



European Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

**Towards an EU
sustainable food system**

Carina Kesitalo

Member of Group of Chief Scientific Advisors



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*INDEPENDENT
SCIENTIFIC ADVICE
FOR EU POLICIES*

Research and
Innovation

Why? Food system challenges

- Expanding global population & demographic transformations (urbanisation, migration, rural ageing, etc.)
- Climate change (extreme weather events, lower yields, pests and diseases, etc.)
- Unhealthy and unsustainable food consumption (diet-related diseases, land and water use, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.)
- Exploitation of natural resources beyond environmental limits (biodiversity, deforestation, soil erosion, etc.)
- Geo-political events and shocks (conflicts and civil disturbances, price volatility, etc.)



What needs to be done?

- promote sustainable intensification and/or scale up agro-ecological approaches
- reduce food loss and waste
- stimulate responsible consumer choices and access towards healthier and sustainable diets
- improve the resilience and robustness of the food system
- increase the awareness, accountability and stewardship of producers and consumers to better inform their choices

But how? Gaps in advice from social sciences insights

How? Mandate (Scoping Paper)

- Use social sciences insights to map and analyse the various components of food systems and their dynamics in relation to sustainability objectives.
- **What are workable paths to deliver an inclusive, 'just' and timely transition to an EU sustainable food system?**
- Consider '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?

Steps towards the Scientific Opinion

- Scoping review report
- Scoping Paper
- Meeting with responsible policy Directorates-General
- SAPEA systematic literature review
- SAPEA evidence review report
- Expert elicitation (workshop, sounding board)
- Stakeholder meeting

What is a Sustainable Food System

- No settled, universally agreed definition
- Many different, diverse food sub-systems in EU
- Contribute to all 3 pillars of sustainability (adapted FAO concept):
 - **Social** (food safety, health and nutrition, animal welfare, occupational health and safety, value distribution and equity, communities, culture and traditions, education and skills, livelihoods)
 - **Environmental** (biodiversity and ecosystem services, soil health, land use, carbon footprint, water footprint and health, animal and plant health)
 - **Economic** (jobs, income, affordability, profits and tax revenues)

Areas under consideration

Ensure a truly integrated approach to sustainable food

- Framing food not only/mainly as a 'commodity'
- Adopt a step-wise policy 'mainstreaming' approach in support of providing food sustainably
- Take leadership role to support multi-level (local-global) transformation, including trade and investment
- Stimulate diversity (local 'pilots'): monitor and assess transfer and upscaling of initiatives



Areas under consideration

Address asymmetries and 'choice architecture' in the food system

- Avoid placing the responsibility on consumers to make a 'rational choice'
- Strengthen position and voice of less influential and vulnerable actors in food system: negotiation capacity, trading practices
- Address information and knowledge asymmetries



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Scientific Advice Mechanism

Areas under consideration

Address asymmetries and 'choice architecture' in the food system (cont.)

- Increase the policy focus on food processors and retailers
- Improve traceability of food, due-diligence and accessibility to transparent, comparable sustainability information to ensure proper market functioning



Areas under consideration

Utilize a complete policy mix

- Combine regulatory, financial, behavioral, communicational, participatory and voluntary measures
- Voluntary means as supplementary rather than main drivers



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Scientific Advice Mechanism

Not everything is covered in scientific evidence:

Feasibility

Impacts on different groups

Additional points for consideration

What would help you as an actor in the food system to become (more) sustainable?