



# **The EU Farm to Fork Strategy: Can we make the European food system healthier and sustainable?**

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In 2050, the world will have 10 billion mouths to feed. At the same time, we will be facing the greatest environmental, climate, and health challenges in human history.<sup>1</sup> How will we feed the future world population without further exhausting our planet? How do we ensure access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food for all? And how do we keep food affordable as part of a fair supply chain? These are all big questions to solve. The European Commission's Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy<sup>2</sup> aims to accelerate our transition to a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system.

## **What is the Farm to Fork strategy? When was it introduced?**

The F2F strategy was launched on 20 May 2020 and is part of the European Green Deal, which is a roadmap to guide the European Union (EU) towards becoming the first climate-neutral region by 2050. The F2F strategy is a comprehensive 10-year strategy aiming to address the challenges of producing and consuming our food in a fair and sustainable way by reconciling what we eat within the capacity of our planet. It intends to reduce the environmental and climate impact of how we produce and consume food, ensure food security and citizens' health through access to sufficient, nutritious, sustainable food, and preserve the affordability of food while generating fairer economic returns for everyone involved in the supply chain. This is the first time the European Union (EU) is putting forward such a holistic approach to the transition to sustainable food systems by providing measures and targets for each step of the food chain, from production to processing, distribution to consumption.<sup>2</sup>

# How does the Farm to Fork strategy work?

The F2F strategy has six main goals<sup>2</sup>:

- Ensuring sustainable food production;
- Ensuring food security;
- Stimulating sustainable food processing, wholesale, retail, hospitality, and food services practices;
- Promoting sustainable food consumption and facilitating the shift to healthy, sustainable diets;
- Reducing food loss and waste;
- Combating food fraud along the food supply chain.

To enable the EU to reach these broad goals, the strategy also outlines a range of concrete targets that need to be met in each area. For example, by 2030, 25% of total farmland has to be under organic farming, the use of chemicals and certain pesticides in agriculture should be reduced by 50%, and the EU sales of antimicrobials for farmed animals and agriculture should be reduced by 50%.

The plan also outlines several actions to be undertaken by the European Commission (EC) in the coming years to enable the food system actors to achieve these objectives. For example, in the area of ensuring sustainable food production, the EC has set out an action plan to incentivise the farming sector to engage in practices such as carbon sequestration (capturing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere so that it cannot contribute to warming the atmosphere) and farming methods that promote biodiversity. In order to help the shift towards healthy and sustainable diets, the Commission will propose food labelling rules and frameworks to empower consumers to make health-conscious and sustainable food choices. To reduce food loss and waste, they will propose a revision of EU rules on date marking ('use by' and 'best before' dates) to improve the use and understanding of these labels.

Together, all actions aim to make the EU food system a global standard for sustainability. By mid-2023, the strategy will be reviewed to see if the actions taken are sufficient to meet the objectives or whether additional action is required<sup>2</sup>.

## What does the Farm to Fork strategy mean for the future of food in Europe?

The F2F strategy is an ambitious roadmap towards a more sustainable food system. However, for the strategy to become a real game-changer, several challenges must be overcome. A key challenge in the implementation of the strategy is that the Commission has not yet clearly defined the concept and general principles of sustainable food systems. Without a shared understanding of this multidimensional concept, it is difficult to formulate coherent objectives, an appropriate systems approach, and clear concrete commitments needed by all stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> The EC is in the process of developing a framework legislation on sustainable food systems to support the implementation and aims to propose this framework by the end of 2023.

Another major challenge is that the F2F strategy sets out some clear targets to be achieved by 2030 in some areas (for example on pesticide use and organic farming) but the targets are less concrete in other areas. Also, some targets address a specific part of the food system without explicitly addressing potential related consequences for other parts of the food system (e.g. targeting 25% of farmland under organic production will also have impacts on post-harvest handling, logistics, business plans of various

food system actors, distribution, retail and so on). It has also faced criticism for not addressing topics such as gene editing techniques and biotechnology. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the lack of ambition among Member States to translate the F2F strategy into legislation, and subsequently into action plans.<sup>4</sup>

Involvement and commitment of all stakeholders including European food producers, processors, retailers, and consumers are crucial to successfully implement the strategy and to make a real sustainable change in the European food system. Since a large number of different enabling action steps are planned to be completed by 2024, there is still a lot of work to be done. A strong commitment from the EU Member States, multilevel coordination between the EU and Member States' governments, with more inter- and intra-institutional cooperation will be needed to ensure the EU Farm to Fork Strategy unlocks its full potential.

## References

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