

OPEN FOOD CONFERENCE SUMMARY REPORT

Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2024



**OPEN
FOOD
CONFERENCE**

COLOPHON

Composition

Flemish Government - Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries, Department of Economy, Science and Innovation, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office

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Open Food Conference

More than 650 registrations from 42 countries, over 170 speakers, 27 parallel sessions and 4 plenary sessions. These were the main ingredients for an open dialogue on food policy at the Open Food Conference initiated by the Flemish government, which took place in Leuven from March 11 to 13, 2024.

For three days, policymakers, scientists, farmers, experts and representatives of NGOs, international organisations and the food industry engaged in a discussion on sustainable food systems and food security, and had the opportunity to meet and discuss the different themes of a future food policy.

The international challenges around the transition to sustainable food systems are large and diverse. Translating these challenges to the national level and the regions was high on the agenda of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Organising the event was a joined undertaking: Flemish Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries, Flemish Department of Economy, Science and Innovation and Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office joined forces. Each represented a different angle on how to perceive the different challenges we are facing.

To ensure all visions and stakeholder groups were represented in the programme of the conference, we consulted the Flemish Food Coalition, to obtain ideas to shape the programme accordingly. This Coalition already had shown its relevance as a partner when formulating Flanders' Food Strategy through a bottom-up collaboration. Now, the Coalition served again as a sounding board to incorporate all stakeholders' views, including academics, NGOs, industry and consumer representative groups and other relevant policy domains from the Government of Flanders. We also consulted the Walloon and Brussels Region, the Federal Belgian Government and the European Commission to create synergies across policy levels.

Another important feature of the conference was the bottom-up approach to shape the programme. The thematic sessions were organised by partner organisations. These 24 organisations were selected by different backgrounds in expertise, and came from either the Flemish/Belgian, European or international level. This colourful group allowed the conference to bring a diverse programme with the right expert knowledge in the different topics.

The programme was an attempt to represent the complexity of the transition towards a sustainable food system to the extent that this is possible in only three days. There was a wide range of topics: from protein diversification, agroecology, research and innovation and transparent international supply chains to food inequality, the democratisation of food systems, the external dimension of EU policies, food environments and food literacy and human, animal and environmental health. And much more ...

For an overview of the programme, we'd like to refer to the [event website openfoodconference.eu](https://openfoodconference.eu). More about international efforts to transform food systems and the link with Flanders' Food Strategy you'll find on the [website of the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries](#). The pictures of the event are available on our [Flickr account](#). Last but not least: this summary report is a wrap up of the main results of the Open Food Conference, including links to the presentations and videos. Enjoy!

Sustainable food systems: transition and systemic approach (day 1)

Opening speech and plenary debate

Programme & speakers

Opening speech by Flemish Minister for Economy, Innovation, Work, Social Economy and Agriculture, Jo Brouns

Keynote by Timothy Searchinger, Senior Research Scholar at Princeton's Center for Policy Research on Energy and the Environment and Senior Fellow and Technical Director of the Food Program at the World Resources Institute

Debate on sustainable food systems: transition and systemic approach

- Elisabeth Hidén, Vice president of European Council for Young Farmers (CEJA) and dairy farmer (video message)
- Stefanos Fotiou, Director in the Office of Sustainable Development Goals in FAO and Head of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub
- Dirk Jacobs, Director General, FoodDrinkEurope
- John Bell, European Commission – Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (RTD)

Moderated by Natasha Foote

[Presentation, video](#)



Summary

Global land use demand for food, feed, wood, energy and urbanization is predicted to increase heavily by 2050 relative to the current situation. In a world with a fixed area of land that must store more carbon, it is key to increase land use efficiency both on the production and consumption side. We need to produce food more efficient, protect habitats, reduce consumption and restore nature, all at the same time.

Europe has been outsourcing agricultural production and its land use, creating a land use deficit that now has to be reduced. Europe should step away from energy crops, reverse its foreign carbon footprint, invest more in nature restoration (e.g. forests and peatlands) and use innovation to reduce emissions and pollution (e.g. new plant-based proteins). It's time for a new social compact for food. We need to produce more food in Europa while protecting nature. We need to be innovative to produce and consume food with fewer land use and emissions. We need every creative solution we can think of. Policy makers must install land use carbon accounting so that land's carbon opportunity costs are visible. And we need to invest far more resources to innovation in food and agriculture.

The Open Food Conference is well placed. Flanders is a region with fertile agricultural land and a knowledge centre for food production, influenced by so many cultures throughout history. The Open Food Conference is also well timed. Europe is standing at a crossroad and never was our food system so challenged as it is today. We need to create futureproof food systems, in open dialogue with all stakeholders, experts and with our feet on the ground. That's our responsibility. The Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture has to result in a common strategy for our food system in Europe.

Luckily there is no lack of ambition: everyone is now convinced that change is necessary and first small steps are taken. Legislation is being put into place. It's important we take our responsibility now, show leadership, create synergies and address the fundamental problems together. Therefore, a systemic approach is crucial. The European Farm to Fork Strategy and Flanders' Go4Food-strategy are important first steps on both the European and regional level.

The focus must be on the 'how to' realise all the ambitions. Financing is an important aspect, we have to restructure instruments and subsidies and put into place more coordination. A systemic approach also requires more coherence and coordination across disciplines, government domains, levels, and stakeholders, and also a more co-creative living lab approach in which farmers and other people on the field are also involved. Research and innovation show the different pathways to reach our ambitions. A mission focused on a sustainable food system could complement existing European research and innovation missions.

We need true prices, internalising hidden costs and creating more fairness in the food supply chain. We need to find a way to truly involve the consumer, to change consumer's behaviour for the better and to reduce overconsumption. We must increase young farmers' access to land, finances and skills. It's time to reconnect farmers and citizens, producers and consumers e.g. through food education in schools. To be able to make the sustainability transition, farmers need fair prices for their products.

Strategies for protein diversification

Programme & speakers

The need to increase Europe's protein sovereignty is now well-established. Achieving this will require long-term strategies for rebalancing and diversifying Europe's protein supply. During this panel discussion, best practices on government action for protein innovation were discussed, based on experiences from regional, national, and EU levels.

Partner: Good Food Institute

Speakers:

- Evelien Decuypere, Policy advisor, Government of Flanders – Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries
- Simone Eijnsink, Government of the Netherlands
- Koen Dillen, Head of Unit E.4, European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
- Marja-Liisa Meurice, EIT Food Leader of the Protein Diversification Think Tank

Moderated by Alex Holst, Good Food Institute

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

The world population is growing, meaning that we will need more food protein in the future. With the current protein sources alone, we cannot produce the required quantities in a sustainable way. Diversifying or protein sources is thus a necessity. Rather than discussing which protein sources are best, we should consider all available options.

Protein transition is a politically sensitive topic. The current events (farmers' protests) increase the polarization and could put pressure on the protein transition. In the Flemish case, the political sensitivity was dealt with by making protein diversification a positive theme. This was done through emphasizing the opportunities and making the theme co-owned by stakeholders. To emphasize the opportunities, no sanctions were tied to the targets developed, and developing actions for targets was used as a way to mobilize funds.

Also in the Dutch case, protein diversification was approached as an opportunity by focusing on the funding for innovation. Even for cultivated meat, farmers were involved and opportunities for specifically them were explored. As such, the resistance to the Dutch protein transition initiative was limited.

In short, the protein transition should be approached as a positive story. It has solutions in it for all kinds of problems, and for everybody. Emphasizing this is the way to get everybody on board. On the supply side, it will be key for policymakers to invest in public research and innovation that improves taste and texture and reduces the cost of alternative protein production. Another key element is ensuring affordability and accessibility for consumers by ensuring that the existing regulatory path to market is clear, efficient and science-based.

To speed up the protein transition, it is argued that we should look more at the consumption side of the food system. We should think more fork to farm, and less the other way round. Policymakers often don't dare to do this, because it is considered as interfering with consumers' free choice. But it will be necessary to achieve change. To address consumption, getting retailers and processors on board is key. These stakeholders often argue that they must follow consumers' choices. But these choices also depend on availability. In addition, the internalization of externalities should be addressed. True pricing is needed for consumers to make good choices.

Mapping food environments

Programme & speakers

Food environments shape the way we consume our food on a day-to-day basis. They play an important part in the transition towards a healthy and sustainable food system. But how exactly do food environments manifest themselves? How can we map different kinds of food environments and what can we do to make them more sustainable and healthy? And why is it important to do so?

Partners: Government of Flanders – Department of Environment & Spatial Development, Sciensano

Speakers:

- Jolien Plaete, Vlaams Instituut Gezond Leven vzw (Flanders Institute for Healthy Living)
- Alba Gil, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
- Stefanie Vandevijvere, Sciensano
- Sascha Gell, MCI Internationale Hochschule GmbH, Center for Social & Health Innovation, Innsbruck
- Peter Defranceschi, ICLEI
- Annik de Ruijter, Law Centre for Health and Life University of Amsterdam
- Caroline Costongs, EuroHealthNet

Moderated by Kristof Rubens, Flemish Department of Environment & Spatial Development

[Presentation](#)

Summary

If we want to steer our eating behaviour towards more healthy and environmentally responsible nutrition, a mix of strategies is needed. What we eat is not limited to knowledge, intention or personal responsibility; the context of consumption is very important as well.

The food environment is defined as a combination of the physical (e.g. availability), economic (e.g. affordability), political (e.g. marketing regulations), psychological (e.g. cognitive biases and heuristics) and socio-cultural (e.g. traditions, cultures, norms) contexts in which people engage with food. This leads the consumer to make

decisions on what, how much and how frequent food to buy. It is this environment that determines the possibilities and choices to follow a certain dietary pattern. There are different sub food environments, like for instance food swamps (abundance of unhealthy food options) and food deserts (lacking access to certain types of foods required for a healthy diet). To improve food environments, we need to know more about both objective and subjective (perceived) food environments.

Improving food environments is urgently needed. In Europe in 2022 almost 73 million people were at risk of poverty and one quarter of European kids are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Citizen science, a participatory research approach, can contribute to mapping food environments, both in a quantitative and qualitative way. Having both benefits and drawbacks, the cost-effectiveness depends on the approach being used. After ten years of mapping food environments in Flanders, a citizen science project has been launched in 2023, to involve citizens in researching what food different population groups buy, where and for what reasons, and how do they think this can be redirected towards a healthy and sustainable food pattern.

Cities can be powerful agents of change. They offer multiple, structural and behavioural levers to pull to transform food systems, like public procurement in local schools and hospitals or defining the food environments in school neighbourhoods. Many cities are experimenting. These cities take first, small steps, link actions to other policy goals, choose approaches that fit their context.

It is a challenge to empower cities to create better food environments. Action is needed on the issue of legal frameworks and instruments that cities and other decision makers can use to intervene in food environments. Higher policy levels need to empower cities by providing the legal and behavioural frameworks and tools needed to act. Europe can become a front runner in this field. We should be all working together to make this happen.

Food inequality: whole school food approach

Programme & speakers

The EU funded SchoolFood4Change project stands as a testament to the recognition of school meals as a potent force in combating child poverty.

In this session, the Belgian Child Rights Commissioner accentuated the pivotal role that school meals play as a catalyst in the ongoing battle against inequality. Further enriching the discourse, an expert from DG Employment delved into the European Child Guarantee, elucidating its role as a strategic instrument. Moreover, a comprehensive exploration of the Whole School Food Approach framework underscored the imperative to transcend the mere provision of nutritious school meals. Concluding remarks touched upon policy recommendations for a greater collaboration across EU policies and initiatives on social justice and food inequality.

Partner: SchoolFood4Change

Speakers:

- Sarah Meys, Children's Rights Commission Belgium
- Stefan Iszkowski, European Commission – DG Employment
- Amalia Ochoa, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability
- Eva Blaho, Truly Healthy School Program Slovakia
- Alberta Congeduti, Ecosistemi foundation
- Alisée Voisin - local manager Mermoz school area
- Julia Haas – City of Vienna
- Lore Sleeckx – student, Scholierenkoepel Belgium
- Katharina Beelen, Rikolto

Moderated by Natasha Foote

[Presentation](#)

Summary

With up to 25% of all European children at risk for poverty, a substantial amount of them hungry at school and almost one third that is overweight, schools are key intervention sites for battling inequality and promoting positive health behaviour. Each child has a basic right to have access to healthy school meals/nutrition. This can play an important role in reducing poverty and education inequality, relieving pressure on families and promoting healthy (eating) habits.

School meals are not only a valuable tool for public health intervention but they can also contribute to increased awareness about reducing food waste, climate change, children's rights, (public) health, (local) agri-food systems, education, social inclusion, nutrition, etc. In other words, school meals can help attain all sustainable development goals

The whole school approach can support a healthy food environment and emphasize the role of schools in making healthy food choices easier and raising awareness by involving all relevant stakeholders. Good practices are meant not to be stigmatizing and require a shared effort by the entire community with attention to quality, taste and context. This can even result in a more sustainable and efficient use of (agriculture) land by a redesign of the menu.

In the discussion, the urgent need for programs that target nutrition and health issues at school was linked to the raising child obesity on the one hand and food inequality / food insecurity for households on the other hand. For sustainability reasons local programs choose to reduce meat and to offer more pulses and vegetables instead. It's a good practice to involve children in the redesign of the menu. Should school meals be free? It depends on the local context. You could ask a low fee (1 to 4 euros), accessible for everybody, or a contribution depending on the parents' salary, but the latter represents an additional administrative burden for the schools. Crucial is that the system is not stigmatizing.

Agri-food industry system transition: towards a resilient, sustainable and digital agri-food ecosystem

Programme & speakers

This session was about the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices, which was one of the first deliverables of the Farm to Fork Strategy of the European Commission. It focused on the role of different stakeholders within the agri-food ecosystem to contribute to system change and transition. The speakers discussed their commitments and interlinkages as well as the challenges they face and the changing context they are working in.

Partner: European Commission – Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs

Speakers:

- Giacomo Mattinò – Head of Food, Retail and Health Unit, European Commission
- Monica Garcia Fernandez – Deputy Director of Public Affairs, Vall Companys Group
- Alexander Beck – Managing Board Member, Association of Organic Food Processors
- Fabrizio Fabbri – Food & Sustainability Policy Manager, EuroCoop
- Inge Arents – Managing Director, Flanders' Food

Moderated by Marie-Elisabeth Rusling, EIT Food

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

The EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices was drafted by stakeholders with the European Commission as facilitator. It is a voluntary initiative, aiming to bring together stakeholders to commit to achieving sustainability objectives. It is important to make the Code more known, especially to SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises). The Code forms an important step in engaging businesses to become more sustainable. However, a clear policy framework is also key.

The food system has certain specificities and has impacts on many different levels. Cooperation between different stakeholders in the value chain is an important way of driving the transition forward, and many SMEs are already leading the way.

To reconcile sustainability and profitability, frontrunners must be rewarded for their efforts. Social, ecological and other impacts should be reflected in the price of products. However, some sustainability practices, such as resource efficiency, can also help in lowering costs in the long run. Transparent communication towards consumers of sustainability efforts can change the demand side, further boosting good practices.

Ecological sustainability must go hand in hand with economic sustainability. New business models can be challenging, because they require new ways of thinking about business. SMEs who pioneer new business models can be inspirational examples for other companies.

Foresight and system transitions

Programme & speakers

This session brought together key stakeholders from various sectors to explore, understand, and reconcile the often conflicting imaginaries surrounding agriculture, food systems and sustainability. Stakeholder groups envision the future of food systems differently: from agroecology enthusiasts to proponents of high-tech solutions.

This session aimed to explore the critical role of policy makers in navigating these complex landscapes who need to align policy frameworks with these diverse socio-technical visions, recognizing the tensions arising from the competition for scarce resources among different socio-technical visions and paradigms and understanding the conflicts and identify potential avenues for collaboration and coexistence.

Partner: KU Leuven

Speakers:

- Derk Loorbach, DRIFT (research institute in the field of sustainability transitions)
- Olivier Mora, INRAE (Institut national de recherche pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et l'environnement)

Moderated by Erik Mathijs, Ines Cottignie & Hannelore De Schaepmeester; KU Leuven

[Presentation](#)

Summary

Transitioning to a new system is a significant challenge due to its scale, involving a regime change from one equilibrium to another, marked by chaos, non-linearity and disruption. This shift entails confronting the dominant paradigm and policy management embedded in cultural, economic, political and social norms. Using the X-curve, transitions progress from optimization through destabilization to building new solutions and phasing out old structures.

Ambitious goals like reducing pesticide use, curbing carbon emissions and achieving food security are crucial yet challenging. Foresight studies, such as 'European Pesticide-Free Agriculture in 2050' by INRAE, offer pathways to address such "wicked problems" by looking ahead and fostering creative thinking and resilience to achieve the desired objectives.

To have a truly transformative impact, foresight discussions must steer controversies related to transition towards a constructive way forward rather than getting mired in polarizing debates. The World Café initiative addressed this issue by gathering solutions for constructive transition approaches: the need for open communication and respectful and inclusive collaboration to navigate transition controversies effectively. It was stated that in these approaches hopeful narratives and shared values should be found, so that long term imaginaries are defined with concrete short-term actions. A need for subsidising incentives and connectors will also be crucial.

Microbial Proteins

Programme & speakers

Microbial protein is a highly promising alternative protein source that is rapidly gaining importance worldwide. The actual producers are bacteria, yeasts and fungi of which the whole biomass is used, or a purified protein is harvested. It is foreseen that microbial proteins will become a substantial part of our food and feed system in a circular bioeconomy. During this panel discussion the regulatory and investment hurdles were discussed based on experience from regional, national, European and international level.

Partner: The ProteInn Club

Speakers:

- Muriel Dewilde, Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant
- Geert Maesmans, Cargill, vice president of research and development
- Eric De Coninck, Arcelor Mittal
- Dirk Carrez, Biobased Industries Consortium
- Anna Handschuh, Future Affairs
- Hermes Sanctorum, Paleo
- Will van den Tweel, Those Vegan Cowboys and Food Fermentation Europe
- Nele Ameloot, UGent, The ProteInn Club

Moderated by Stef Denayer, Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant

[Presentation](#)

Summary

Today, a number of pioneer companies do already implement microbial fermentation for the production of proteins for food, feed and fine chemicals on a lab, demo or industrial scale.

Microbial proteins have a lot of potential not only for the further development of the bio-economy with a broad variety of interesting fermentation products but also to contribute to the implementation of the Green Deal and to support the transition towards a more sustainable agricultural production by producing proteins and all kind of fermentation products in a more sustainable way with a lower environmental impact that also contributes to the mitigation of the climate change.

However, the widely extended and multifaceted potential of this technique encounters many regulatory and investment hurdles. Obstacles are faced when building value chains based on this technological innovation for microbial proteins, related to the use of sustainable bioresources, the necessary investments to build production facilities, and the regulatory hurdles to put products on the market.

In order to develop this sector, it requires a stimulating environment and regulatory framework, funds and faster acceptance procedures with the aim to contribute to a more sustainable agriculture, the development of a green bioeconomy and climate mitigation.

Synergies in EU, national and regional food strategies

Programme & speakers

What are the expectations for a European, national and regional food system strategy and how can they better work together? These are two of the main questions this session attempted to answer. We dove into the main priorities a food system strategy should have based on the policy level, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how they can better collaborate and share best practices. These exchanges should be held beyond conferences such as these. This session hoped to give the Flanders' Food Strategy a direction on how to embed itself within a European framework and to create linkages towards initiatives of other Member States and regions.

Partner: Government of Flanders – Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries

Speakers:

- Luisella Ciani, European Food Forum
- Joke Schauvliege, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and Flemish Parliament
- Coline Questiaux, Good Food Brussels
- Kris Roels, Government of Flanders – Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries
- Angèle Liaigre, Cities Northern Netherlands EU Office, European Regions, Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN)

Moderated by Natasha Foote

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

There's a lot happening on the local and regional level in Europe, as evidenced by presentations of the Brussels and Flanders food strategies. Collaboration between different policy domains is vital to develop food policy, on all levels.

The local level plays an important role in legislation and as a link with citizens and local actors, and cities and municipalities should be able to connect with and learn from each other more. However, there's still progress to be made on better

synergies and collaboration between policy levels. Public procurement could be a powerful tool to foster system change, if the necessary legal changes are made.

Food legislation on the EU-level is too fragmented. There's a need for an overarching framework that allows for more experimentation and a multi-stakeholder platform for exchange on the EU level. The framework law would need a clear timeline and good monitoring, has to incorporate challenges of the local level and acknowledge that not one solution fits all, and would need to allow room for experimentation and testing. The elements that were in the initial draft were already a good starting point.

A couple of key messages for the European elections formulated in this panel were:

- We need a common framework.
- Keep the Green Deal, keep the ambition, and support farmers and work with them.
- Involve local and regional partners, and don't be afraid to make choices.
- Keep working on the EU food policy.

New plant-based protein value chains

Programme & speakers

Plant-based proteins play an ever-increasing role in human nutrition and, if responsibly produced, also have important climate, environmental and health benefits. The last decade, the food industry has increased the diversity and quantity of plant-based products in Europe. Also, more and more farmers are interested in cultivating protein crops for humans.

Nevertheless, Europe has a shortage of plant-based protein-sources which is filled by imports. To increase responsibly produced, domestic plant-based protein production, long term and consistent strategies and policies of enabling the protein value chain needs to be built or strengthened.

Both companies throughout the agri-food chain and policy makers across policy levels can apply different types of strategies. Every strategy or policy choice has its pros and cons. During this session, we explored the potential strategies taken by companies of the agri-food chain on the one hand, and of the policy makers on the other hand. Which elements/measures are crucial to create a plant protein value chain? What is missing today?

Partner: Government of Flanders – Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries

Speakers:

- Stefaan Deraeve, Executive chairman, La Vie Est Belle
- Cecilia McAleavey, Director of Sustainable Eating and Public Affairs, Oatly

Moderated by Evelien Decuypere, Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries

[Presentation](#)

Summary

To create more plant-based proteins there is a strong need for value creation in the food chain. Companies and policy can contribute significantly to this.

The inspiring examples of La Vie Est Belle and Oatly show how bringing a positive story on tasty food, with a company strategy explicitly built on the idea of change, are successful strategies to create value. Cooperation is a key element for success: the chain is made from farm to fork and requires involvement of several actors. Building trust between those actors around a shared vision is the first step.

The group discussion further added to a menu of ideas of what companies and policy makers can do. The most important elements for companies are their communication and marketing, the development of tasty quality products, partnerships, and a shared vision and mission within those partnerships. Policymakers should focus on fair pricing (e.g. through taxes), a level playing field in regulation, stimulate innovation and experiment, and public procurement to convince consumers. All strategies should be built upon objective information, coming from independent research.

Food losses - good circular practices in households

Programme & speakers

The reduction of food losses is a priority for Flanders and Europe. This session, in partnership with OVAM (public waste agency of Flanders) gave insights in the Flemish action plan on circular food losses 2021-2025. Good practices illustrated the steps forward and the challenges in reducing food losses in the residual waste from households. Different research projects and awareness campaigns are ongoing. This session showed lessons learned and the challenges.

Partner: OVAM

Speakers:

- Bartosz Zambrzycki, European Commission – Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
- Ann Braekevelt, OVAM (Public Waste Agency of Flanders)
- Bart Van Droogenbroeck, ILVO (Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)
- Tim Smits, KU Leuven
- Astrid Van Parys, Colruyt Group
- Elfriede Anthonissen, Vlaco

Moderated by Aminda Leigh

[Presentation](#)

Summary

Reduction of food waste is an important theme with a lot of dimensions: reduce impact on climate and environment, save money and resources, social distribution, respect for produce and producers.

Food waste should be looked at holistically, with all stakeholders, and ranging from prevention to waste management. It's the responsibility of all chain partners, from production to consumption, to take action to reduce food losses, to re-process food waste flows as food or valorise them with higher value in a circular way. The government can facilitate, bring actors together, monitor and set targets.

Exchanging effective measures and good practices on reduction of food loss at consumer level is crucial. Intermunicipal waste associations, local governments and retailers play a local key role in the prevention of food loss at household level. Consumers need practical tips and tricks, e.g. using shopping lists to avoid impulsive buying, understanding expiry dates, planning menus, rethinking portion sizes, storing food well, cooking with leftovers.

Information/awareness is not enough to change repetitive, automatic consumer behaviour. People have a positive attitude towards reducing food waste, but there is a gap between intention and behaviour. Nudging techniques can help to navigate consumers to make more sustainable choices. Changing behaviour of households on food loss asks more insights, research and time. Social norms are key. They are linked with three pillars: motivation (individual's willingness to act), ability (individual's skills or knowledge base related to the action) and opportunity (environmental or contextual mechanisms that enable action). The context can be different, e.g. at home or in public places, in well-known or new situations. Social norms are difficult to change, e.g. provide enough/too much food for your guests, emptying plates, role of parents.

It's not fair to point only at the individual consumer. There is a systemic problem in our food system about overproduction and overconsumption. There should be improvements in healthy and sustainable food environments and food literacy.

Site visit: TRANSfarm

[TRANSfarm](#) is the brand new pilot center for circular bio-economy at KU Leuven. It hosts upscale infrastructure to pilot lab scale research to a demonstration scale for researchers together with end-users.

In the animal facilities the focus is on sustainable animal production with functional feed trials, novel management approaches and striving for zero emissions in aquaculture, swine and poultry production. The Veglay food lab hosts plant based, additive free and only mildly raffinated processes in a food grade production environment. In the pilot hall, upscale infrastructure for biomass conversion – Biocon – and stand-alone hydrogen production – Solhyd – are located. And on their experimental fields they focus on multiple land use, protein shift, water and drought and biodiversity.

Reception with food market

On the first evening of the conference, participants gathered at the Faculty Club in Leuven for a network reception. Several caterers presented their experimental and innovative take on food.

- [Kriket](#) is a Brussels-based company that produces organic bars and granola using crickets.
- [Robin Food](#) saves food waste by turning it into delicious and healthy products, such as apple juice, tomato sauce and courgette jam, making nutritious food available to all.
- [Kris Heirbaut](#) grows on his farm micro-algae. Chlorella is a green freshwater alga with a deep vegetable flavour somewhat reminiscent of watercress or spinach. Heirbaut makes cheese, ice cream and chocolate out of it.
- [La Vie est Belle](#) produces delicious, high-quality vegetarian products close to the source, such as falafel, pea burger, sea salad and curry spread.
- [Kopje Zwam](#), an urban agriculture project in Bruges, grows oyster mushrooms on residual flows such as coffee grounds, and microgreens on compost. From oyster mushrooms they make plant-based food products, such as burgers, 'bitterballen' and vegan minced meat.



Healthy food within environmental limits (day 2)

Opening Speech and plenary debate

Programme & speakers

Opening speech by Flemish Minister for Welfare, Public Health and Family, Hilde Crevits

Key note by Raschad Al Khafaji, Director of FAO Liaison Office Brussels (FAOLOB)

Debate on healthy food within ecological borders

- Fabrice DeClerck, Director of Science, EAT
- Patrick ten Brink, Secretary General, European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
- Claire Bury, Deputy Director-General, European Commission - Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE)
- Tijs Boelens, farmer and member of Via Campesina

Moderated by Aminda Leigh

[Presentation](#)

Summary

We have entered the Anthropocene: mankind is having a planetary impact. Transforming the food system is necessary, all around the globe, because the challenges are massive and urgent. The way we produce and consume food is having an enormous impact on both our health and that of our planet. We can shift towards a more healthy diet with food produced within planetary boundaries and by doing so ensuring productivity and resilience of our food system in the long run.

Food strategies provide a compass, they give direction and introduce the systemic approach which is absolutely needed to address the challenges. We don't lack ambitions and laws are in place, solutions already exist and new ones are being developed, but we need to do better when it comes to implementation and financing. We have to mean it, otherwise the policies will be challenged by opposition or not survive external shocks. We have to step up our game.

There are clear focus areas, where policy action can have a big impact, like the food environment. We can leverage behavioural science to make the sustainable choice the default choice, not putting all responsibility on the shoulders of the consumer. We must focus on getting sustainable food in public procurement, which accounts for 14% of GDP in Europe (while the Common Agricultural Policy only accounts for 0.5% of GDP). We have an opportunity to rethink public funding, better aimed at nutritious food and public goods delivered by producers.

Our producers are of vital importance. Farmers and fishers feed the world, deliver public goods and is the only sector that is able to regenerate the planet. We need to revalue agriculture and food production in our society, policy and economy. We

need to put them in the heart of our food transition and strategy. We need to restore their hope and perspective on a better future, by delivering strong supporting policies, remuneration for their efforts in the transition, and give them public recognition.



Financial instruments: innovation financing the transition

Programme & speakers

Food system(s) transformation is a costly affair. How do we address the gap, which is estimated between 38 and 50 billion euros per year? As we all know, it takes more than what existing instruments can deliver to deliver on the badly needed, accelerated transformation of our food systems. How do we as Europeans plan to accelerate and create the space for more funding?

This session discussed existing financial instruments, their limits and new models, ventures, opportunities to fund the transformation of food systems.

Partner: European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) Food

Speakers:

- Michiel de Ruiter, Chairman Supervisory Board, EIT Food
- Adelaide Cracco, Head of Greentech Investments, European Investment Fund (EIF)
- Pawel Kaczmarek, Board member at Foundation Terra Nostra and CEO of Top Farms Wielkopolska and Jagrol Ltd.
- Lieven Van Waes, Belgian Presidency representative

Moderated by Natasha Foote

[Presentation](#)

Summary

The farmers' protests have highlighted the need to bridge the gap between the Green Deal with reality. There's a need to shift away from the top-down regulatory approach towards that of a value-chain approach which allows space for innovation (risk-taking) and the formulation of long-term goals. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are viewed as a way forward to foster disruptive innovation; multi-actor involvement could ensure innovation effectiveness.

Though in agreement with the core principles of the Green Deal, farmers find themselves in the increasingly contradictory dual role as a provider of economic and public goods. This dual role signifies a market failure; there's no remuneration for such public services despite the increase in expectations.

The European investment landscape in Climate & Agrifood tech continues to lag significantly compared to its Asian and North American counterparts. Action is needed to mobilise (private-public) capital into the agrifood sector.

Reimagining food literacy: leveraging consumer awareness of food environments for healthier and more sustainable food choices

Programme & speakers

This session inspired participants to re-imagine food literacy: to include awareness of food environments and become literate not only in nutrition and sustainability concepts but also in learning to "read" the context and understand what influences food decisions. A panel debated how choice architecture, as currently used in our food systems, often drives unhealthy food choices.

The event proposed ways to equip consumers with a better understanding of the critical role of food environments, how to mitigate their negative effects and how to co-design new environments together with government, civil society and private sector. The event also addressed the enabling food environment policies, actions and incentives required to make healthy foods from sustainable food systems the easy choice for consumers.

Partner: FAO

Speakers:

- Raschad Al Khafaji, Director of FAO Liaison Office Brussels (FAOLOB)
- Loes Neven, Innovation manager – senior expert nutrition, Flanders Institute for Healthy Living
- Hannah Nohlen, Behavioural Scientist, EU Policy Lab: Foresight, Design and Behavioural Insights, Joint Research Center, European Commission
- Emma Calvert, Senior Food Policy Officer, BEUC, the European Consumer's Organisation
- Andreas Thurner, member of the European and Social Committee (EESC)
- Vincent Thoen, Public Affairs manager, Delhaize
- Ana Islas Ramos, FAO Nutrition Officer

Moderated by Courtney Price, Lead for Behavioural Science, Office of Innovation, FAO

[Presentation](#)

Summary

Food behaviour is a complex phenomenon determined by many factors. The COM-B model for behaviour change cites capability (C), opportunity (O) and motivation (M) as three key factors capable of changing behaviour (B).

Many people want to eat responsibly, but there is a gap between intention and action. Education, awareness and economics influence food choices. In many cases, the food environment – physical, but also social, cultural, political and economic - doesn't help to make healthy and sustainable choices. Children are for example bombarded with marketing for junk food. The low price of unhealthy and not sustainable products make them also attractive, especially for people on a budget.

Food literacy can be improved by promoting easy, more accessible labels, such as the nutri-score, co-creative experiences offering the chance to learn about the frequently negative power of food environments and the measures people can take to guard against the unhealthy choices food environments sometimes promote. Binding rules for advertising for children are needed. More equitable and transparent pricing can help to make healthy and sustainable choices the easiest ones. A greater offer of nutritious plant-based products such as pulses has the potential to increase the demand. Every decision of every stakeholder in the food system has impact.

Sustainable food roots in healthy soils

Programme & speakers

Many agricultural soils in Europe are in an unhealthy state and subject to land degradation processes such as carbon and biodiversity loss, erosion and compaction. Several factors contribute to this, but some market demands, specifications of the agri-food industry, or even consumer preferences are pushing farmers toward unsustainable soil management practices. The central question is: how could alternative food chain approaches or regulatory systems (e.g. Corporate

Sustainability Reporting) contribute to enhancing soil quality and promoting climate-resilient soils?

Partners: ILVO (Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food), EJP Soil (European Joint Programme)

Speakers:

- Greet Ruyschaert, Senior Researcher soil management, ILVO
- Giulia Meloni, European Commission – Directorate-General for Research & Innovation
- Maira Dzelzkaleja Burmestre, Deputy Board Chairman, Latvian Farmers Parliament (Copa-Cogeca)
- Noémi Van Bogaert, Scientific advisor fvp house - the umbrella organisation of the Belgian potato, fruit and vegetable wholesale trade and processing industry

Moderated by Greet Riebbels, ILVO

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

The Research and Development and Innovation (RDI) sector of the European Commission is actively working on a legislative framework for sustainable food systems. The goal is to accelerate the transition to sustainable practices. The RDI funds the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' which aims to establish 100 living labs and lighthouses (exemplary farms) by 2030 to lead the EU's transition toward healthy soils.

Key factors for soil health include crop selection and crop rotation. Farmers know that healthy soil delivers expected yields and is essential for sustainable agriculture. However, achieving sustainability requires holistic consideration of farm types, better guidance, more flexibility (more results-based approach) and fewer penalties. Solutions include stable crop markets, the EU protein plan, equal animal husbandry development, increased investment in applied science, and practical knowledge transfer.

The food chain industry faces challenges due to climate change, higher food demand, labour shortages, and regulatory uncertainty. To address these, companies must conduct due diligence on supply chains. Raising awareness, funding research (e.g. new varieties, cultivars), certification chains and providing technical assistance can help farmers adopt good practices and improve soil health.

A constructive dialogue between the Commission, the farmers and the food chain industry is necessary to work towards a healthy soil.

Trade-offs and small steps: food security versus sustainable food transition

Programme & speakers

Due to recent events food security is high on the policy agenda, with many discussions emphasizing on the link with biodiversity and how it is used to the detriment of the transition and vice versa. This session focused on the trade-offs between food security and biodiversity, but more importantly, how they can actually be linked in a way that benefits social, ecological and economic development.

Partner: Government of Flanders – Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries

Speakers:

- Emilie Haspeslagh, Director sustainability at Ardo
- Tomaso Ferrando, Professor at University of Antwerp
- Federico Sgarbi, Senior policy advisor at IEEP (Institute for European Environmental Policy)
- Simon Kraemer, farmer and representative at European Alliance of Regenerative Agriculture
- Johannette Klapwijk, Former council member at IBMA (International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association) and General manager at Koppert Foundation

Moderated by Natasha Foote

[Presentation](#)

Summary

At the beginning of the current legislature food security was not an issue in Europe anymore. In a few years there has been a major shift due to a changed global geopolitical and economic setting. Food security is now back on the agenda. The sustainable development goal on ending hunger and malnutrition is out of reach and also in Europe more people are food insecure. FAO is calling to redouble global efforts to achieve food security.

There are three main ways to look at food security. The productivism paradigm puts food production central. The globalist approach focuses on trade and distribution. The systemic and right based approach adds accessibility to the discussion.

A comprehensive definition on food security is looking beyond production, taking into account availability, accessibility, utilisation, stability but also agency and sustainability. There does not have to be a trade-off between food security and food sustainability. They are intertwined and are not per se conflicting. It is desirable to meet both goals together. Let's take this into account in the strategic dialogue on agriculture. We have to focus more on helping farmers in the transition. To reduce food insecurity, we need to work more on reducing poverty, reducing food losses and waste, fair prices in the food supply chain and sustainable diets.

We must actually speed up the transition to sustainable agriculture. Climate change is already creating problems in the field today, with lower yields, threatening food

supplies for instance in the vegetable processing sector. We must look beyond crop resilience towards (eco)system resilience. Regenerative agriculture, combining knowledge of pioneering farmers from different production models with soil biodiversity science, can help increase the resilience of farmers and food production.

Both policy and the private sector have to support farmers in taking risks. They cannot do it alone. And we have to demonstrate the successful innovations, practices and alternatives towards the broader farming community (e.g. biocontrol solutions).

Raising the bar: public procurement's role in cultivating healthy, just and sustainable European food systems

Programme & speakers

Public food procurement is a great yet often overlooked mechanism for steering the transition towards healthy, inclusive and sustainable food systems.

The focus of the session was the potential of minimum sustainability standards to transition towards more inclusive, healthy, and sustainable food systems. More specifically, the session delved into the minimum standards for public food procurement (PFP) proposed by the EU Food Policy Coalition and progressively taken up by the European Commission (DG Sante) to ensure higher standards for healthy and sustainable food and support small-scale farmers all the while contributing significantly to climate change mitigation. Therefore, the session provided the public with an overview of the minimum sustainability standards for PFP as well as practical examples from around Europe showcasing the multiple benefits local governments can reap through their implementation.

Partner: ICLEI European Secretariat

Speakers:

- Vincent Demaison, Dordogne (France)
- Tamara Bruning and Daisy Schellinck, City of Ghent (Belgium)
- Orsolya Diófási-Kovács, Corvinus University of Budapest (Hungary)
- Moderated by Peter Defranceschi, ICLEI ES

[Presentation](#)

Summary

There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to (public) procurement strategies. Shaped by the interplay between the top-down and bottom-up processes, procurement strategies are the product of their environment.

To formulate one's strategy the operator needs to take into account the availability of infrastructure, analyse possible suppliers and the presence of culturally ingrained values.

Despite operating their own 'tailor-made' strategies a common operational basis is noticeable: the Short Supply Chain (SSC). It allows the operator to exert a greater degree of control on its suppliers, further emphasising its potential as a powerful lever to facilitate paradigm change.

Public procurement strategies are, however, subjected to regulatory frameworks (national and EU-level). Through a degree of interpretation, operators are able to exploit loopholes as a means to achieve their ambitions (more plant-based diets, delivery dates, specific requirements, etc.).

Three good practices in EU Member States:

- The Loi EgAlim in France sets minimum mandatory standards for public food procurement. However, the Dordogne region has developed its own approach to public procurement, unlocking its full potential. Dordogne works closely with local producers, offering technical and financial support. It has also invested in training for cooks, enabling them to prepare flavourful dishes using raw ingredients and whole animals. This approach helps prevent food waste and ensures better oversight of the supply chain, leading to higher animal welfare standards. Additionally, Dordogne has phased out disposable plastic tableware, improved food packaging and transportation, and introduced composting facilities. Sustainability efforts extend to producers outside the EU, with many products labelled as fair trade.
- The City of Budapest made efforts within the EU Project School Food 4 Change. In the methodology, importance was given to mapping supply chains, value chains, and various stakeholders. Crucial aspects were the regulatory environment, types of goods procured (food or services), procurement thresholds and funding. The consortium's criteria and targets included achieving 40% organic food, 25% regional ingredients and a 25% reduction in GHG emissions.
- Ghent's food strategy supports the public procurement strategy. The professionalization process of procurement included training, centres of expertise, reporting and the adoption of circular economy principles, ILO standards and fair trade. Ghent also focuses on employing disadvantaged individuals. The city has a protein shift strategy, develops shorter supply chains, and progresses monitoring through the partnership with the Coolfood Pledge.

Unlocking the potential of agroecology: from practice and movements to consistent policy developments in Belgium and the EU

Programme & speakers

The session on agroecology delved into the heart of sustainable farming practices, connecting the dots between on-ground experiences, scientific insights and crucial policy considerations, particularly within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Partners: Agroecology Europe and Voedsel Anders

Speakers:

- Ingrid Pauwels, Voedsel Anders (Flemish network for agroecology)
- Jennifer Nold, De Witte Beek (organic farmer in Flanders)
- Caroline Amrom, Sytra – Transformation of Food Systems
- Ruben Savels, University of Ghent

Moderated by Elena Ambühl, Agroecology Europe

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

Agroecology is an alternative paradigm for a more sustainable agricultural and food system. It is a holistic concept for which attention is growing, both in science, social movement, practices and on the policy level. Agroecology is based on 13 principles that combine the economic, ecological, social and political aspects that are all necessary to create the system change needed in the food system.

The inspiring story of a farmer shows how agroecological farmers choose resolutely to farm with nature and to reconnect with consumers. This reconnection is key in changing consumers beliefs about healthy diets and the true cost of food. Both ecosystem services and social efforts are integrated in agroecological farming models. However, this remains challenging because they are not rewarded by the market. The message is clear: to create the system change that is needed, actions from below can make the difference, thereby underlining the importance of grassroots initiatives in driving the agroecological movement.

A study on financial flows for agroecology in Wallonia provided valuable insights into the financial support required for agroecological practices. It shows how only 10% of the financial flows in Wallonia support agroecological transition. By analysing the financial flows contributing to agroecology (37%) in depth, it was found that measures often focus too much on technical issues, resulting in a low agroecological ambition. In conclusion: more budget (upscaling) is needed, as well as more ambition (ecologisation).

Policy and governance play a crucial role in unlocking the potential of agroecology. This implies recognising the existing asymmetries in power. In terms of transition theory, agroecological farming is a 'niche' in the current 'regime' food system. Niches lead the way to system change and should be encouraged to develop. Currently that is not the case for the agroecological niche. Policy measures of (amongst others) the CAP need to a move away from interventions that suppress, coopt and contain agroecology, and move towards more interventions that shield, nurture, release and anchor agroecology. This implies amongst others a reorientation of funding (e.g. farmer-based instead of area-based payments, ambitious sustainability targets, structural support to bottom-up agroecological organisations) and a removal of legislative obstacles.

True Policies for fair prices

Programme & speakers

Equitable pricing for agricultural products and services is imperative to furthering the sustainability of food production and achieving sustainable food systems. This session contemplated suitable policy instruments for fair prices in agriculture as 'takeaway messages' for policymakers at both the EU and Member States' levels. The recommendations of the Strategic Advisory Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (SALV) for a more active and broader socio-economic policy for agriculture served hereby as a starting point for reflection and the exchange of ideas on the topic of true policies for fair prices.

Questions addressed in this session included: how can the EU further strengthen and develop policy initiatives to improve the position of farmers in the food chain? How can trade and competition policy contribute to this goal? Can Flanders' Food Strategy offer inspiration for other Member States and for the European policy level, and what lessons can Flanders and Belgium learn from other Member States?

Partner: SALV (Flemish Strategic Advisory Council of Agriculture and Fisheries)

Opening remarks & scene setting

- Koen Carels - SALV
- Pieter De Graef - SALV
- Fabien Santini - European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development

Panel Discussion

- Fabien Santini - Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI)
- Pieter Verhelst - Boerenbond (Belgian Farmers' Union)
- Léna Girard - FoodDrinkEurope
- Camille Perrin - BEUC (European Consumer's Organisation)
- Anton Delbarre - EuroCommerce

Concluding remarks:

- Hendrik Vandamme - SALV

Moderated by Natasha Foote

[Presentation](#)

Summary

There are a lot of hidden costs throughout the production process of food (and feed). These costs should be equally shared between the actors in the food chain (from farmer to consumer, and all in between). Furthermore, fair pricing or rather the lack of fair pricing – should also be seen as a hidden cost to be taken into account when assessing true costs. In that sense, attention for a fair agricultural income should be integrally part of this debate.

Although there are already a lot of tools available, as foreseen by the European Commission, these tools – market and price transparency, collaboration in the value chain in producer organisations and interbranch organisations, guaranteeing fair trading behaviour – should be better aligned with each other to mutually reinforce their efficacy.

It is therefore important to gather more types of data to further build up market and price transparency, so that this can be instrumental for producer organisations and interbranch organisations. It is important to find a balance between providing information and the cost to gather this information.

The use of the exemption foreseen in article 210a of the Common organisation of agricultural markets (CMO) will hereby be important to make sure farmers are getting paid for their extra costs involved with higher sustainability levels.

Besides gathering data, it is also important to tackle unfair trade practices in the food chain (UTP) with the help of EU legislation.

Furthermore, it is necessary to maintain a level playing field in international trade whereby the rules for our own production systems are also imposed for imported goods (fair trade). Although there are already a lot of trade measures whereby an EU standard is set (like for hygiene rules, deforestation, etc.), this is not enough for the farmers and the consumers.

Pitfalls and opportunities in the science-policy interface

Programme & speakers

This session explored the challenges for evidence-based policymaking. First, a framework for understanding science-policy interfaces and their challenges was introduced. Second, a number of policy discussions and the role of science in these were presented by experts. From these cases, reflections on the role of science in policymaking were drawn.

Partner: Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO)

Introduction: Anna Verhoeve, ILVO

Discussion:

- Klaus Berend, Director for Food Safety, Sustainability and Innovation, European Commission - Directorate-General for Health and Food
- Edith Feskens, Wageningen University & Research (WUR)
- Els Van Pamel, researcher, ILVO
- Daniela Lüth, Policy Officer, European Commission - DG Research & Innovation

Moderated by Greet Riebbels, ILVO

[Presentation](#)

Summary

To achieve better evidence-based policymaking, we need to achieve a better functioning science-policy interface. Therefore, a number of issues have to be addressed.

First, we need to realize that *the* science-policy interface doesn't exist. The policy context and the research context are different in every field, and so is the science-policy interface. Second, scientists and policymakers have different expectations. Scientists can take up different roles: reporting on *what is* (fact finding), *what could be* (envisioning solutions), or *what should be* (normative propositions). These different roles are all valid, but scientists need to be transparent on their role. In turn, policymakers should be clear on their expectations. Third, all actors involved should acknowledge the validity of different perspectives on a problem. Different perspectives can be valid, and policymaking has a unique role in integrating these.

Should scientists take a servicing role (establishing facts) or an advocacy role? This is a false binary, and there is no single answer to this question. The panellists argued mostly in favour of a servicing role. Some believe science should also point out what can be, and thus help to imagine future trajectories. Therefore, scientists need to be clear on the role they take up in given project. What should be avoided at all costs, is that the credibility of science is put into question. This has happened for example in the case of ultra-processed foods, where scientists have taken both servicing and advocacy roles.

There is a balance to be sought between the time needed to obtain scientifically solid data and knowledge. In the example of ultra-processed foods, we cannot wait 50 years to take action, until the last uncertainties are removed. We need good dialogue to find the balance. One way of facilitating a good dialogue between policy and science is to have people with backgrounds in both worlds.

Personalised food

Programme & speakers

This session focused on the societal need to promote better health through a more balanced diet. The objective is to preventively address food-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes type II and malnutrition. The focus is both general (general public) as well as specific (various age groups, athletes, residents of care facilities, etc.).

The NuHCaS partnership (Nutrition Health Care System) brings stakeholders together and strengthens collaboration between the health sector, food sector, policy and research. The session presented the future perspectives of this network and learned from case studies abroad, e.g. in African countries.

Partner: NuHCaS (Nutrition Health Care System)

Speakers

- Marijke Van Moorhem, Jo Mons & Kim Doan Ngoc, Odisee, University of Applied Sciences
- Ellen Fierens, Flanders' Food (spearhead cluster and innovation platform for the Flemish agri-food industry)
- Catherine Malingreau, Wagralim (Walloon agri-food cluster)
- Carl Lachat, University of Ghent

Moderated by Aminda Leigh

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

The scientific evidence is clear: food can be very important in health promotion, disease prevention and treatment of disease. We know which diets are healthy, however, to this day, there exists a gap between what is served on our plate and what is recommended in food guidelines. To overcome this gap, we need to focus on food literacy.

This requires actions both at food systems level and on individual level. In the 'nutrition health system', the formation of professionals at both sides (food industry and health care) is a key element. We still have a long way to go. Systemic projects such as NuHCaS are very important first steps in a crucial challenge in the food system to address.

The strength of NuHCaS, a multi-sectoral collaboration from agri-food, health care, logistics, technology and others, is its emphasis on integrated care, practical connections between care providers and meal providers, and sharing of science-based knowledge. This integrated approach can effectively address individual dietary needs, e.g. nutrient-rich foods, customized smooth foods, improved intake of fruits and vegetables, and support for making healthier dietary choices.

During presentation and discussion, all participants stressed the need for more cooperation as building evidence-based knowledge requires considerable time and resources which makes joined initiatives a prerequisite. The session also introduced an international expansion of the NuHCaS partnership with 5 different countries committing to collaborate on a 'Smart Specialisation Strategy' (S3) on 'food for positive health impact'. Through this partnership, expertise can be collected and transferred across different relevant sectors such as the food industry and healthcare, covering various topics such as food environments, food literacy and the gut microbiome. The presented case study on supplementary foods for the health of pregnant woman in Africa further illustrated that to spend money well, a more stratified approach is needed.

Site visit: Bio-incubator Leuven

[Bio-incubator Leuven](#) is fully dedicated to biomedical life sciences and offers opportunities for both start-ups and established companies. Bio-incubator provides multifunctional office and lab space, as well as general and technical, logistical and environment-technical support, to R&D intensive life sciences companies with high growth potentials.

Three of these promising residents: [Fishway](#) produces novel ingredients for human and animal consumption from cells of cultivated fish. [Paleo](#) brews animal proteins by using yeast, through precision fermentation. The [Centre for Microbial and Plant Genetics](#) / [VIB](#), a research laboratory associated with KU Leuven and VIB, performs research on the interface of plant science, microbiology, genetics and molecular cell biology, and engages in applied projects in collaboration with industrial partners in the broad fields of medicine, food production and agriculture.



Site visit: Park Abbey Leuven

[Park Abbey](#) is a unique and special heritage site in Leuven, where historical heritage and vibrant activity meet flawlessly. Craft and agriculture were given a contemporary future here.

In Park Abbey, after all these centuries, people are still working, living, thinking and praying, but in the manner of today, in line with the motto 'tradition in renewal and renewal in tradition'. During each stop, our guide treats you to a delicious snack prepared with local, sustainable (abbey) products, as well as a refreshing drink, a taster of abbey beer and an apple juice made from apples from the abbey's orchard.



Resilient food economies while connecting farmers and consumers (day 3)

Opening speech and plenary debate

Programme & speakers

Opening speech by Kris Heirbaut, circular farm Heirbaut

Keynote by Alan Matthews, Professor Emeritus of European Agricultural Policy in the Department of Economics, Trinity College Dublin

Short presentation by Peter Strohschneider, Chairman of the Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture

Debate on resilient food economies while connecting farmers and consumers

- Peter Schmidt, President of the NAT section, Section for agriculture, rural development and the environment European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
- Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Director, European Commission – Directorate-general for Agriculture and Rural Development
- Lode Ceysens, President Boerenbond (Belgian Farmers Union), member of Copa-Cogeca
- Els Bedert, Director product-policy and sustainability, Eurocommerce

Moderated by Aminda Leigh

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

The European agricultural sector has transformed in the recent decades, making progress towards more productivity, sustainability and resilience. Towards the increasingly uncertain future, further change will be inevitable, we must take lessons from what has worked and adjust what hasn't, and integrate it more and more in a broader food system perspective, connecting agricultural policy with broader food policy.

For the agricultural sector, faced to make a transition, the only way out of the challenges is to go through. And this we must do together, reconnecting farmers, the other food chain actors and our citizens. Through dialogue, exchanging knowledge and working together in the field, we can depolarize the debate. Society has set high sustainability ambitions, but the level of support from policy and market, must increase equally. Technological innovation in agriculture is important, but at the same time we need nature-based solutions, peer-to-peer learning and facilitating legislation. The solutions exist, pioneers are showing the way, legislative barriers are on the agenda. Now we have to look how we can upscale it towards all farmers.

The [Strategic Dialogue on Agriculture](#) provides an opportunity to create a new political setting at EU level that goes beyond the false dichotomy between agriculture and nature, to support agriculture in its transition and to nurture Europe's next steps in food system policies.



Local food strategies for food system transformation

Programme & speakers

Local food strategies are crucial for sustainable food systems, and they rely on a coordinated approach across different levels of government. During this session, we looked how local food strategies work in Flemish cities like Ghent and Leuven. The City of Milan shared a document called the [Comparative Analysis of Existing Urban Food Policies](#), part of the Cleverfood project, which gives us a detailed look at how different levels of government influence urban food policies. We also explored how European Union policies can better support initiatives for integrated food policies.

Partner: Eurocities

Speakers:

- David Dessers, Deputy Mayor of Agriculture & Consumption, Climate & Sustainability and Mobility, City of Leuven
- Tine Heyse, Deputy Mayor for Climate, Environment and Housing, City of Ghent
- Dirk Van Gijsegem, Head of Division of Rural Development, Flemish Land Agency (VLM)
- Elisa Porreca, Food Policy Officer, City of Milan

- Pasquale Di Rubbo, Team Leader - DG Agriculture and Rural Development
- Unit on Policy Perspectives - European Commission

Moderated by Madeleine Coste, Head of Food, Eurocities

[Presentation](#)

Summary

If we want to rethink food systems, dealing challenges as climate change, the loss of biodiversity, food inequality and the rise of obesity, the basis should be the access of all citizens to sustainable and healthy food. Cities are nowadays leading in the transformation of food systems by developing local food strategies, setting ambitious targets about food production and consumption and monitoring them. Crucial for food strategies is policy coherence and a coordinated approach, which is for European cities facilitated by Eurocities.

To increase support for a food strategy, the strategy should be cocreated bottom-up, for example with a local food council, consisting of citizens, farmers and NGOs. Pillars of the strategy can be: access to 'good' food for everybody, support for short supply chains and innovative urban agriculture projects, reducing food waste and social distribution of food surpluses. As for the food production, good practices are using the opportunities of public land in or around the city, stimulating certain crops, models and techniques (e.g. agroecology, small-scale agriculture) and focusing on a fair income for farmers. Regarding the consumption, awareness for healthy and sustainable food should be increased by actions, campaigns and nudging techniques, such as public procurement of local and organic foods and offering inexpensive vegetarian school meals.

An integrated food policy is defined as the joining up of goals and policies related to food systems horizontally across governments, vertically between government levels, or inside and outside government actors to better align these efforts, reduce incoherence between them, and tackle food systems challenges more effectively. The amount of European cities developing food policy together with stakeholders and in a multilevel governance is increasing. The main goals of the Urban Agenda Food Partnership are better regulation, better funding and better knowledge about food policy. The idea of a specific EU platform, as for food waste, is suggested.

In the European rural development strategy, food policy is a component, with instruments as LEADER, accessible for smaller municipalities, and the Operational Groups including farmers and other stakeholders within EIP. The EU Farm to Fork Strategy is also an inspiring plan pleading for a more plant-based diet and a more sustainable food production, but the implementation lags behind. Local sustainable food landscapes can help to overcome the conflict between nature and agriculture.

In the discussion, the question raised about the importance of money and (legislative) power to change the food system. In our global economic system, profitability and free trade are very important issues. Monopolies on seeds and grains by multinationals are criticized by some of the participants. On the other hand internal market rules don't make it easy to favour 'local' food. The government should provide an enabling environment for the transformation of food systems aiming for diversity, resilience and inclusion within the system. Cooperation with all

concerned policy levels and areas is key for an integrated food policy. Local governments have the advantage that they have the boots on the ground, having a direct contact with the people and taking measures with a direct impact.

African and European food systems and the external impacts of food and climate policies

Programme & speakers

Leaders everywhere are developing and implementing policies for their food systems as they seek to (re)balance and improve food security, climate adaptation and resilience, equity and rural development.

These policies mainly target their domestic food systems; however, domestic food systems are like a pasta bowl: they are closely connected with food systems abroad, often dependent on critical imports or export chains. Policies can then, unintended or not, impact food systems abroad. And when one's policy does not align with what a partner envisions or carries costs, tensions can arise as well.

This dialogue seeks to make these opportunities and tensions more explicit and ask: Where are the options for cooperation and the areas of tension between the two continents regarding food systems? What are the governance and policy changes needed to align stronger and lower unintended consequences? What are the roles of support agencies, like FAO, in assisting such transformation? Are Africa and Europe drifting apart or sailing together more?

Partner: ECDPM (European Centre for Development Policy Management)

Speakers:

- Bitange Ndemo, Kenya's Ambassador to Belgium & EU and Professor of Entrepreneurship
- Andrea Alfieri, European Commission – Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)
- Adriana Opromolla, Advocacy lead at Alliance2015 Hub
- Daniel Adeniyi, Policy Officer at ECDPM

Moderated by Koen Dekeyser, ECDPM

[Presentation](#), [video](#)

Summary

A one-size-fits-all approach is not feasible; what works for the EU does not necessarily work for the African countries. The European agri-sector operates in a different reality (climatic, farm size, level of advancement) compared to its African counterpart, hence resulting in different challenges and priorities.

The EU's legislative rush has unintended consequences on third countries in terms of compliance, imposing additional constraints to the already fragile farming systems.

Developing countries do not always have the understanding nor the capacity to comply with these regulations. The EU should therefore do more in terms of capacity building.

The EU needs to be more aware of the issue of the sequencing of the (compliance) actions and the challenges it puts on the developing countries. The private sector needs to play a more active role in terms of due diligence; they are required to fulfil the due diligence expectations.

One health: putting an approach into action

Programme & speakers

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a stark reminder of the fact that our health is closely intertwined with the health of animals and the shared environment in which we live. The silent pandemic of untreatable infections caused by antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is another example of how animal health and the environment through direct contact between animals and humans and the food chain can threaten human health. A One Health approach is needed to sustainably balance and optimize the health of humans, animals and the environment.

Partners: WHO (World Health Organization) Regional Office for Europe; Leuven One Health (KU Leuven)

Speakers:

- Peter Sousa Hoejskov, Technical Officer - Food Safety & Zoonotic Diseases, WHO Regional Office for Europe
- Caroline Garvan, Senior Superintending Veterinary Inspector, Ireland
- Carlos Gonçalo das Neves, Chief Scientist, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
- Hein Imberechts, Project Manager at Strategy & External Positioning, Sciensano
- Els Goossens, Boerenbond - Belgian Farmers Union

Moderated by Robbert Boudewijns, Leuven One Health – the KU Leuven One Health institute & Kira Fortune, Division of Communicable Diseases and Environmental Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe

[Presentation](#)

Summary

Through the One Health approach multiple sectors, disciplines and communities are mobilized at varying levels of society to jointly tackle threats to health and ecosystems.

At the level of the UN, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) created a mechanism to strengthen multisectoral coordination. This Quadripartite alliance developed the One Health Joint Plan of Action 2022-2026 (OH JPA) and the Guide to implementing the OH JPA at national level, which offers a set

of tools, guidance and support mechanisms for countries, international partners and non-state actors to draw upon for their One Health planning and implementation.

At the EU level a Cross-agency Task Force on One Health has resulted in multiple joint programmes and projects. It's important to bring the regulatory actors closer to the scientific actors and vice versa. Being transdisciplinary, converging, and engaging communities is key in transforming practices. The recently finalised One Health European Joint Programme (OH-EJP), a partnership of 44 partners across Europe, has led to joint integrative projects in cross-sector settings and multiple joint research projects to advance science in the domain of foodborne zoonoses, antimicrobial resistance and emerging threats.

Ireland is successfully implementing the One Health approach. In 2021 a second National Action Plan was launched. Different ministries are working closely together and bring stakeholders together around the table. Research has shown that taking an enabling, social-ecological approach to AMR and addressing individual and interpersonal factors has led to more meaningful, long-term changes than restrictive measures alone. The aim of the Safefood project is to develop evidence-based behaviour change intervention recommendations using the Behaviour Change Wheel. The Irish One Health policy is aligned with the broader Irish food systems policy 'Food Vision 2030'.

Belgian farmers are aware of the need and are familiar with the One Health Approach. The National Animal and Plant Health Approach of the federal government is an intensive collaboration between all stakeholders. Every farmer contributes to a dedicated federal fund, which defines the goals on animal health. Prevention works (biosecurity, farm management, vaccination), but requires long term efforts. The National action plan on AMR led to a reduction in the sales of antibiotics for livestock of 58% in the last decade. Each farm now has the data and a benchmark on antibiotics use. Farmers' protests signal the need for a long-term holistic vision in which different societal challenges (e.g. One Health) are balanced and farmers' income can be secured.

Food democracy

Programme & speakers

This session focused on the importance of food democracy and of a comprehensive approach in achieving sustainable food systems, as well as ways to further strengthen the governance of the food policy process. A panel of experts and civil society actors discussed how to implement food democracy in the EU, with special attention to the role of Food Policy Councils.

Partner: European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

Speakers

- Tim Lang, City University London's Centre for Food Policy
- Almudena Garcia Sastre, FIAN EU and member of the EU Food Policy Coalition
- Harry Dalton, Generation Climate Europe
- Christian Jonet, Liège Food Belt

- Zoe Heuschkel, Representative of the national Network of German Food Policy Councils
- Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, European Commission – Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety– Farm to Fork Strategy unit

Moderated by Piroska Kallay, EESC , Rapporteur of the EESC opinion: [Towards a European Food Policy Council as a new governance model in the future EU Framework on Sustainable Food Systems](#)

[Presentation](#)

Summary

Food democracy is a term invented 30 years ago. With it, civil society gets a role and a voice in food policy. That is needed, because sustainable and secure food systems require democracy. That means that there should be democratic (public) control on how people are fed. In our current corporate model, this control over food is now in the hands of big companies that become the judging partners.

During the debate, actors representing the civil society pleaded for a legal framework for sustainable food systems. This framework should include:

- the right to food. In that way, citizens become political subjects when it comes to food, and are no longer limited to economic actors or consumers.
- a long-term vision with time-bound targets independent from political cycles. If not, we are restarting from zero at every new government.
- a multi-level governance that connects food policy councils across the territory, horizontally and vertically
- a territorial approach

The need for this territorial approach is illustrated by some concrete examples of food policy councils/networks, such as the Liège Food Belt in Belgium (Wallonia) and the national Network of German Food Policy Councils in Germany. They illustrate that a (European) legislative framework is crucial to be able to realize ideas on local levels.

The workshop concluded by highlighting that a more structured participation of civil society and food actors (e.g., through food policy councils/a European FPC) plays a key role in helping to achieve a just transition across the food supply chain, and that community-based Food Policy Councils aim to make "food democracy" a procedural guiding principle.

Quote: "We strongly believe that if we increase the equal participation of the general public and various food system stakeholders, democratic innovations such as Food Policy Councils will promote the quality and legitimacy of food policymaking."

Sustainable animal food production

Programme & speakers

The future role of animals in our food system is the subject of much debate these days. We asked ourselves what function animal husbandry has in a future food system where healthy food is available to all, but where the impact on the environment is minimal. And depending on the function, what would be the ideal shape and scale of animal production systems in the near future?

Partner: Government of Flanders – Department of Economy, Science and Innovation

Speakers

- Ana Granados Chapatte, vice-president Animal Task Force, EFFAB Director – Secretary General FABRE TP
- Stuart Reigeluth, Revolve Media-Pathways project
- Nele Lauwers, Boerenbond (Belgian Farmers' Union)
- Geoff Perrott, Arla Foods
- Luis Vivas-Alegre, European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
- Brigitte Misonne (European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development)

Moderated by Aminda Leigh

[Presentation](#)

Summary

The future role of animals in our food system leads to complex debates where there is no unique, simple solution. All speakers on this topic showed us the importance of the subject, but also that there is no 'one call for all'. But they all mentioned the crucial role of research and innovation (R&I) in improving sustainability.

Following elements were highlighted:

- Acknowledge that there is no 'one size fits all' but lots of diversity.
- We need to improve how we measure (quantify more, more indicators, continuous monitoring, improved tools and new tools).
- We have to scale up practices that already showed their success, e.g. by using data.
- We have to keep in mind that agriculture is part of the solution.
- We have to bring everybody, the whole society, on board.
- We need supportive legislation on EU and national level.
- We can't forget the non-European part of the world and what happens there (and what not).

Sustainable food processing

Programme & speakers

As we navigate the challenges of our food system, it's crucial to focus not only on the agribusiness and consumer research ends of the food chain but also on food processing.

Innovation in food processing plays a pivotal role in achieving sustainable, safe, healthy and affordable foods at the scale needed to feed our growing population. Food products must however not only meet sustainability goals. It is essential that they are organoleptically attractive as consumers' sensory experiences drive purchasing decisions, making taste, texture and visual appeal critical factors. Combining all these quality attributes in a more sustainable process is a real challenge for which innovative research is essential.

This seminar explored diverse approaches of different EU research projects to processing-level innovation via lectures, followed by a panel discussion involving food researchers, the Belgian and EU food industry federations and Flanders' Food. We discussed how these strategies contribute to the production of more sustainable food products.

Partner: Government of Flanders – Department of Economy, Science and Innovation

Speakers:

- Imca Sampers, University of Ghent
- Tara Grauwet, KU Leuven
- Inge Arents, Flanders' Food (spearhead cluster and innovation platform for the Flemish agri-food industry)
- Luc De Vuyst, VUB
- Rebeca Fernández, FoodDrinkEurope

Moderated by Natasha Foote

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

Research on food-processing opens doors to innovation, sustainability and economic growth. Processing can take many forms, and many of them can provide healthier, more sustainable products.

Food structure, for example, plays a key role in digestion kinetics, and can be targeted by processing steps to make certain nutrients more readily available. Fermentation is another process that we wouldn't necessarily think of as 'processing', but has been done for millennia and might play an important role in a sustainable food system and in making platform molecules and biofuels.

Because we rely on convenience foods, the food industry has a big role to play to provide certain groups with healthier, more physiologically adapted foods. Furthermore, processing can be used to develop products for specific sub-populations, such as the elderly.

Developing the necessary equipment and technology for small businesses and disseminating research to them is important to foster new market opportunities and develop different business models. Both upscaling of equipment, design and business models and downscaling of equipment used by big businesses are necessary. Direct co-creation with the consumer to develop products is essential to successfully bring innovative, healthy and sustainable products on the market.

Some processing steps are already taken by farmers, so it's important that they know which equipment is being developed and how it can be beneficial for them. Dissemination of information needs to happen through different channels, not only research papers.

Open strategic autonomy and sustainability of the European food system

Programme & speakers

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and extreme weather events caused or exacerbated by climate change have prompted the EU to take steps towards strengthening its resilience in the agri-food sector.

This workshop focused on open strategic autonomy and sustainability of the European food system. It served as an opportunity to reflect and discuss the internal and external dimensions of both concepts and how they interlink. We also looked ahead and explored options for the next EU policy cycle on how to move towards a more sustainable and resilient food system.

Partner: Europe Jacques Delors

Speakers

- Alan Matthews, Trinity College Dublin
- Geneviève Pons, Director General of Europe Jacques Delors
- Sergi Corbalan, Advisor on International trade for the Greens/ European Free Alliance (EFA)

Moderated by Claudia Azevedo (Europe Jacques Delors)

[Presentation, video](#)

Summary

Since 2020, the EU has increasingly been using open strategic autonomy in various sectors, including agri-food systems. The concept emerged in a time of multiple crises: a global health crisis caused by COVID-19, followed by a geopolitical and energy crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The European Commission defined open strategic autonomy as 'shaping the system of global economic governance and developing mutually beneficial bilateral relations, while protecting ourselves from unfair and abusive practices'. It's about as much cooperation as possible, as much autonomy as needed. This would help to diversify and solidify global supply chains to protect the EU from future

crises. Regarding food, the EU's strategic approach is to ensure food security and sustainability for all EU citizens through a fair, healthy, sustainable and resilient food supply.

Our global economic system is based on interdependence and efficiency. Trade will always be a part of a resilient agrifood system. We have always traded with unfriendly regimes, but in a geopolitical crisis we have to be aware of the risk of vulnerable supply chains for critical industries. In the EU the self-sufficiency rate for food in terms of nutrition value is high and we are a net exporter of agri-food products, but on the other hand we import a lot of inputs for agriculture such as animal feed and fertilizers. Intelligent land use includes priority of producing food over biofuels.

Food production has a serious impact on environment, climate and biodiversity. 25% of the greenhouse gas emissions come from the global food system, which also accounts for 90% of deforestation due to the production of commodities such as soja, palm oil or cocoa. Meanwhile soil degradation spreads at an alarming rate. A win-win for environment, health and social justice would be the reduction of meat consumption and the choice for a more plant-based diet in the Western world, combined with the prevention of food losses and waste through measures such as better preservation and packaging and social distribution of surpluses. Side note: red meat is according to several parameters less sustainable than white meat.

For environmental and social reasons, we have to tackle harmful excesses in our global food system and find a good balance between trade and self-sufficiency. It's a myth that we can fully localize our food production and consumption. But Europe should stop exporting products that destroy local markets. The same goes for in the EU banned fertilizers and pesticides. We have to ban the worst practices of child labour. We know that regulatory changes in the EU have impact worldwide.



In general, EU production standards for food are higher, but we can't impose these standards on partner countries for every product. A flexible approach includes international alignment and equivalent conventions, and giving sufficient time for adaptation. The West should remain modest, as we caused a lot of problems in the past, for example loss of biodiversity and the rise of greenhouse gas emissions.

In the necessary green transition of our agri-food system we have to find a right compromise in dialogue with the stakeholders. A fair income for our farmers is a crucial issue. The farmers' protests though, may not lead to the repeal of the legal framework of the Farm to Fork strategy. Trade policy should put ecological sustainability and human rights more in the centre. Technological innovation can help to improve the traceability of food products, for example by QR codes.

International chain development and sectoral initiatives: how to come up with an integral and coherent policy

Programme & speakers

Despite several industry's voluntary commitments to sustainability, the path to sustainable food systems is a journey of ups and downs, riddled with questions. How can companies, civil society, government actors and knowledge institutions collaborate to enhance sustainability in international chains and address the multiple challenges in a holistic way? How can stakeholders use and implement the different tools and strategies available, from value chain experiments, over non-binding sectoral agreements to upcoming mandatory due diligence legislation at EU level?

Partner: Rikolto

Speakers:

- Abou Dosso, Ambassador Ivory Coast to Belgium, Luxembourg & EU
- Antonie Fountain, Voice Network
- Charles Snoeck, IDH Sustainable Trade
- Karen Janssens, Colruyt Group
- Liesbeth Van Meulder, Rikolto
- Barbara Creemers, Federal Parliament Belgium (Groen)

Moderated by Jelle Goossens (Rikolto)

[Presentation](#)

Summary

The cocoa case highlights the need to look beyond the (commodity) value supply chain; one needs to take the entire ecosystem as the value supply chain does not operate in a vacuum. The local farming system and community need to be taken into account.

Whereas company-level sustainability initiatives play an important role in terms of raising awareness internally, non-binding multistakeholder processes serve as crucial actors to tackle barriers on a sectoral level through collaboration, trust building and knowledge sharing in a highly competitive market environment.

Regulatory actions are needed, however, to tackle the lack of punishing power in multistakeholder processes through the imposition of a mandatory level playing field. Hence both acts should be viewed complementary; the former introducing a bottom line while the latter raises the ceiling.

There needs to be awareness to the risk of such legislative acts as such acts should not result into an exodus/avoidance of high-risk areas. Such acts need to act as a catalyst for positive change.

Responsible and sustainable fishing: not the why but the how

Programme & speakers

Europe supplies with its own fishery production one third (5 million tonnes live weight) of seafood products to the EU consumer food market. A no-brainer is that the EU needs to aim for more protein resources from the seas along with responsible and sustainable fishing. But... how to realize? Are there multiple roads to Rome? This session focused on pros and cons of the way we (try to) reach the goals of the EU and presents relevant scientific developments from the EU and Flanders.

Partner: ILVO (Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)

Speakers:

- Hans Polet, ILVO
- Thord Mosen, Norwegian Fisheries Management
- Esben Sverdurp Jensen, European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)
- Marloes Kraan, Wageningen University & Research

Moderated by Greet Riebbels, ILVO

[Presentation](#)

Summary

The session started with an overview of the Common Fisheries Policy and the way Flanders (Belgium) is working on this policy. As control and enforcement has a big role in this policy, this causes questions on whether the policy could be made less complex and more socially acknowledged.

In Flanders we are working on open communication and data collection (by Vistraject-Strategy, the sustainability label 'Visserij Verduurzaamt' and the data program VISTOOLS) that should lead to less control and enforcement and more and better quality of data.

The open data approach can lead to an alternative form of fisheries management that relies much less on control and enforcement and more on cooperation, open data and good management tools.

In the Norwegian example, self-reporting of non-verifiable information is crucial in their policy. This means that documentation is very important to verify the entire value chain (and comply with foreign trade requirements). They are working on a AI-identification program (CatchID) that will hopefully come into business the coming years, leading to a data collection with non or very little human intervention.

For the EAPO, that coordinates 32 producer organisations in 12 Member States, the translation of the complex legislation and obligations into 'a known language' is very important. They work hard on the landing obligation in the discard ban, on maximum sustainable yields and on reaching climate neutrality by 2050 (with a reduction of 55% by 2030). Central in the discussion is the stability of financing, something that was mentioned by the two other speakers as well. This way the fisherman can build up capital and trust, both essential to embark on the green transition.

The last speaker talked about social science insights that can help to understand the individual and group behaviour of the fishermen better.

After debate, this could be concluded:

- Fishermen are not afraid of innovation and mostly the industry is ahead of us. Crucial is taking the time to build the trust, to cooperate along the triple helix and to create an open culture. What is the data we really need, what is interesting but not necessary?
- Work together in finding solutions, building trust. First find out what we want to achieve and then how to do it. Build new tools if necessary.
- Don't neglect the social dimension of policy. If not, that creates mistrust. Trust is needed to share knowledge and data

Basis for successful entrepreneurship is stability and this can best be achieved by implementing good management tools. These tools can be built on the high quality, high resolution and real time data that can be produced by the fishing vessels like is already implemented in the Belgian fishing fleet. The tools allow more reliable quota, real time fish stock evolution, catch prediction for commercial as well as protected and endangered species and in the near future, the ecosystem approach. Such an approach will be necessary to come to a real green transition.

Recommendations for food policy

The challenges we are facing today to provide healthy and sustainable food for all are numerous and immense. This poly-crisis age has shown that although there is agreement that we cannot continue business as usual, the response so far has not met the expectations. Many questions remain on what will happen regarding the introduction of a European legal framework on sustainable food systems and on how the Farm to Fork Strategy of the EU will further take shape. In this last chapter, we provide you with insights that have come forward during the Open Food Conference on policy recommendations for food policy in the EU.

We need a **systemic approach** in building and implementing a strategy towards sustainable food systems that incorporates short, medium and long term goals. A systemic approach requires more coherence, coordination and synergies across scientific disciplines, policy areas and policy levels.

- We need a **multistakeholder governance**, bringing all societal values and interests at the table. A more structured participation of civil society and food stakeholders (e.g. through **food policy councils**/a European Food Policy Council) plays a key role in helping to achieve a just transition. Community-based food policy councils aim to make "food democracy" a procedural guiding principle.
- To achieve better **evidence-based policymaking**, we need first of all continuous support for basic and strategic research and innovation on food, and strengthen the European Partnership for Sustainable Food Systems. Besides this existing Futurefoods-partnership, we need a **mission-driven instrument** focused on sustainable food systems which complements the existing European research and innovation instruments. Furthermore, we have to achieve a better functioning science-policy interface.
- **Innovative and co-creative forms of research** like citizen science, living labs and foresight offer pathways to bridge the divide between theory and practice and to improve communication and collaboration.

We need **true prices for our food**, internalising all hidden cost for society (e.g. health costs) and the planet (e.g. through land use carbon accounting). A **fair agricultural income** should be an integral part of this debate. Social policy measures can mitigate the impact of higher prices on vulnerable groups in society.

- The use of the **exemption on competition rules to achieve higher sustainability standards** than EU or national mandatory standards, foreseen in Article 210a of Regulation (EU) 1308/2013 (CMO Regulation) can be an important instrument to make sure farmers and other actors in the food supply chain are getting paid for their extra costs involved in sustainability efforts.
- Initiatives like the **EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices** form an important step in engaging businesses to become more sustainable. Becoming more sustainable or embracing new business models can be challenging, but also profitable when you take into account reduced costs and risks in the long run, changing consumer demand and more sustainable partnerships in the food supply chain.



We must shift towards a **healthy diet with food produced within planetary boundaries** and by doing so ensuring productivity and resilience of our food system in the long run.

The **protein transition** is a gamechanger in tackling some of the main challenges.

- The protein transition asks for a **positive approach** creating opportunities for all sectors, the environment and public health in Europe and beyond.
- The time has come for a **full-fledged European protein strategy**, with a strong emphasis on consumption (e.g. protein shift towards more plant proteins), innovation (e.g. microbial proteins) and new plant-based protein value chains.

Reducing food waste and high-value valorisation of food waste is a priority for a more circular food system.

- It should be looked at **holistically**, with all stakeholders, ranging from prevention to waste management. The government can facilitate, bring actors on the whole food chain together, monitor and set targets.
- Exchanging effective measures and good practices on the reduction of food loss at **consumption** level is crucial.

We need to change **consumers' behaviour** for the better, engaging all stakeholders close to the consumer to take up responsibility.

- We need to expand policies mainly focused on **food literacy to include behavioural insights and food environments**.
- Improving **food environments** is urgently needed. Policy action can have a big impact. We can make the sustainable choice the default choice, not putting all responsibility on the shoulders of the consumer.

Cities are powerful agents of change. They have multiple levers to pull to transform food systems like public procurement in local hospitals or defining the food environments in school neighbourhoods.

- Cities are nowadays leading in the transition of food systems by developing local food strategies, setting ambitious targets and monitoring them. But they rely on a coordinated approach across different policy levels. Europe must further **support local integrated food policies**.
- Higher policy levels need to provide fitting **legal frameworks and instruments** that cities and other decision makers can use to intervene in food environments.

Public food procurement is a major yet often overlooked mechanism for steering the transition towards sustainable food systems.

- We must focus on getting sustainable food in public procurement, which accounts for 14% of GDP in Europe. We have an opportunity to rethink public funding, better aimed at nutritious food and public goods delivered by producers.

Targeting and tailoring policy tools to **specific audiences** are also elementary to leave no one behind in this transition.

- **Schools** are key intervention sites for battling inequality and promoting positive health behaviour. Food programmes at schools (e.g. school meals) are not only a smart tool for public health intervention but they can also contribute to increased awareness about many topics. The **whole school approach** supports a healthy food environment and emphasizes the role of schools in raising awareness by involving all relevant stakeholders.
- **Integrated care** is another focus point as it can effectively address individual dietary needs. Here, more multi-sectoral collaboration is necessary which can be fostered through joined partnerships such as NuHCaS.

We need to **revalue agriculture** and food production in our society, policy and economy. We need to put our food producers in the heart of our food transition. We need to restore their hope and perspective on a better future, by delivering strong supporting policies, fair remuneration for their efforts in the transition, and by giving them public recognition.

- We must make the transition together, reconnecting farmers, the other food system actors and our citizens. Through **dialogue**, exchanging knowledge and working together in the field, we can depolarize the debate.
- Society has set high sustainability ambitions, but the **level of support** for the agricultural sector to meet these expectations must increase equally, both from a policy and market perspective.
- Technological **innovation in agriculture** is key, but at the same time we need agro-ecological solutions, peer-to-peer learning and facilitating legislation.
- Solutions already exist, pioneers are showing the way, legislative barriers are on the agenda. Now we have to look how we can **upscale** it towards all farmers.

- The **Strategic Dialogue on Agriculture** provides an opportunity to create a new political setting at EU level to support agriculture in its transition and to nurture Europe's next steps in food system policies

There does not have to be a trade-off between **food security and food sustainability**. They are intertwined and are not per se conflicting. It is desirable to meet both goals together.

- To ensure the **right to food for all**, we need to work on reducing poverty, fair prices and sustainable diets.
- As for food sustainability, we have to focus more on **helping farmers in the transition** to sustainable agriculture.
- The agricultural sector is the only sector that can **regenerate**. We have to acknowledge that sustainable food is rooted in healthy soils and be aware that climate change is already creating problems in the field today, with lower yields, threatening food supplies. We must look beyond crop resilience towards (eco)system resilience. We must increase land use efficiency both on the production and consumption side of our food system.

Trade will always be a part of a resilient agrifood system, however, current geopolitical context shows the risks of vulnerable supply chains for critical industries. In the EU the self-sufficiency rate for food in terms of nutrition value is high and we are a net exporter of agri-food products, but on the other hand we import a lot of inputs for agriculture such as animal feed and fertilizers. **Strategic autonomy** on (plant) proteins can play a crucial part here.

- EU policy has **unintended consequences on third countries** in terms of compliance, imposing additional constraints to the already fragile farming systems. Developing countries do not always have the understanding nor the capacity to comply with these regulations. The EU should therefore do more in terms of capacity building. The private sector needs to play a more active role in terms of due diligence.
- All stakeholders must join forces to enhance **sustainability in international chains** and address the multiple challenges in a holistic way. Whereas company-level sustainability initiatives play an important role in terms of raising awareness internally, non-binding multistakeholder processes serve as crucial actors to tackle barriers on a sectoral level through collaboration, trust building and knowledge sharing in a highly competitive market environment. Regulatory actions are needed, however, to tackle the lack of punishing power in multistakeholder processes through the imposition of a mandatory level playing field.

A **One Health approach** is needed to sustainably balance and optimize the health of humans, animals and the environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a stark reminder of the fact that our health is closely intertwined with the health of animals and the shared environment in which we live, as is the silent pandemic of untreatable infections caused by antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Food system change is necessary and **first steps have been taken**. Food strategies like the European Farm to Fork Strategy and Flanders' Go4Food-strategy provide a compass, they give direction and introduce the systemic approach needed to address the challenges.

It's important that we take responsibility now, show leadership, create synergies and address the fundamental problems of our food system together. Otherwise the policies will be challenged by opposition or not survive external shocks. Although we have seen steps being made in the direction of a sustainable food policy on the different policy levels, we have to acknowledge that there is still a long road ahead of us. The new legislative term should learn from the successes and failures and lead the transition with **boldness and unity**.

Let's keep working together on a sustainable, healthy and fair EU food system policy.

[Video closing session of the Open Food Conference.](#)

[Note of the Belgian Presidency to the General Secretariat of the Council on the Open Food Conference](#)