 In recent years, reorganisations of food supply chains have emerged with the aim of re-connecting producers and consumers and re-localising agricultural and food production. These include community-supported agriculture, short supply chains, alternative food networks, local farming systems and direct sales. Even if the sector is relatively small, it should be promoted further, as it has very positive impact related to the sale of fresh, quality, healthy, heritage food with both social and economic positive impacts. SMEs are also important contributors in this field. The specific role of urban municipalities should be emphasised, as the required infrastructure and appropriate investments should be put in place in urban areas in order to facilitate producers’ direct sales. Good private sector practices should also be encouraged, for example when such an infrastructure is created at the private initiative of local shopping centres.

4.4 To stimulate more resource-efficient food production, the reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) introduced a combination of measures, including mandatory greening, agri-environment schemes, and broad support from the Farm Advisory System and applied research, to address the challenges of food security, climate change, and sustainable management of natural resources, while looking after the countryside and keeping the rural economy alive. This can be considered an important step in the right direction; however its implementation both in terms of red tape and the gains involved could be further improved.

4.5 As regards the fishery chain, it is important to ensure the right balance between healthy and sustainable, as the consumption of fish is healthy, but excessive pressure on fisheries is often diametrically opposed to ecological sustainability. The reform of the Common Fisheries Policy achieved in 2013 should contribute to a more efficient use of fishing resources, in particular through the mandatory objective of a maximum sustainable yield set for all European fish stocks. Sustainable development of offshore and inland aquaculture models is also important.

Fostering prevention and reduction of food waste along the food supply chain

4.6 The ‘Circular economy’ package states the commitment of the EU and its Member States to meeting UN sustainable development goal target 12.3 of halving food waste by 2030. To support the delivery of this target, the food-use hierarchy should be a guiding principle in managing food resources, and economic incentives should support this in all relevant EU policies. This would avoid the current situation where it is often cheaper to landfill edible food than it is to prepare and deliver food to food banks.

4.7 Sustainable management of resources also requires increased efforts to re-use residual flows at the highest possible value. New research comparing the cost of food preparation for redistribution, for animal feed, for anaerobic digestion and for landfill in the EU28, would help to identify the role of economic incentives in the proper application of the EU waste hierarchy. Food donation from the hospitality and food service sectors remains challenging and legislation around it poorly understood. This is a key area where European guidance, widely circulated to hospitality businesses, would be particularly useful.

4.8 The ‘Circular economy’ package also identifies the need to clarify the current guidance around the use of food not fit for human consumption as animal feed. Robust legislation regulating new food waste sterilisation technologies at a centralised industrial level, could ensure the microbiological safety of animal feed while creating new jobs and investment opportunities and reaping the environmental benefits of more effective application of the waste hierarchy.
4.9 As consumer awareness and acceptance is crucial, the provision of teaching materials related to food, food sustainability, and food waste is sought to enhance the value of foodstuffs and to support systemic changes in behaviour. Modules for primary and secondary schools, universities, and specialised programmes in the farming, manufacturing and hospitality sectors, building on a wide range of good practices, are already available.

4.10 The EU has been proactive in fostering activities to reduce food waste for a number of years. The leading example of the EU in the delivery of target 12.3 will have a key role in the success of the target globally, for example through the dissemination of European good practices and know-how.

**Strengthening the link between food systems and climate change strategies**

4.11 The impact of climate change is felt on all dimensions of food security — not only on yields and crops but also on farmers’ health, the spread of pests and diseases, the loss of biodiversity, income instability, water quality, etc. Loss of arable land due to soil degradation and urbanisation of agricultural land is also a potential concern. Therefore, it is essential to maintain the priority of using land for food production. Institutions and the private sector play a crucial role in ensuring the resilience of food systems, e.g. by enhancing social protection schemes to reduce shocks for households and ensuring continuing investment in low carbon technologies in the agriculture and food sectors; improving crop diversification and the development of genetic resources; investing in resilient agricultural development, both in-farm and off-farm; and implementing systems to better manage risks related to climate change.

4.12 Bearing in mind the economic pillar of sustainability, the Commission and Member States have to consider both the mitigation and sequestration potential, while at the same time providing all means of financial support for implementation, and promoting innovative public-private partnership cooperation mechanisms. Additional indicators on agricultural productivity gains, existing land, diets, and food loss and waste would complete the picture of food systems’ impact on climate change.

**Promoting healthier and more sustainable diets**

4.13 A healthy food choice is often a sustainable choice (14), particularly within a balanced diet. For example, eating more seasonal, local and diverse plant-based foods is good both for health and the environment. A healthier eating pattern also reduces the risk of chronic diseases, the costs of healthcare and the loss of work productivity in the economy. Principles for developing healthy and sustainable dietary guidelines are needed, which can be considered by the Member States. Dietary and procurement guidelines have a direct impact on consumption where they are adopted by public institutions, such as schools and hospitals. It is also worth recognising the nutrition transition under way globally, and the EU’s role in providing a positive model on sustainable diets. A ‘flexitarian’ approach in reducing meat consumption, at least once a week, promoted for instance in The Netherlands, can be considered as a good example in this respect.

4.14 Initiatives such as the EU’s school food scheme which include nutrition counselling as well as the distribution of nutritious products contribute to more balanced diets. The Commission should invite Member States to stimulate healthy and sustainable consumption. EU-wide healthy food visual advertising campaigns should be promoted; this could also be a good way of increasing of local consumption during turbulence in the global markets.

4.15 As consumers have become more and more used to buy food products cheaply, the real value of food should be re-emphasised. Low-cost products do not take into account externalities, such as the costs related to water treatment. As mentioned above, food education is needed in schools, along with understanding of healthy dietary patterns and basic cooking skills that can support good health through home-prepared meals in line with nutrition recommendations as well as food waste reduction.

4.16 It is noted that the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has initiated an Agreement for Improvement of Food Composition with producer, retail, catering and hospitality sector associations, making products healthier, and enabling the healthy choice to be the easiest choice. This agreement includes ambitious targets on salt, saturated fat and calorie reductions in foodstuffs progressively to 2020, minimising noticeable changes in flavour profiles \(^{(15)}\). This opinion calls for the implementation of the EU framework for national initiatives on selected nutrients, namely the recently approved annex on added sugars.

4.17 Product development, market development and key partnership building can help to make healthier and sustainable choices both easy and attractive. Industry and civil society should investigate and seize opportunities to increase the consumption of seasonal and local fruit and vegetables and other products naturally rich in fibres such as wholegrain food or pulses. This year’s designation as UN International Year of Pulses is noted as a starting point.

4.18 Implementing a clear labelling system on the origin, means of production and nutritional value of food would facilitate consumers’ choices. Traceability is also very important both for food producers and for consumers, to ensure food safety. A single, easy to understand ‘Sustainable food’ label should be considered and its feasibility should be assessed by the Commission. More emphasis on technologies like mobile apps, and consumer displays in the retail sector, providing all the required information and full traceability should be further promoted.

**Developing the knowledge base and mobilising research and innovation**

4.19 Many of the challenges in addressing global food and nutrition security need the participation of the research community to generate knowledge, foster innovation, engage with the public and help to shape a more sustainable food system. Considerable funding has been made available for this purpose under the EU research and innovation programme Horizon 2020 and the former seventh framework programme. However, research on diets, food losses and waste were not adequately addressed and require increased efforts. The EESC strongly supports the Commission initiative for a long-term strategy for European agricultural research and innovation and also the most recent ambitious decision by DG RTD to develop a comprehensive strategy for an EU food research area, Europe can also promote sustainable nutritional transitions and food loss and waste reduction in other global regions through its Switch programme \(^{(16)}\).

4.20 The Milan Expo 2015 EU Scientific Steering Committee identified research challenges in seven broad areas and highlighted the importance of promoting systems approaches and investing in inter- and trans-disciplinary research. The setting-up of an International Panel on Food and Nutrition Security was also recommended and would be a clear step in encouraging an interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral approach.

\(^{(15)}\) Dutch Lower House 2014-2015, 32793, No 162.

\(^{(16)}\) http://www.switch-asia.eu
4.21 Research, innovation and development are the main drivers of the transition to a sustainable food system, in line with climate policy objectives. The EESC calls on the EU institutions and Member States to increase the funding for work in this field, and calls for a joint effort where findings are shared between the research communities, practitioners and other stakeholders. The European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) supported by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) has a crucial role in enhancing the cooperation and collaboration between various stakeholders and ensuring a stronger link between the practitioners and researchers. In addition, the multi-actors approach under Horizon 2020 is an important tool to ensure that farmers are key actors in the process. The key to successful implementation of innovation is to actively promote it via consultative and educational bodies to end-users across the food system as well as to actively involve end users in the research and innovation activities.

4.22 The EESC stresses that the use of new information and communications technologies (ICT) and existing Commission programmes such as Galileo and Copernicus for the agricultural sector are helping to improve sustainable production techniques for raw materials in the EU. The EESC calls for further research and development in the application of ICT in all areas of food production. These techniques are crucial to promote further precise and more resource-efficient food production techniques, early detection of disease, and climate disturbances and extreme weather conditions. This may in turn lead to less food losses in primary production. More research should also be directed to assessing the potential of innovative types of farming (such as urban farming) as well as to improving animal feed.

**Tackling animal and plant diseases to increase the robustness of the food system**

4.23 The spread of animal and plant pests and diseases, exacerbated by globalised trade and climate change, has a detrimental impact on food systems. Recent outbreaks of African swine fever or of *Xylella fastidiosa* affecting olive trees in southern Italy are just some examples of how plant and animal diseases can disrupt the food system and generate food losses. While having nearly the best early detection and prevention system in the world, the EU’s policy and legislative framework on animal and plant health could be further developed and reinforced with a stronger focus on crisis prevention, better surveillance and early detection, preparedness, and management, as well as on the identification and assessment of emerging or new risks both in the EU and outside the EU. A network of reference laboratories already exists for animal diseases, but not for plant diseases. Knowledge and research are the most important pillars for prevention. The EESC calls on the Commission and the Member States to be even more ambitious in urgently funding animal disease research centres and establishing plant disease reference labs. Early detection and prevention systems should also be reinforced, while ensuring that food producers and other operators (e.g. agricultural workers) are duly compensated for any losses, including for financial losses borne by farmers when trade restrictions are imposed in the public interest because of epidemic outbreaks. Furthermore, emphasis needs to be given to establishing more diverse farming systems which are more robust in terms of withstanding biotic stresses.

4.24 Research investment should concentrate on prevention and early detection, as treatment and eradication of an ongoing disease can be very costly and disruptive. Capacity-building and awareness-raising are essential, as is the transfer of knowledge from researchers to farmers and other operators. Knowledge transfer and cooperation with third countries are essential. The EU should provide soft law, guidance, and tools for better surveillance, while stricter import controls are also crucial. Tackling resistance to antibiotics is also essential, and an integrated approach combining human and veterinary healthcare should be adopted (‘One Health’ approach).

Brussels, 26 May 2016.

*The President of the European Economic and Social Committee*

Georges DASSIS