

Farm to Fork Strategy: building a sustainable EU Food system framework: share responsibility equally

The Farm to Fork Strategy will help shape farms in Europe in such a way that they respond to the consumers and environmental expectations. Is the current Farm to Fork strategy proposal going to succeed to bridge the gap between consumers and farmers? Will the intermediate actors of the supply chain also be bound by commitments, or will voluntary action remain paramount? These were just a few questions addressed at the first event to be hosted from the Forum for the Future of Agriculture 2021 (FFA2021) studio on March 16.



After an introduction by Mark Titterington, Senior Adviser, Strategy & Partnerships, Forum for the Future of Agriculture, the Chair of FFA2021 and Chairman Rise Foundation, Janez Potočnik, opened the session by stressing that food system transformation is an important part of the European green deal. This new growth strategy acknowledges that Europe's future economic development depends on how it preserves its natural capital.

He noted how energy and climate interests had worked together to design an effective response to climate change and energy transition. Implementing the farm to fork strategy will require an equally wide-ranging partnership and mutual trust. "That means not just asking others to do it, but for each of us to be part of it," he said.

Claire Bury, Deputy Director-General, DG Health and Food Safety, European Commission, presented the aims, content and economic dimension of the Farm to Fork. The integrated strategy covers the whole of the food chain and system. "It aims to create a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system that will safeguard food security and safety," she explained. The covid pandemic had made this even more urgent.

The proposed strategy, which runs to 2030, aims to inject a paradigm shift in food systems. It uses a mixture of legislative and non-legislative measures to encourage companies to reformulate food products, empower consumers to choose a sustainable diet and reward those making the sustainable transition.

Roman Leshchenko, Ukraine's Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food, told the session his government strongly supports the European green deal and environmentally friendly production. Ukraine's food strategy and food safety legislation are already largely in line with European requirements.

The minister stressed the huge potential of his country's agriculture and its readiness "to work together with the EU to achieve the green goals of climate neutrality and open our arms in the direction of the EU's sustainable food system".

The wide-ranging panel discussion that followed covered public reaction to possibly more expensive food; the need for clear information to help consumers make sustainable choices; support for farmers to implement the necessary production changes; the balance between voluntary and mandatory measures; and moves to encourage non-EU countries to go down a similar route.

Jeroen Candel, Assistant Professor, Wageningen University, identified the key challenge as "translating this global notion of food system sustainability into concrete targets". He pointed to the need to move from volume to high quality, nutritious food production and to change pricing structures so the healthy sustainable choice is the most affordable.

Florence Jeantet, Managing Director, One Planet Business for Biodiversity (OP2B), explained that many companies are already reinventing their food supply chains and factoring in biodiversity and new specifications. She emphasised the need for "transparency of communication on where a product comes from and its environmental impact" to ensure trust throughout the food chain.

Samuel Masse, President of the European young farmers' organisation CEJA, confirmed that members "totally welcome the ambition of the green deal". However, he called for clearer measures to encourage a new generation of farmers, ensuring them secure incomes and access to land. Targets in the strategy should not be mandatory for individual farms.

Marco Pierani, Director Public Affairs and Media Relations at Euroconsumers, acknowledged that consumers generally favour moves to a more sustainable food system. But they need a clear signal on the price of sustainable food and reliable information to make informed choices. He underlined that as changes are made: "We should not put everything on the shoulders of the last element of the market".

Maria do Ceu Antunes, Portugal's Minister of Agriculture, brought the session to a conclusion by spelling out her country's main agricultural priorities during its current six-month EU presidency. She confirmed her government is looking to secure agreement on the new CAP reforms by the Spring, so the new policy can be rolled out in 2023. "Now is the time to deliver a fairer, greener and digital Europe," she concluded.

