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# Towards an EU sustainable food system: main findings of the Evidence Review Report

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# The Evidence Review Report

- The challenge of transitioning towards a more just and sustainable food system
- The evidence review process
- Preliminary findings
- Next steps



# The challenge

- **‘A sustainable food system ... ensures food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition of future generations are not compromised’ (FAO HLPE, 2014):**
- Food insecurity widely recognised as one of the most significant ‘global challenges’ of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, linked to other challenges including malnutrition, obesity, biodiversity loss, climate change, soil degradation and water quality
- Unless consumption patterns and levels of food waste change, the world will need to produce 50% more food to meet population demand by 2050
- Ensuring sufficient, safe and nutritious food for all is a major issue for the European Union, both internally and in terms of our wider international responsibilities.

# Remit

- Working group established (April 2019) at request of the European Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors (GCSA)
- Asked to identify:
  - Workable paths to deliver an inclusive, 'just' and timely transition to an EU sustainable food system, considering 'co-benefits' for health, the environment, and socio-economic aspects, including the socio-economic situation of the farming sector, and addressing territorial imbalances, the rural-urban divide, food waste as well as responsible consumer behaviour
- Addressing a 'social science deficit' in current work.

# The review process

- The SAM unit asked SAPEA to convene an expert working group: international, multi-disciplinary, independent
- Three face-to-face meetings (London, Berlin, Amsterdam)
- Commissioned a series of systematic reviews (SURE unit and academic advisory panel in Cardiff)
- Completed an Evidence Review Report based on scientific evidence in peer-reviewed literature
- Expert workshop (with invited external participants)
- Draft report subject to rigorous peer review
- Report leads to a Scientific Opinion from the GCSA
- Separation of scientific evidence (based on peer reviewed literature and expert advice) from policy recommendations.

# The Evidence Review

- Broad-ranging review, with emphasis on social science evidence of ‘what works’
- Asked to identify ‘workable paths’ to deliver an inclusive, just and timely transition to an EU sustainable food system, considering ‘co-benefits’ for health, the environment, economy and society
- Consistent with European Commission’s Food 2030 Strategy and with the new ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy (more later)
- The Review covers critical issues and global challenges, understanding sustainable food systems, evaluation of recent policy initiatives, questions of governance and power, agents of change, and examples of ‘good practice’ on which EU can build.



# A food systems perspective

- Food chain ('farm to fork') at centre, but also includes more circular elements (food waste/disposal)
- Interactions with other systems (health, environment, economy, society and politics)
- Governance, regulation and power are key parts of the system.



# Findings and key messages 1

- **Urgency:** links between food and climate change, biodiversity loss, obesity epidemic – measured in years or decades rather than generations
- **Framing:** food as right or commodity? sustainable intensification or agro-ecology? agriculture or food? (social sciences have important role in making the underlying premises of different approaches explicit, making the implications of policy framing more open and transparent)
- **System-wide change:** EAT-Lancet ‘healthy reference diet’ proposes increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, wholegrains, legumes and nuts; decreased consumption of red meat, sugar, refined grains – major implications for all parts of the food system
- **Circular economy:** move beyond linear models of food system (e.g. building in sustainability measures from early stages in product design to avoid waste at later stages - reduce, reuse, recycle)



# Findings and key messages 2

- **‘Policy levers’**: educational initiatives focusing on behaviour change and individual consumer choice are insufficient; mix of hard and soft measures more effective; also reflect EU competencies, stronger in some areas than others
- **Science and policy**: public understanding and consumer acceptance of novel technologies a key issue for future food policy
- **Coordination**: food system governance is highly fragmented, requires leadership and coordination – but not just top-down; also encourage experimental, bottom-up and participatory initiatives (‘polycentric’)
- **Scenario analysis**: modelling different food futures and designing alternative metrics for preferred system outcomes

# Findings and key messages 3

- **Power asymmetries:** food system characterised by vested interests and short term horizons
- **Trade-offs and compromises:** trade-offs between competing objectives are inevitable (focus on winners and losers rather than elusive win-wins)
- **Responsibility:** where does responsibility for change lie – wider institutional environment and socio-technical arrangements, not just consumers
- **Growing consensus:** series of recent reports reach similar conclusions – IPES report on common food policy; FAO study on transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs; OECD climate change report (creating a sustainable food system).



# Next steps

- Complete WG response to referees' comments
- Publication of ERR and Scientific Opinion
- Public engagement and dissemination
- Contribute to Commission's 'Farm to fork' strategy.

# Thanks

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