



Towards Predominantly Plant-based Food Systems Globally

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent the international community's plan to shape a more sustainable, healthy and fair world. Many challenges – from climate change to health threats and a growing world population – pressure our planet and our livelihoods. Our current, unsustainable food systems are a major driver of these hazards, and the UN Food Systems Summit will be an important opportunity to identify ambitious and bold actions to step up global efforts to deliver on the SDGs.

An effective, credible and long-lasting transformation of global food systems must involve a shift towards predominantly plant-based diets. These mainly consist of foods and food products made from vegetables, grains, pulses (including soy), nuts, fungi, algae. In fact, our current, animal-based consumption patterns – especially in developed countries – have dramatic environmental, health and social implications worldwide. They cannot be sustained in the face of a growing world population. If the global community is to meet the SDGs and turn the vision of a world without inequalities and environmental degradation into reality, a comprehensive shift towards plant-based diets is indispensable.

The European Alliance for Plant-Based Food (EAPF) calls on the international community and national governments **to make plant-based diets a central part of global and national strategies to develop more sustainable, healthy and equitable food systems, and to attain the UN Sustainable Development Goals.**

National and international actors must decide on ambitious actions to realise the positive impact of predominantly plant-based food systems on:

- **Sustainability.** Currently, global food systems are responsible for over a third of all man-made greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Increasing scientific evidence links overconsumption of dairy and meat products, especially in Western diets, to high use of natural resources: two-thirds of global agricultural land is used to raise livestock – a major emitter of GHGs – while one-third of freshwater is used to produce animal products. Plant-based products prove to be a much more sustainable option than their animal-based counterparts: for instance, a plant-based burger can generate up to 90% less CO₂ emissions than a beef burger, while the carbon footprints of plant-based margarine and drinks are smaller than those of butter and dairy milk, respectively 70% and 77% less than their animal-based counterparts. **Predominantly plant-based food systems are the only option if we want to feed a growing world population while preserving the environment** for future generations and supporting the achievement of:
 - SDG 12 “Responsible production and consumption”
 - SDG 13 “Climate action”
 - SDG 14 “Life under water”
 - SDG 15 “Life on land”
- **Health.** **Plant-based foods are at the heart of healthy and nutritious diets**, and can play a role in preventing many non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and type-2 diabetes. Because of their lower environmental footprint, predominantly plant-based diets would help reduce the health impacts of climate change, air pollution, water contamination, and other environmental events, which are associated with a higher risk of developing illnesses, such as inflammatory diseases and allergies. An increased consumption of plant-based foods – and a



consequent reduction of animal-based products – is also crucial to prevent future disease outbreaks of zoonotic nature, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Predominantly plant-based food systems are thus crucial for the achievement of SDG 3 “Good health and well-being”.

- **Social equity.** With the global population expected to reach 9 billion in 2050, the gap between rich and poor is likely to deepen: resources will become scarcer and population growth will mainly concern less developed areas of the world¹, increasing pressure on global ecosystems. The only way to halt this process is to opt for a sustainable development that moves away from the unsustainable lifestyle habits, largely ingrained in animal-based diets and that have characterised the developed world thus far. This would require action and cooperation from all countries worldwide. Given their environmental and health benefits, **predominantly plant-based food systems would allow fairer distribution of resources both socially and economically.** Moreover, the development of the plant-based food sector would open growth and employment opportunities across the global food production chain, supporting farmers in moving towards more sustainable agricultural practices. Thus, predominantly plant-based food systems directly support the achievement of:
 - SDG 1 “Eradicate Poverty”
 - SDG 2 “Zero Hunger”
 - SDG 6 “Clean Water and Sanitation”
 - SDG 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth”

Recommendations

There is urgency in transforming our food systems and making them fit for current and future challenges. The UN Food Systems Summit provides the stage to turn ideas into concrete actions to build a more sustainable, healthy and just world.

EAPF recommends the international community and national governments take the following actions for an effective shift towards predominantly plant-based food systems globally:

- **Integrating plant-based foods into public procurement** (e.g. plant-based options available in school canteens, hospitals etc) as well as in **national dietary guidelines**;
- Educating citizens about plant-based foods via **public campaigns**;
- Providing **transparent information** on the health and environmental impact of foods **through food labelling**, empowering consumers to make more sustainable food choices;
- Using **economic incentives** to facilitate access to plant-based products (e.g. reduced VAT rates);
- Developing food environments where **plant-based foods** are presented as the **sustainable choice** (e.g. in retail stores);
- Supporting farmers in moving towards more sustainable agricultural practices and crops (e.g. plant-protein crops) by **providing and/or redirecting incentives** (e.g. subsidies);
- Incentivising targeted **research and innovation** on plant-based foods, to develop products which are increasingly healthy, sustainable and tasty, able to meet evolving consumer demand.

¹ [Growing at a slower pace, world population is expected to reach 9.7 billion in 2050 and could peak at nearly 11 billion around 2100](#), UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, October 2019