

PRESS RELEASE

The EU needs a blueprint for food and farming, finds new academic report

24 MAY 2018 – The European Union (EU) has no consistent, coherent or complete food policy, finds new research published today. The absence of an overarching framework means that the current food and farming policies are failing to adequately protect public health and the environment, as well as making the farming sector sustainable [1].

The research [2], commissioned by the **European Public Health Alliance, Friends of the Earth Europe, IFOAM EU and Slow Food**, and carried out by the University of Pisa, backs up calls for the EU to develop a coherent policy framework which can bring forward a transition towards a sustainable food and farming system. Plans for a Communication on Sustainable Food, which aimed to go this way, were shelved by the European Commission in 2015. The European Commission is expected to soon launch new plans for its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – the EU’s biggest single budget item and the main policy governing farming.

Professor Gianluca Brunori of the University of Pisa said: “We assessed 10 different EU policies to judge how they contributed to a sustainable food and farming system. Available evidence shows that there are many inconsistencies, incoherencies or gaps. These should be addressed through an overarching policy framework, able to balance a mix of demand and supply side policy instruments, as well as food environment-oriented ones. We hope our research contributes to building a more ethical and resilient food system in the EU.”

In this light, the study highlights the following policy weaknesses:

- **Policy failure:** some policies are failing to achieve their set goals. For example, the greening of the CAP has failed to deliver the planned environmental benefits.
- **Policy inconsistency:** EU policies conflict with the goals of other policies. For example, the Seed Marketing Directives succeed in establishing a market for regulated seed, but at the cost of reducing genetic diversity, which in turn adversely affects ecological, ethical and resilience goals.
- **Policy incoherence:** whilst EU policies have the potential to contribute to a sustainable food system, their implementation remains insufficiently coordinated with other policies. For example, there is little connection between EU laws to protect water from nitrate pollution and the CAP cross-compliance rules.
- **Policy gaps:** sometimes policy instruments are missing, or existing instruments fail to integrate other sustainability dimensions. The Food Quality Policy, for example, developed certification schemes that promote traditional products based on transparency and a fair return, but omitted explicit reference to environmental or nutritional criteria.

In relation to the reform of the EU’s CAP, one of the key policies affecting EU food and farming, the **European Public Health Alliance, Friends of the Earth Europe, IFOAM EU and Slow Food** recommend:

- A much stronger integration of health, environment, governance (ethical) and resilience objectives into the policy.
- Ensuring that Member States are required to deliver on all objectives set by the EU framework on an equal basis as well as ensuring that an adequate budget is dedicated to the fulfilment of the health, resilience and environmental objectives;
- Ensuring that the new CAP is results oriented and that the payment system is geared towards delivering public goods, by organising the proposed CAP tools around a comprehensive set of sustainability objectives and to ensure coherence with other food-related policies;
- Ensuring that the implementation of environmental (air and water quality, climate), animal welfare, biodiversity, antibiotics use legislation is linked much more strongly to the granting of direct payments.

EPHA, Friends of the Earth Europe, IFOAM EU and Slow Food said: “There is an urgent need for the EU to build a sustainable, healthy and resilient food system. The current approach to food and farming is too much of a patchwork of incoherent and competing policies that are not attuned to promoting people’s health, the environment and the welfare of the farming community. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy must be used to step back from vested interests and start building a food system that is fit for the future.”

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[1] Briefing "Transition towards sustainable food systems in Europe", <http://bit.ly/EUFoodSystemsTransition>(link is external)

[2] Galli F., Favilli E., D'Amico S., Brunori G. A transition towards sustainable food systems in Europe. Food policy blue print scoping study. Laboratorio di Studi Rurali Sismondi, Pisa, Italy, 2018. ISBN: 9788890896040; <http://bit.ly/SustainableFoodSystems>(link is external)

This study comes just before a major participative forum and process organized by the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES Food) focused on exploring concrete tools to deliver sustainable food systems in Europe: www.eu3f.com