



THINK 2030

Paper summary

European food and agriculture in a new paradigm

Can global challenges like climate change be addressed through a farm to fork approach?

In 2018, in the context of the first Think2030 conference, we recognised that *"A major transformation of the EU food and agriculture sector is necessary and involves the development of coherent and synergistic policies; a new contract between farmers and society; appropriate governance; alongside new approaches to addressing consumption as well as production"*.

This statement was made in a different political and global landscape than we find ourselves in 2020. The European Green Deal (EGD) has been published, including its component strategies linked to the EU agri-food system, such as the Farm to Fork (F2F) and Biodiversity strategies, and in a context of necessary economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Full paper



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The impacts of the pandemic itself are far reaching, beyond the direct impact on health, society and the economy. There has been a renewed interest in a reconnection with local and domestic suppliers and markets, and correlations between human wellbeing and health, with resilience to disease and infection.

All of these factors have put the EU's agri-food system, the way we produce and consume, at the forefront of discussions around ensuring long-term economic, social and environmental resilience. But has this changed the response in policy and will it change implementation on the ground?

This updated Think2030 paper looks back at the recommendations made in 2018, to see whether they are still relevant today, if they have been addressed, and where greater coherence in policy development is still needed.

Transformation of the EU food and agriculture sector

There has been a welcome move to greater coherence in policy development under the EGD and F2F strategies, yet the governance mechanism to ensure such an approach works in practice remains lacking. Similarly, there is little to ensure or require Member States to programme environment and climate delivery into their CAP strategic plans (CSPs). **Our 2018 recommendations** are still important, specifically that:

- agriculture policy is used as a tool to achieve Europe's ambitions and is not seen as an end in itself. Therefore **alignment of agriculture plans to the EU's long-term strategies is essential** and **strong accountability and robust monitoring need to be put in place in addition to effective transparency rules around national CSP; and**
- **a transition away from CAP direct support towards multi-annual and results-based payments** combined with knowledge transfer, advice and innovation is possible, but relies on strong ambition from Member States, which remains a concern, as does **removing all environmental harmful subsidies under the future CAP.**

The greatest challenge on production is not understanding necessarily what to do (although there are some research gaps), but on encouraging and supporting Member States to internalise that sustainable food production and consumption are both essential components of food

system resilience. Taking such an approach has economic, social and environmental benefits that far outstrip those of the status quo.

Towards a legal framework for sustainable food systems

The F2F Strategy foresees a new legal framework for sustainable food systems as an overarching policy, with European Commission proposals due in 2023. This has the potential to support both the demand for and supply of agricultural commodities and to provide signals for more sustainable production. Yet the details of how this would work in practice are vague. Again, **our 2018 recommendations** should remain key considerations including:

- a **high-level food sustainability advisory board** to assess the coherence of new or amended EU law that affect our food system;
- the role of **citizens being actively involved in future policy making and monitoring**;
- the use of available (and new) tools to address consumption and measures to **rebalance the cost of food where sustainable products become cheaper and more convenient, compared to unsustainable ones**; and
- fiscal measures being allied with **greater education about our food and farming** decisions at all ages and in all sectors of society particularly through school curricula.

In particular, the new legal framework should initiate the development of Food Policy Strategic Plans that bring together different instruments backed by clear common objectives agreed at EU level, but driven by policymakers, food chain actors, civil society and citizens at regional level. These plans should work alongside the CAP to address consumption issues **ensuring a just transition in the agri-food sector, and specifically for consumers**, which is essential to the COVID-19 recovery response. Effective stakeholder and citizen engagement throughout the policy cycle is essential to give all interests a voice in how best to improve the availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy diets in their communities, and thus ensure political legitimacy and buy-in for change. Strong accountability and robust monitoring will also need to be put in place around all agriculture and food related spending under the EU Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and Recovery Plan.

Addressing consumption linked to production

The EGD and F2F Strategy have huge potential to enable EU policymakers and food chain actors to address the links between consumption and production in an integrated way. In particular there is a welcome recognition of the need for a

protein transition, specifically the reduction in consumption of livestock products, but this requires accompanying actions. This includes:

- securing clarity and agreement on the **safe operating space for livestock** (as we recommended in 2018); and
- additional measures that **support an attractive variety of sustainable protein and aid the further market uptake of existing plant-based alternatives.**

Strategic research and knowledge access are also essential ingredients in facilitating the transition towards sustainable food production and consumption. In particular:

- **Strategic research agendas should be developed to support technical, socio-economic, policy and governance solutions that contribute to food system transformation.** These will need to support farmers in addressing the impacts on the environment and climate, as well as benefiting productivity and farm economics; and
- Bottom-up, participatory and systems-focused research should encourage buy-in, as well as connect different parts of the agri-food system, across production and consumption spheres. **This will require significant resourcing and coordination at the EU and Member State level and should be seen as a key investment in the green recovery mechanism.**

THINK2030

Think2030 is an evidence-based, non-partisan platform of leading policy experts from European think tanks, civil society, the private sector, and local authorities. Find out more at Think2030.eu.



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