

A SUPPORTIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Recommendations for a sustainable, resilient, healthy, and competitive model, raised at FUTURE of FOOD, 26 October 2023



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Introduction

EIT Food, a pan-European multi-stakeholder organisation under the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), receives co-funding by Horizon Europe and is uniquely positioned to foster collaborative discussions on the needs to transform the food system.

When stakeholders speak, we listen: **this document compiles recommendations that emerged from our Future of Food Conference on 26 October 2023** across all thematic panel discussions, from a heterogeneous selection of speakers and moderators such as project leaders, researchers, innovators, farmers, industry, retailers, consumers, NGOs, students, EU decision makers and national authorities. Our transparent, evidence-based, open approach is testimony to our commitment to making change happen in our food systems inclusively, bringing everyone along.

Through this document, we aim to keep the conversation moving forward on the critical aspects of the transition. It provides a course for action based on realistic scenarios to make our food ecosystems future-proof by working together with stakeholders throughout the food ecosystem to accelerate change. These efforts are guided by EIT Food's three *Missions*, embodying our objectives for systemic change:

- **Promoting Healthier Lives Through Food** focuses on enhancing consumer well-being by providing affordable, healthier products and information to make informed choices.
- **Achieving a Net Zero Food System** is supported through measures such as minimising food waste and empowering consumers to contribute to the circular food economy. Crosscutting enablers such as regenerative agriculture and protein

diversification play a key role in supporting these efforts.

- Meanwhile, **Reducing Risk for a Fair & Resilient Food System** seeks to enhance food security and safety globally by establishing robust and digitally enabled food supply chains.

For years, EIT Food has been dedicated to delivering impactful solutions, refining its approach through the Missions outlined above. By gathering transformative forces of change, and actively implementing these strategies, we have been consistently aligning our actions with our words. From enhancing soil health to rebuilding consumer trust; from educating and mobilising youth toward healthier eating habits, to engaging authorities at all levels; from financing top innovators to encouraging the broadening of protein sources beyond animal-based protein, we have moved the needle across many communities and key players, reshaping food systems.

The juncture between two legislative cycles provides a unique chance to emphasise the importance of establishing a supportive policy framework for a food system that is sustainable, resilient, healthy, and competitive. Europe requires: A clear and well-defined policy mix, a sense of direction with clear signals to all stakeholders, robust frameworks supported by appropriate financial investments, consistent local involvement, incorporating feedback mechanisms across various phases of agrifood transformation, and continuous global conversations to stay on course and expedite the transformation. Inaction is no longer a viable option. The Future of Food Conference showed how the players in the food sector are embracing a shift towards a science-based approach for future policy initiatives and

acknowledging the absence of a universal solution: there is no one-size-fits-all solution for our food systems.

Since our establishment in 2017, we at EIT Food work across all geographies with our community to address the impact of unsustainable food systems and accelerate their transformation. Driven by our focus on innovation and a pursuit of impactful change that brings together all stakeholders, we recognise the need for tailored responses to address systemic challenges. Transferring best practices, knowledge, innovative solutions across Europe is crucial.

However, we recognise the need to shift from addressing niches to shaping norms. Hence our call

today. Outlined below are our recommendations to everyone involved in the food chain as well as policymakers taking office this year. We urge a multidimensional approach considering human health, ecosystem impacts, the vulnerability of the agricultural sector, and the imperative for a fair systemic transition covering all aspects from production to processing, distribution, consumption, and transport.

This paper is our invitation to engage with us to discuss these proposals, and together achieve the speed, efficiency, and region-specificity that we need to transform our food systems into a series of debates spanning across Europe, together with our regional offices.



1. Drive Momentum: Advance food system legislation and elevate agri-food objectives

“We cannot miss the momentum; the new Commission must empower key players to enable the Green Deal ambition.”

Monica Andres, Executive Vice President for Europe, YARA International

The EU’s commitment to sustainable food systems must stand firm, as each delay in adopting sustainable practices adds to the environmental toll, while overlooking opportunities that could benefit farmers, consumers, and the food ecosystem overall. Furthermore, such delays risk compromising the competitive advantage of dominating new market niches by leading in technological development.

The Union must deliver a regulatory framework suited to societal challenges, comprehensive and conducive to meaningful change. This will send a clear and unequivocal signal of this commitment to all stakeholders, setting clear expectations on the direction forward. A comprehensive Sustainable Food System Framework (SFSF) Legislation should integrate **robust climate actions into food policies, establish ambitious standards for sustainable food systems, and ensure alignment between climate, nutrition, and health objectives**. The FSFS law should establish conditions for businesses that hold the potential to drive innovation and foster resilience and sustainability in the food system. While providing consumers with reliable information for conscious consumption, access to better alternatives, and choice environments.

EIT Food is part of [FoSSNet](#) (Pan-European Food Systems Science Network), an initiative dedicated to establishing a robust network to address the challenges within food systems effectively. This initiative has the potential to provide essential support and resources needed to establish a robust framework for sustainable food systems.

EU policymakers should **prioritise market growth for innovators, financial support and training for farmers, and high ambitions for corporations within Europe**. Encouraging farmers to transition to sustainable practices requires incentives; educational initiatives are crucial to enhance their understanding of these practices, while access to cutting-edge technologies and financial support are essential for effective implementation.

In this spirit, EIT Food has launched projects like [“Regenerative Agriculture – mentoring farmers for the benefit of all”](#), [“GROW: Empowering farmers for a sustainability journey”](#), or [“Digital agriculture for sustainable food systems”](#), to support farmers scaling sustainable farming practices in Europe.

The EU should live up to its potential as an innovation powerhouse, leveraging the huge value of the cutting-edge research it produces and empowering its many local innovation ecosystems. This implies market defragmentation, harmonisation of definitions, supporting innovators through regulatory measures, investments, and talent retention policies.

2. The only change is together: towards an inclusive and systemic policymaking with consumers at the core

“[Sustainability] challenges require an encompassing approach [...] It is not a task for a few players, but for society as a whole, and that is precisely where EIT [Food] and this community comes in.”

Iljana Ivanova, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

Transitioning to a sustainable food system demands breaking silos. EU policymakers must foster collaboration among academia, companies, governments, farmers, and citizens. An example of inclusive policymaking is seen in the launch of **the Strategic Dialogue for Agriculture – and Food**. The Dialogue could effectively move the needle if it sets expectations for agrifood stakeholders and strikes a fair balance between appropriately targeted incentives and binding measures for actors across the value chain. This initiative should not only set the stage for collaboration, but importantly foster a collective vision for a food system that benefits all. It **should serve as a platform where stakeholders are encouraged to propose and implement actions to advance the transition**, with a vision to creating a collective momentum towards positive change.

Prioritising consumers is key, given that their uptake of policies and sustainability initiatives will

ultimately determine their efficacy. It is imperative that the transformation of the food system facilitates transitions towards healthier and more sustainable diets – which consumers want but feel unequipped to achieve. On the one hand, consumer expectations on sustainability and wellbeing should be met through education and awareness campaigns, particularly for younger and deprived populations. But beyond information and labels, choice environments which make the healthy and sustainable choice the default will require crucial collaboration among policymakers, retailers, industry, and consumers.

Through initiatives like the **Consumer Observatory and TrustTracker®**, EIT Food leverages consumer insights to drive discussions on food trends and sustainability, offering innovative, consumer-centric solutions. The Trust Reports, initiated in 2021, provide valuable consumer trust insights. EIT Food actively engages citizens through platforms like **FoodUnfolded®** and implements inclusivity through the **Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) Scheme**, aiming at strengthening those regions in Europe which are modest and moderate in terms of innovation in agrifood sector.

3. Tackling the financial cost of the transition

“The financing available [to foster a sustainable transition] is still vastly insufficient”.

Adelaide Cracco, Head of Climate and Environmental Impact at the European Investment Fund (EIF)

The sustainable transition in agriculture carries an annual cost estimated between €37 and €52 billion¹. The cost of inaction is equally substantial with soil degradation costing €50 billion per year², while the increasing rates of non-communicable diseases due to widespread unhealthy diets are driving up healthcare costs. Public financing is currently insufficient to cover this gap, and so is private investment. Europe needs a better financing mix of subsidies and private investments for a successful transition.

Through the [Regenerative Innovation portfolio](#), EIT Food commits EUR 15 million over three years, matching private corporate investment, to pilot innovative solutions on the ground, driving the transition to regenerative agriculture across diverse European landscapes.

EU policymakers ought to **enhance coordination between instruments such as the European Investment Bank, European Investment Fund, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and regional budgets, to support local and context-based innovation**. Harmonising frameworks is essential to promote simplicity and coherence across these tools. EU policymakers should also work toward allowing Member States and regional schemes to

efficiently integrate with EU instruments. This approach ensures that beneficiaries of national schemes are well prepared to engage at the EU level, facilitating faster access to EU programmes.

Creating a dedicated funding instrument is crucial for a sustainable and resilient food supply chain. VC investment in the sector is still vastly insufficient – though improving – particularly for startups at growth and scaleup stage. Moreover, restructuring the CAP can enable **more precise targeting of sustainability conditionalities to promote environmentally friendly agricultural practices**, enhance biodiversity, and foster the adoption of innovative technologies. To foster innovation, the CAP should **encourage upskilling for business model innovation and reskilling for technology adoption in agriculture**. This includes embracing deep tech fields such as precision farming, drones, and earth observation systems.

Startups and SMEs require access to scaling facilities, often entailing significant investments. Empowering regions and municipalities to establish Regional Innovation Valleys for agrifood innovators is thus important. Building these infrastructures demands immediate attention and collaborative efforts from authorities and investors. Given the substantial costs linked to operating these facilities, it is crucial to enhance **EU funding for living labs**. Increased financial support is key to accelerate the implementation of sustainable solutions and foster innovation.

¹ European Commission 2023, Proposal for Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Soil Monitoring and Resilience, [link](#)

² European Commission 2023, Questions and Answers on a Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience, [link](#)

4. Empowering innovation through reliable data

“It is important to drive down the costs and make all [environmental] data available to the farmer”.

Valeria Forlin, Policy Officer, European Commission – DG CLIMA

Innovative farmers are confronted with a critical challenge: the often limited availability of reliable data. Data is essential for achieving carbon reduction goals, as a precise quantification of soil carbon removals resulting from healthier soils would unlock reliable rewards and incentives. Farmers will therefore need this data (as well as other data certifying the externalities they provide) to make a business case and obtain financial support for transitioning to regenerative practices. By 2028, farmers should be enabled to access carbon production data as seamlessly as they do other metrics, such as feed purchase or carcass production levels. This will require strategic efforts to harmonise lab procedures, consistent carbon removal certification methodologies at the EU level, and reducing costs for measuring techniques like soil probes, satellite-based imagery and AI.

At all levels, leveraging data for decision-making is crucial to ensuring that the collective efforts are not only impactful but also grounded in practical realities. But reliable data comes at a cost, and its use can have far-reaching consequences. Data ownership and trust between suppliers and users is therefore very important to address. Respecting farmers’ privacy and rights is another critical

aspect that policymakers should promote; **farmers should have control over how their data is collected, used, and shared.** Additionally, establishing a third-party independent broker system adds another layer of reliability. This system would foster trust and integrity in data transactions, contributing to an ecosystem where all stakeholders feel secure in sharing and using data. Agreements to access data should be multi-annual, fostering stability and continuity.

EU policymakers should **foster collaboration and encourage the exchange of knowledge and resources, especially between larger and smaller farmers.** Peer-to-peer learning is especially effective for engendering behaviour change in farmers: sharing facilitates growth and swift transitions, contributing to a more sustainable agricultural future.

Through projects like **Test Farms**, EIT Food actively supports farmers to have access to groundbreaking agri-tech solutions by connecting them and their testing land with agricultural startups. By using data-driven strategies and tools, farmers can make informed decisions, optimise resource usage, and contribute to a more sustainable and productive agriculture.

At the same time, we help startups validate and test their innovative solutions, showcase their business to consumers and investors, and finally support the technological transformation in European agriculture.



5. Enhancing skills for innovation excellence

“Private companies, especially innovative ones, need to be empowered to provide the lifelong skills training the [agri-food] sector needs.”

Glindys Virginia Luciano, Strategic Network Engagement Manager, Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD)

A skilled workforce is vital for implementing transformative changes, but the EU’s agrifood sector struggles to attract professionals with the right set of skills to navigate the twin transitions – or even to reach a consensus on the necessary requirements for that skillset. In the next mandate, policymakers should **promote collaboration between academia and the private sector to align educational initiatives with the ever-evolving needs of the food industry**, thereby cultivating a dynamic and skilled workforce capable of effectively addressing future challenges.

Empowering young agricultural leaders globally by building soft skills, supporting innovators in scaling their ideas, and providing knowledge management and capacity-building is pivotal. Recognising that the **younger generation** plays a

pivotal role in shaping the future of our food, it becomes essential to **equip them with skill sets that are not only relevant but also future-proof in the context of the rapidly evolving agri-food sector**. This effort should prioritise supporting learning within startups and among entrepreneurs, with a focus on action-oriented approaches to drive sustainable value creation. By fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and providing tailored resources for startup initiatives, we can empower entrepreneurs to innovate and meaningfully contribute to the advancement of sustainable practices within the agri-food industry.

EIT leads the development of a skilled agrifood workforce through a large suite of programmes, spanning from a [Food System Master of Science Programme](#), to [farmer training programmes](#), to much more. Critically, [EIT Food’s Education Competency Framework](#) identifies the key competencies and capabilities that innovators and entrepreneurs should possess to drive effective change in the food system. With projects like [“EU Skills for Future”](#), EIT Food strives to empower new generations to create solutions for societal challenges.



6. Private Sector's impact for informed policymaking

"Options to achieve [sustainable practices in the agri-food sector] include public-private partnerships."

Will Surman, Deputy Director General,
FoodDrinkEurope

The private sector, leveraging its financial resources and innovation capacity, stands as a key driver in steering the shift towards sustainable food systems. Acknowledging their contribution and efforts to achieve sustainable food systems signals a commitment to collaboration, paving the way for partnerships that can accelerate the adoption of sustainable practices and tackle challenges in the agri-food landscape.

This approach not only acknowledges the private sector's role, but also encourages responsible business practices, aligning with shared goals of environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and economic resilience. It is crucial for policymakers to **support the private sector in advancing the transition to sustainable food systems**. By prioritising the establishment of robust public-private partnerships, policymakers can highlight the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by our food systems. These partnerships serve as a powerful instrument for fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and

resource sharing between governments, businesses, and civil society organisations. By working together, these different actors can pool their expertise, financial resources, and innovative solutions to collectively tackle environmental challenges, social inequities, and economic inefficiencies within the food industry. Such concerted efforts can thus pave the way for the development of greener, more sustainable food systems that promote the wellbeing of both people and the planet.

Through its [Impact Funding Framework](#), EIT Food leverages the private sector's own sustainability ambitions by enabling projects aligned with EIT Food's 3 Missions for food system transformation. These can be both point-solution projects promoting a specific innovation, and larger collaborative programmes integrating innovation with activities such as public engagement, education, advocacy and more.

Similar initiatives emphasise the private sector's capacity, both in power and resources, to drive meaningful change. Policymakers should recognise the impact of private-sector initiatives in the agri-food landscape as contributing to the overall sustainability and resilience of the agri-food sector.



7. Advancing healthier diets through nutritious and sustainable foods

“Changing consumer attitudes is often seen as an effective ‘nudge’ factor [...] but at the same time [consumer] information is not by itself sufficient”.

Cortney Price, Lead for Behavioural Science, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

A food environment transformation is fundamental to making nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable diets available to all, thereby preventing diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) at all life stages. To achieve this, EU policymakers must **create robust regulatory and policy frameworks that support measures making healthy food choice the easy choice**. Beyond providing clear information to consumers, it is crucial to integrate behavioural science into policymaking to guide the collaborative development of food environment, where consumers are encouraged to choose the healthiest and most sustainable options. Additionally, fostering cooperation with the industry is essential to continue to reformulate products, decrease portion sizes, and encourage marketing strategies that prioritise healthier options.

The EIT Food Protein Diversification Think Tank calls on the EU to aspire to offer access to a diet by 2050 that includes appealing and affordable protein foods that are sustainable, healthy, and

safe. Beyond securing future food supplies, embracing a diverse range of alternative protein sources contributes to a sustainable planet by offering high greenhouse gas reduction per Euro invested.

Streamlining the novel food approval process is vital for improving diets and transforming food systems. Reducing bureaucratic hurdles encourages innovation, allowing the introduction of novel, sustainable, and healthy food products. Simplifying the regulatory pathway facilitates the availability of appealing, affordable, and safe protein sources that align with sustainability goals. Initiatives like the EU Protein Strategy mark the starting point for such a transformation. However, it is crucial for policymakers to **implement an agile and regularly updated regulatory framework that encourages group applications, promotes data sharing, fosters collaboration across jurisdictions, and establishes a pre-submission dialogue with the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA)**.

To overcome barriers to innovation in the field of protein diversification, experts from the EIT Food community have established the **EIT Food Protein Diversification Think Tank**. This independent body identifies gaps, barriers and opportunities, engaging all stakeholders of the food system to provide policy recommendations for protein diversification.



Conclusions

The above recommendations compiled from our Future of Food Conference of 26 October 2023, across all thematic panel discussions, provide actionable insights to policy makers.

In a world challenged by environmental concerns, the EU stands at a pivotal juncture, Europe is uniquely positioned to lead the global transition towards a sustainable, resilient, healthy, and competitive food system and unlocking opportunities for farmers, consumers and enterprises.

At the heart of effective and sustainable solutions for the future lies collaboration and a systemic

approach, connecting key stakeholders from farm to fork and fostering dialogue among them.

With a new legislative mandate in sight, the EU institutions will be in a position to review internal organisation and governance so as to catalyse transformative change within the agri-food sector, enabling more efficient and cooperative actions towards a sustainable, resilient, healthy, and competitive food system.

EIT Food invites policymakers, industry leaders, and consumers to join force with us. Together, we can build a resilient, inclusive, and competitive food system that safeguards the health of our planet and future generations.

