

31 March 2020, Geneva

{by email}

Dear Commissioner Gabriel,

As Chair and on behalf of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, it is a great pleasure to share with you our scientific opinion *Towards a Sustainable Food System*, which we adopted today. This scientific advice is intended to inform in particular the development of the 'Farm to Fork Strategy', expected later this spring. I trust that this advice will be of interest not only to your colleagues responsible for the European Green Deal, but to all with a stake in a sustainable food system.

With this advice, we urge the European Commission to take the lead and drive change towards a sustainable food system in the EU and beyond. We specifically recommend that environmental, social and economic sustainability are made the central objectives of all policies relevant to the food system. Food must be viewed more as a common than a consumer good, as has been the tendency in the past. In more detail, we call on the European Commission to:

- Ensure a fully integrated approach to bring about a sustainable food system by adopting an active step-wise policy transition with responsive, learning-focused policy approaches and governance structures;
- Address power and information asymmetries in the food system by increasing the policy focus on food manufacturers and retailers, supporting a food environment that helps citizens to make healthy and sustainable food choices, and strengthening the more vulnerable actors in the food system;
- Use a well-balanced policy mix in an iterative, responsive and adaptive manner, considering binding policy measures as the main drivers.

With permission of the authors, I also enclose the supporting evidence review report, *A Sustainable Food System for the European Union*, prepared by the Scientific Advice for Policy by European Academies (SAPEA) consortium. This report is the main evidence base for our scientific opinion and provides more in-depth analysis on the topic, which may be of additional interest to you and your colleagues. This report is in 'pre-print' and the authors kindly request that its distribution is limited to within the European Commission until it is published on their website¹.

During the development of this advice, and in line with our own recent guidance on the provision of scientific advice², we have ensured that services involved in the Farm to Fork Strategy were aware of early insights from our work. Specifically, we have shared preliminary evidence and findings with them at several occasions and hosted a dedicated meeting with relevant EU policy makers on 12

¹ <https://www.sapea.info/topics/sustainable-food/>

² As elaborated in our scientific opinion on *Scientific Advice to European Policy in a Complex World*: https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/support-policy-making/scientific-support-eu-policies/group-chief-scientific-advisors/scientific-advice-european-policy-complex-world_en

December 2019. Moreover, we organised a joint stakeholder meeting with the European Commission services responsible for the Farm to Fork Strategy on 18 February 2020.

I hope that this scientific opinion – now that it is finalised – will further help the European Commission take the necessary steps towards a sustainable food system, and with that, the vital realisation of the European Green Deal ambitions.

Yours sincerely,



Rolf-Dieter Heuer, Chair of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

Enclosed:

- [1] Scientific opinion *Towards a Sustainable Food System* by the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors;
- [2] Preprint of evidence review report *A Sustainable Food System for the European Union* by SAPEA

CC: Pearl Dykstra (Deputy Chair of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors), Janusz Bujnicki, Elvira Fortunato, Nicole Grobert, Carina Keskitalo, Paul Nurse (Members of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors), Reinhard Hüttl (Chair of the Board - Science Advice for Policy by European Academies (SAPEA)), Adrienn Kiraly (Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Mariya Gabriel), Jean-Eric Paquet (European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), Director-General), Wolfgang Burtscher (DG RTD, Deputy Director-General – Science and Policy Transitions), Johannes Klumpers (DG RTD, Head of Unit – Chief Scientific Advisors – SAM, EGE (RTD.03)), Jeremy Bray (DG RTD.03 – Deputy Head of Unit), Annabelle Ascher (DG RTD.03 – Secretary of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors), Gerjon Ikink (DG RTD.03 – Project Leader).