



EAPF'S POSITION ON THE EU FARM TO FORK STRATEGY

The Vital Role of Plant-based Foods in the Transition Towards Sustainable and Healthy Food Systems

Brussels, December 2020

The Farm to Fork Strategy provides the foundation of the new EU agri-food policy, and aims at **Accelerating the transition towards more sustainable and resilient food systems**, good for people and the planet. As part of the Strategy, the European Alliance for Plant-based Foods (EAPF) welcomes the EU's recognition of the environmental and health benefits of plant-based diets.

Plant-based foods play a vital role in enabling the transition towards sustainable and healthy food systems. The international scientific community widely acknowledges their importance for food security for a growing population, without depleting natural resources for future generations¹. The plant-based sector also contributes to the objective of the EU Recovery Plan, **Next Generation EU**, aiming to support economic recovery, modernise the farming sector, and accelerate the green transition. It is crucial for the EU to be a frontrunner for this global change to happen. EAPF thus calls for **strong leadership** from the European institutions in supporting plant-based foods through concrete actions and create the conditions to promote plant-based diets.

EAPF calls on the European Commission, the European Parliament and Member States in the Council of the EU to effectively enable the plant-based food sector to grow and contribute to tackling climate change, improving public health, and raising animal welfare. To do this, we need a comprehensive framework that fosters adequate market access, clear food information for consumers, and support to Research & Innovation (R&I).

¹ [IPCC Report 'Climate Change and Land'](#), August 2019.

[EAT Lancet Report 'Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT Lancet Commission on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems'](#), January 2019.



1. Sustainable food production and processing

Sustainable and resilient food systems start with **production and processing**. It is thus essential that the EU actively supports the transformation of our food systems from the farm to the shelves. To do this, EAPF advocates for:

- **Active support to low-carbon agriculture in Europe.** Agriculture makes a large contribution to the EU's carbon footprint, with almost 70% of the greenhouse gas emissions coming from animal agriculture. The way out of this paradigm: The EU should stimulate and better support farming activities that contribute to climate change mitigation, sustainable land use and biodiversity preservation.
- **Incentives for better resource efficiency.** Farmers and food business operators need to be encouraged to invest in the transition towards sustainable and healthy food systems. The EU should provide incentives for the adoption of more sustainable practices in agriculture and the food processing industry (e.g. higher water and energy efficiency). Agricultural schemes have been timid in that regard, thus far (e.g. Green Direct Payments under the CAP 2013-2020).
- **Support for growth and jobs in the plant-based value chain.** Plant-based foods currently represent 0.7% of the meat market and 2.5% of the dairy. Nonetheless, retail sales have been growing by almost 10% year on year between 2010 and 2020. The sector is projected to become a €7.5 billion market in the EU by 2025. This will sustain and boost economic growth and employment in the EU agri-food chain, creating new opportunities for crop farmers with better return on production. The EU needs to promote sectors that contributes to both the EU Green Deal and the EU recovery plan – Next Generation EU, which is focusing on the green transition. The plant-based sector also contributes to several environmental objectives of the new EU Taxonomy Regulation (i.e. 'climate change adaptation' and 'the transition to circular economy'). The EU should not only encourage investments in such value chains, but also help create the framework and business cases to attract investments.
- **A level playing field between plant- and animal-based foods.** The transition towards more plant-based food systems cannot occur without ensuring fair competition between the animal- and the plant-based sectors. The latter is currently at a disadvantage in terms of market access, pricing and taxation. This creates distortions: Many plant-based foods are less affordable than animal-based products for consumers despite their better environmental footprint. The EU should mobilise financial instruments and incentives that can restore the balance on the agri-food market. This



would contribute to greater availability of healthy food for consumers, while enhancing the livelihood of crop farmers. EAPF thus calls for **an integrated approach to agri-food, marketing and taxation policies** to overcome regulatory hurdles impacting low-carbon food systems.

2. Consumption: towards more sustainable and healthy diets

Our current western diets are neither sustainable nor healthy: consumption of plant-based foods is below the recommended intake, while that of animal-based foods often exceeds nutritional guidelines. Moving towards more sustainable consumption patterns requires a dietary shift where plant-based foods play a key role. For this transition, consumers need:

- **Accessibility to plant-based foods and education about their health and environmental benefits.** There are no changing habits without proper information and easy access to healthy foods. **Plant-based foods should be an integral part of the EU school scheme**, as well as of the **sustainability criteria for food procurement**. This could happen via, for instance, including plant-based alternatives to milk in school canteens or ensuring a minimum share of plant-based products in public caterings (e.g. in hospitals). It would allow consumers to access a diversified range of products, educating them about the benefits of plant-based foods. In addition, nutritional and environmental information about plant-based foods should be part of educational programmes from primary school to university (e.g. medical trainings, revision of national dietary guidelines to include plant-based foods).
- **Incentives that stimulate healthier and more sustainable consumption patterns.** Affordability of healthy foods is fundamental to encourage consumers to take up virtuous dietary habits. The Commission's intention to use tax incentives to drive the sustainable consumption – by also including the 'environmental price' of food products – is a good step forward. EAPF encourages the EU to go even further and apply reduced **VAT rates** to support plant-based foods.
- **Clarity when purchasing plant-based food products.** To help consumers choose sustainable diets, guidance on animal-based alternatives (dairy and meat) is needed first. This includes the EU explicitly authorising the use of widely known and understood denominations for plant-based foods such as 'burger' or 'steak', qualified with appropriate descriptions such as 'plant-based' or 'vegetarian', where necessary. Studies



have shown² that a majority of European consumers support using denominations in this way – as is currently standard practice. Rather than creating confusion, they contribute to informing consumers about what to expect from the product (e.g. texture, mode of consumption). EAPF stresses the importance of keeping this practice to ensure clarity.

- **Proper labelling to enable sustainable food choices.** Food labelling is an important tool to empower consumers to make more sustainable, conscious choices. We need to support consumers with a comprehensive understanding of the nutritional, social and environmental implications of food products. EAPF welcomes the Commission's intention to elaborate a sustainable food labelling framework and stresses the importance of educating consumers on the environmental impact of foods products.

3. *Research and Innovation*

Research is essential to drive innovation for healthier and more sustainable products allowing consumers to access high-quality and nutritious food. EAPF welcomes the Commission's commitment to allocate R&I funds to research on alternative protein sources – including plant, marine-based proteins and meat substitutes – under the upcoming funding programme Horizon Europe. EAPF believes that the EU should go even further into enabling innovation for sustainable, healthy and nutritious foods. There is great need for:

- **Investment in research on plant-based products for food consumption.** In order to pave the way for more sustainable and healthy diets, research should focus on alternative, plant-based products for food consumption. Promising areas for publicly funded research include: Characterizing plant proteins to assess their suitability for use as ingredients; developing techniques for making proteins more functional; improving methods of plant-based food manufacturing. Where possible, public funding should advance open-access research that is shared with the public and can unlock the potential of the entire plant-based food sector.
- **Expanding the scope of plant-based food research to different areas and funding programmes.** It would be limiting to confine research on plant-based foods to the agri-food area. **Plant-based foods should play an important role in other research areas**, as well. For instance, the prevention of non-communicable diseases, healthy lifestyles, environmental protection and climate change. At the same time, research on plant-

² [BEUC Report 'One Bite at a Time: Consumers and the Transition Towards Sustainable Food'](#), June 2020.



based foods should build and develop along different funding programmes, such as Horizon Europe and Food2030.

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The European Alliance for Plant-Based Foods (EAPF) brings together like-minded organisations in the plant-based value chain around a unique mission: To put plant-based foods at the heart of the transition towards more sustainable and healthy food systems. The Alliance represents companies and organisations supporting and promoting plant-based foods.