



Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

**Towards sustainable food consumption**  
**Stakeholder Meeting Report**  
**Scientific Advice Mechanism**

*9 June 2023*

## **Towards sustainable food consumption**

### **Stakeholder Meeting hosted by the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors (GCSA) of the European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM)**

**9 June 2023**

#### **MEETING REPORT<sup>1</sup>**

The purpose of the meeting was for the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors (GCSA) of the European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) to present the key messages of the Scientific Opinion 'Towards sustainable food consumption' to representatives of major stakeholder groups and to gather their immediate views and reactions, mainly on the clarity of the recommendations. Thus, it is unlike the stakeholder consultations that the European Commission organises. Importantly, participation in the meeting does not imply endorsement of the SAM publications by any of the stakeholders.

The meeting was held via video conference. Over 40 representatives attended. The European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism and SAPEA's Evidence Review Report (ERR) were introduced, followed by an overview of the policy recommendations included in the Scientific Opinion. Emphasis was placed on the adoption of a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach in developing the report, particularly by taking a food systems perspective. This approach takes into account both individual actions and the broader food environment, recognising their interconnectedness within a larger system. The importance of understanding complex interactions, structures, and the power imbalances at stake was also acknowledged.

Before opening the floor for reactions and comments, it was highlighted that the GCSA had explicitly been requested to refrain from discussing initiatives already addressed under the Farm to Fork Strategy, such as measures relating to food labelling, public procurement, or packaging. This explained the absence of these topics in the recommendations. Another important guidance point was that, while the GCSA's advice is requested by the European Commission, many important decisions impacting the food system are taken at the Member State, regional and municipal levels. Thus, recommendations for these levels of governance have also been included in the Scientific Opinion.

Following the meeting, the GCSA received further feedback in written, which is mostly also included here. Some feedback exceeded the scope of this work and was thus omitted.

The recommendations were mostly welcomed by the participants, particularly with regards to the objective of enhancing policy coordination and coherence and the resulting legal certainty for all actors. The holistic approach, which resulted in a wide range of recommendations, was also appreciated. Cooperation between different stakeholders, including the private sector and local communities, and the leverage of synergies were deemed as key to an efficient supply chain approach. The focus on consumers and the barriers they encounter was also appreciated. Participants emphasised the retail and wholesale sector's commitment to a sustainable food system, citing initiatives to meet

---

<sup>1</sup> See meeting agenda and list of participants at the end of this document.

consumer demand, promote healthier choices, and adopt sustainable business practices. They underscored the need to create food environments where foods, drinks and meals that contribute to sustainable and healthy diets are the most available, accessible and affordable, with evidence-based and easy-to-understand labels, thus empowering consumers to make sustainable and healthy choices.

Some concern about the established process was expressed, namely that stakeholders had not been able to read and review the ERR and the Scientific Opinion before being asked to provide feedback. It was clarified that a crucial element of the SAM is its independence and that it relies on rigorous and objective scientific evidence primarily sourced from peer-reviewed scientific publications and multi-step review processes. Stakeholder comments are valuable in identifying potential gaps in the recommendations, highlighting complementary scientific evidence, and informing future requests for scientific advice. The process also envisions a wide dissemination of the findings and recommendations among stakeholder audiences to facilitate the development of relevant policies and measures and encourages a discussion following publication.

Based on the presentation, the following points of discussion emerged during the consultation as well as in the additional written feedback subsequently sent by the different organisations:

### **Governance**

- With regards to the **reach of the advice**, it was clarified that the aim is to develop a shared vision and suggest recommendations which will subsequently inform policies and actions primarily at EU level and potentially at other levels (national, regional, municipal) as well.
- In this regard, one participant cautioned that—while transitioning towards more sustainable food systems could benefit from establishing processes and arrangements to foster multi-level cooperation, engagement, and public participation both at EU, Member State and regional or local levels—the development of individual food sustainability strategies by Member States risked **fragmenting the Single Market**. Another stakeholder added that effectively representing the diverse realities of all Member States constituted a real **governance challenge**.
- It was mentioned that the recommendations could inform the upcoming **Protein Strategy**.

### **Concept of sustainability**

- There was a repeated request for clarification on the **definition** adopted for the term sustainability and its relationship with healthiness. It was explained that the GCSA's mandate was to examine the barriers that consumers face in shifting to healthier and more sustainable diets and not to define what "healthy" and "sustainable" means exactly. Thus, the GCSA relied on the SAPEA evidence review report and the considerable expertise of the expert working group, as well as the definitions of healthy and sustainable diets in peer-reviewed scientific literature.
- One stakeholder argued that **sustainability and health aspects of diets should be considered separately** and raised a concern about the relevance of considering non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the working definition of healthy and sustainable diets, arguing that **over-consumption is the central issue**, regardless of the product and how it is produced.

- One participant appreciated the focus on **environmental sustainability** which had been overlooked for many years, as previously, emphasis had been given only to economic sustainability.
- It was clarified that the **three pillars of sustainability** (economic, social, and environmental) had been duly considered. However, a definition of minimum sustainability requirements for food items, as requested by one of the participants<sup>2</sup>, was beyond the scope of this Advice.
- While **animal welfare** had been considered in the definition of sustainability adopted for the recommendations, participants felt that it should be further emphasised, in response to a clear demand from consumers. Furthermore, the general lack of consideration for the welfare of fish was stressed - for example in the Planetary Health Diet. One stakeholder called for a prioritisation of animal health and welfare over sustainability when in conflict. They argued that preventing illness and ensuring animals are healthy meant a reduced need for treatments and less risk of zoonotic diseases spreading to humans. To this effect, it was argued that digitalisation, traceability, monitoring and analysis of data, better breeding, genomic techniques, and preventive care innovations needed to be reinforced.
- Reference was made to the **hidden costs** of animal sourced food consumption for health, the environment but also for animals in terms of poor animal welfare citing Rusman et al. (2023)<sup>3</sup> who found that quantified external costs attributed to animal sourced food consumption in the EU are 7.8 times higher than the basic price paid to producers for the value of animal sourced food goods.
- It was also suggested that factors such as **labour conditions** of individuals engaged in the food value chain, including seasonal workers, should be considered as an integral component of sustainable food production (beyond environmental sustainability).
- Several stakeholders recognised the importance of establishing a **robust regulatory framework** that outlines the minimum sustainability requirements, such as indexing food products based on the impact of their production, processing, and distribution as key in setting timely goals for promoting healthy and sustainable consumption.

### **Value chain approach**

- The need to **preserve nutrients** throughout the food chain was emphasised as this had not been specifically addressed in the presentation.
- The participants stressed the significance of considering **all stages of the value chain**, including food transportation and its environmental impact, particularly in relation to sustainability.
- The importance of **circularity** in the food chain was stressed, in particular with regards to preventing food waste by utilising waste of the agri-food supply chain for producing food and feed ingredients and ultimately preventing the depletion of resources through innovative production technologies.
- It was appreciated that the recommendations acknowledged the multiple and evolving options for consumers to access food through for example, **informal supply**.
- The potential role of **digitalisation** to support direct sales between farmers and consumers was pointed out, and calls were made for further research on this subject.

---

<sup>2</sup> The example of Coop (2022) [Rules for Coop's Sustainability Declaration](#) in Sweden was provided whereby a sustainability declaration for 17,000 products has been signed by producers to inform consumers.

<sup>3</sup> Rusman, Andrea et al. 2023. [External costs of animal sourced food in the EU](#). Impact Institute/Eurogroup for Animals.

### **Imports**

- Regarding the recommendation relating to the need to **restrict imports** of food commodities from environmentally sensitive ecosystems under threat, a prudent and sensible approach in line with other EU policies was advised as it could have a direct impact on EU exports.
- Caution was called for in reducing production volumes as this would not necessarily be environmentally sustainable on a global scale if consumption would not decrease equally since it might lead to increased imports of products not subject to the same **sustainability standards as those produced within the EU**.
- It was suggested that border taxes or bans be based on the evaluation of a product's performance according to **sustainability indices** that would still need to be developed and not disadvantage entire regions (and all the producers within that region that may employ different production methods).
- Currently, plant-based meat and dairy alternatives rely mostly on soybeans, oats, wheat, almonds, and peas. More (financial) incentives are needed for farmers to also produce other crops that grow well in the EU, reducing the need for food imports.

### **Recognition of diversity of consumption patterns**

- The need to reflect the **diversity in patterns of consumption** was stressed in order to avoid simplistic recommendations. To achieve healthy diets, overall nutrition composition, amount, and frequency should be considered.
- Some argued for a **balanced approach**, focusing on diets as a whole rather than on individual food items.
- Many stakeholders argued that **most or all foods can be enjoyed while striving for a healthy and sustainable diet**, but that frequency and quantity of consumption, as well as combination with other foods matter.
- In response to these concerns, it was highlighted that the recommendations **acknowledge the diversity** in consumption patterns and the varying needs of different age groups and individuals with different health conditions including food intolerances and allergies.

### **Overconsumption of certain categories of foods**

- Representatives of the food industry acknowledged the current problem of **widespread obesity and NCDs linked to food consumption** and stated that they were working on improving the situation.
- One stakeholder highlighted that the recommendation to reduce meat consumption and increase the consumption of plant-based foods is also supported by Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.<sup>4</sup>
- It was noted that **unprocessed animal products** are only detrimental to health when consumed excessively, though the definition of "excessive" was not further discussed. Reference was made to an article by Stanton et al. (2022)<sup>5</sup> regarding the health impacts of red meat consumption.
- One stakeholder pointed out that, according to data from the FAO<sup>6</sup>, per capita meat consumption in the EU is nearly double the global average, and that, according to

<sup>4</sup> [https://health.ec.europa.eu/publications/europes-beating-cancer-plan\\_en](https://health.ec.europa.eu/publications/europes-beating-cancer-plan_en)

<sup>5</sup> Alice V. Stanton, Frédéric Leroy, Christopher Elliott, Neil Mann, Patrick Wall, Stefaan De Smet (2022) [36-fold higher estimate of deaths attributable to red meat intake in GBD 2019: is this reliable?](#) The Lancet. Vol 399

<sup>6</sup> [https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/per-capita-meat-consumption-by-type-kilograms-per-year?country=OWID\\_WRL%7EOWID\\_EU27](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/per-capita-meat-consumption-by-type-kilograms-per-year?country=OWID_WRL%7EOWID_EU27)

Eurostat<sup>7</sup>, only 12% of Europeans eat the recommended amount of vegetables and fruit.

- It was noted that the [2022 Dublin Declaration of Scientists on the Societal Role of Livestock](#) had not been mentioned in the presentation. The declaration calls for reliable evidence of livestock systems' nutrition and health benefits, environmental sustainability, and socio-cultural and economic value. The advisors confirmed that they are aware of the declaration, and that the available evidence had been very carefully analysed by many different topic experts, allowing the Opinion to provide a highly reliable and balanced view, in line with the Dublin declaration.
- It was argued by some that **animal health** should be considered as a strong ally in transitioning to sustainable food systems, while ensuring food safety and security. According to the relevant stakeholders, healthier animals use less resources and are more productive. An emphasis on animal welfare also reduces production loss.
- The Advisors confirmed that due attention had been given to the newly published FAO report on the [Contribution of terrestrial animal source food to healthy diets for improved nutrition and health outcomes](#).
- Other stakeholders called for shifting the attribution of **Common Agricultural Subsidies** from livestock and dairy production to producing foods recommended within a sustainable dietary pattern. They felt that the price of animal products should reflect the **social cost** of the associated environmental damages and explained that this type of shift in fiscal policy had been widely researched<sup>8</sup> and simulated, with positive conclusions for both climate and health.
- Some stakeholders were concerned that the **environmental impact of fish consumption** might have been underestimated in the EAT-Lancet Planetary Health Diet and that an average per capita consumption of 200 g of fish/week would result in substantial increase of aquaculture.
- Another argument for a shift to plant-based diets, made by one of the stakeholders, was that **protein and energy efficiency of animal products** (i.e., the ratio of body mass gains to protein intake) is very low, reaching less than 10% for pork, lamb/mutton, and beef, less than 20% for poultry and 25% or less for milk and eggs<sup>9</sup>.
- A request was made to move **beyond qualitative recommendations** regarding which foods should be consumed. Some countries such as Spain and Denmark have started incorporating sustainability into their nutritional recommendations as part of their dietary guidelines. This was deemed important, as consumers tend to underestimate the environmental impact of their consumption, by, for example, significantly underestimating the amount of meat they consume.
- Although beyond the scope of the Opinion, a suggestion was made to include recommendations aimed at identifying more sustainable methods for producing animal products. The type of **feed** used was pointed out as one key determinant of animal food production sustainability. The recently published EU Deforestation Regulation addressed the issue of deforestation caused by the use of soy as feed, with measures to mitigate the potential environmental externalities associated with it. In terms of enhancing the sustainability of feed sources for animal rearing, it was suggested that

<sup>7</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20220104-1>

<sup>8</sup> Examples of such research are: Rusman Andrea et al. (2023) [External costs of animal sourced food in the EU](#). Impact Institute.; Korteland Marisa et al. (2023) [Pay as you eat dairy, eggs and meat. Internalising external costs of animal food products in France, Germany and the EU27](#). CE Delft for the TAPP; Leite Pinto, R. (2021). [The effects of introducing a carbon-meat tax in the EU: a literature review](#). UNIO – EU Law Journal, 7(2), 106–123.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, P., C. Brown, A. Arneith, J. Finnigan, M.D.A. Rounsevell (2016) [Human appropriation of land for food: The role of diet](#), Global Environmental Change, Volume 41

exploring circular approaches could be beneficial, such as utilising by-products that would otherwise be lost or wasted.

- Regarding the recommendation to prioritise **plant-based foods** over animal foods, some stakeholders raised concerns about the sustainability of certain plant-based foods, citing the deforestation caused by the extensive soy production in certain parts of the world. However, the GCSA reassured the audience that this had been considered in their Advice, including consideration of the fact that more than 75% of global soy is used for livestock feed and less than 10% for human food production.
- The use of the term **Ultra Processed Foods** (UPFs) in the recommendations was criticised as a precise definition had not been provided, which could lead to confusion. Some stakeholders stressed that food processing could lead to positive outcomes such as enhanced nutritiousness, more efficient production, better taste, or extended shelf-life (and therefore less food waste). The GCSA pointed to the fact that the definition they had adopted for UPFs was well-accepted in scientific literature and based on SAPEA's Evidence Review Report. They recognised the diversity of processed foods and that the understanding of UPFs is evolving rapidly. They suggested that, given the significance of the debates and interest over these foods, further follow-up requests for advice may be made to the GCSA.

### **Affordability**

- The 2022 Eurobarometer on food safety<sup>10</sup> shows **cost** to be the primary consideration when choosing food. A separate survey of 11 EU countries found that the biggest barrier to consuming certain foods was price, followed by lack of knowledge, the challenge of identifying sustainable food options as well as their limited availability.<sup>11</sup> However, one participant stressed that, while it was important to make healthy and sustainable food options accessible and affordable, foods would only be consumed if they were appealing in terms of taste as this was another primary factor influencing Europeans' food choices.
- It was pointed out that, on the one hand, many EU citizens are consuming more calories than needed, but at the same time certain foods are considered unaffordable. Some participants suggested that **raising taxes on certain foods** would make some foods (even) less affordable. It was clarified that the GCSA took the issue of cost and affordability of foods by different groups into account during the formulation of the recommendations, for example by recommending that only foods that do not contribute to healthy and sustainable diets would be taxed more, and healthy and sustainable foods less.
- It was pointed out that **plant-based diets** are usually more affordable than mixed diets.
- However, **organic food** is often relatively less affordable due to the fact that cheaper non-organic food does not account for its true environmental and social costs.
- While **food security** was not a theme specifically reviewed in the report, it was confirmed that it had been considered throughout the report, especially given the current prevailing levels of food insecurity associated with price inflation.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-09/EB97.2-food-safety-in-the-EU\\_report.pdf](https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-09/EB97.2-food-safety-in-the-EU_report.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> BEUC (2020) [One bite at a time: consumers and the transition to sustainable food, An analysis of a survey of European consumers on attitudes towards sustainable food](#)

- On food security in context of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, one stakeholder referenced a recent Communication<sup>12</sup> arguing that moving to mostly plant-based diets could improve food resilience.

### ***Taxation as a tool to influence consumption***

- With regards to the recommendation on **taxing meat**, the GCSA clarified that the primary motivation behind this measure was driven by environmental concerns and acknowledged that food products from ruminants could play a positive role in diets.
- The need for a cautionary approach to **fiscal policy** as a means to discourage consumption was emphasised by some stakeholders, highlighting its potential limited effects or even unforeseen health consequences. Indeed, such measures might exacerbate the 'nutrient gap' and render some food products unaffordable for a large fraction of the society, which may turn to cheaper products with lower protein quality. It was argued that behavioural economics research had demonstrated the uncertain outcomes and substitution effects of such tools. The discussion also referenced the mixed results of Member States' attempts to reduce VAT on items. The GCSA acknowledged the need for careful utilisation of taxation as a tool and emphasised the importance of evidence-based exploration to identify the most effective combination of measures. Ultimately, a mechanism to penalise consumption of unhealthy and unsustainable amounts of foods needs to be identified.
- Several stakeholders noted that the current policy approach—fragmented between EU Member States—sometimes taxes plant-based meat and dairy alternatives at a higher rate than their animal-based counterparts (e.g. Germany, Austria, Spain, Poland)—which runs counter to the recommendations given in the Opinion.
- Reference was made to the 2014 McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) mapping of potential solutions available to society to change its collective behaviour and reduce obesity<sup>13</sup>. This report developed a framework that classified interventions to **tackle obesity** based on health-related behavioural-change theory and insights from behavioural economics and assessed the potential impact and cost effectiveness of 74 interventions. The exercise found taxation to be a rather **inefficient** intervention compared to other measures (e.g. reformulation, portion control). Other reports such as Andreyeva et al. (2022)<sup>14</sup> or the UK Institute of Economic Affairs,<sup>15</sup> who report limited effects of taxation on obesity, were also cited.
- Using **disincentives** such as **taxes** to address externalised costs and guide consumption towards sustainable diets was acknowledged to be a good option, but it was also pointed out that the use of **incentives** was important as well. This could encourage consumption of plant-based foods, for example.
- While there is limited 'real life' experience with food taxation to draw upon, one participant highlighted the existence of other successful measures to increase the consumption of certain foods, such as **milk vouchers**.

<sup>12</sup> Sun et al. (2022). Adoption of plant-based diets across Europe can improve food resilience against the Russia–Ukraine conflict. *Nature Food*, 3, 905-910. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-022-00634-4>

<sup>13</sup> McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) (2014) [Overcoming obesity: An initial economic analysis](#)

<sup>14</sup> Andreyeva, T., Marple, K., Moore, T. E., & Powell, L. M. (2022). [Evaluation of Economic and Health Outcomes Associated With Food Taxes and Subsidies: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis](#). *JAMA network open*, 5(6), e2214371.

<sup>15</sup> Lyons R. & Snowdon C. (2015) [Sweet Truth- Is there a market failure in sugar?](#) UK Institute of Economic Affairs



### **Reformulation**

- A request to provide **additional details** on the recommendation concerning the reformulation of products whose frequent consumption is unhealthy was made. However, the GCSA explained that this was a generic recommendation on a potential tool to be used. Implementation details were beyond the scope of the Advisors' work and would require further in-depth investigation.
- It was pointed out that in many **EU Member States**, public authorities and the industry are already working together and have signed plans or agreements on product reformulation (e.g., [Norway](#), [Germany](#), [the Netherlands](#), [Spain](#), [France](#), [Greece](#), [Czech Republic](#)) and reference was made to FoodDrinkEurope's recently published [Guidance for Product Innovation and Reformulation](#) which aims to help businesses in their product innovation and reformulation activities.
- It was cautioned that any reformulation efforts should pay particular attention to product **shelf-life**, as changes could significantly impact supply chains.
- The progress made by retailers in product reformulation by reducing fat, sugar, and salt levels or enriching with vitamins was emphasised. The relevant stakeholders said that they are dedicated to further enhancing these initiatives, despite the time it takes for consumers to adapt to these changes. Facilitating **knowledge sharing** within the industry is essential to drive progress in this regard.
- The **Organic Regulation** was criticised because it restricts the fortification of organic foods with vitamins and minerals.

### **Alternative foods and diets**

- The inclusion of reference to **alternative foods**, such as insects or lab-grown proteins, in the report was confirmed. However, the deployment of any of these alternative foods would need to be accompanied by a study on their sustainability and their nutritional properties. Some stakeholders objected to the inclusion and promotion of lab-grown and fermentation-precision foods as potential sustainable alternatives to animal-based products, as the evaluation of these foods is still pending. They referred to an FAO study<sup>16</sup>, which indicates that these products cannot fully replace animal-derived food in terms of nutritional composition. The report also highlighted the necessity for further research to assess the food safety risks associated with large-scale production of cell-cultured 'meat'.
- Caution was advised regarding the farming of insects, especially highlighting the need to distinguish between insect farming for food or for feed. It was argued that insect farming for feed can encourage unsustainable practices in animal farming and can add an extra trophic level to the food chain. Moreover, participants pointed out that progress is being made in understanding insect behavioural needs and their capacity for sentience. This development raises significant **welfare concerns within the insect industry** (see Björkbom (2021)<sup>17</sup> and Lambert (2022)<sup>18</sup>).
- Some stakeholders argued to specifically make reference **to nuts, seeds, fungi and algae, as well as plant-based milk alternatives** such as unsweetened, fortified soy or pea "milk" as healthy and sustainable options in a plant-based diet.
- More generally, the need for **R&D** to develop more sustainable products was stressed. In this regard, the EU-funded Smart Protein Project<sup>19</sup> was mentioned, which aims to

<sup>16</sup> FAO. 2023. [Contribution of terrestrial animal source food to healthy diets for improved nutrition and health outcomes – An evidence and policy overview on the state of knowledge and gaps](#). Rome.

<sup>17</sup> Björkbom, Camilla. 2021. [Is insect farming truly a solution to the animal feed problem](#). International Animal Health Journal, 8(4): 34-36.

<sup>18</sup> Lambert, Helen. 2022. [Insect farming and sustainable food systems: the precautionary principle](#). Eurogroup for Animals.

<sup>19</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/862957>

develop alternative protein ingredients and products for humans which have a positive impact on bioeconomy, environment, biodiversity, nutrition, food security and consumer trust and acceptance. Some stakeholders lamented, however, that little EU research budget was currently targeting the development of healthy and sustainable plant-based foods.

- In response to the concerns that have been raised regarding the **nutritional content in plant-based diets**, particularly in the case of vegan diets, it was stressed that protein intake in the EU adult population is generally at or above the recommended daily amounts<sup>20</sup>. Fortified plant-based meat and dairy alternatives not only offer essential vitamins and minerals but often also have low saturated fat content and high levels of unsaturated fat, which has been associated with a reduced risk of overall mortality and cardiovascular diseases. Furthermore, plant-based meat and dairy alternatives can significantly contribute to address the, on average, insufficient intake of fibre.
- The **availability** of plant-based meat alternatives may also reduce the **cognitive effort** associated with shifting to a more plant-based diet.

### ***Public procurement and outlets for consumption***

- The role of **public procurement** was highlighted by many participants as a crucial tool to influence consumption. They suggested that public procurement could contribute to promoting more sustainable diets by implementing certain criteria in provided meals such as a minimum number of plant-based foods or other criteria relating to sustainable foods<sup>21</sup>. Specifically, schools and even universities were mentioned as important environments where new foods, including plant-based alternatives (e.g. to milk), vegetarian, and vegan meals, could be introduced. However, public procurement is already covered under the Farm to Fork Strategy and did not therefore fall under the remit of the Advice, as mentioned in the introductory remarks.
- The GCSA explained that the different consumption practices associated with **different outlets** (restaurants for example) had been acknowledged in the report as this was important in addressing issues such as food waste. However, the recommendations had not been customised to specific settings or outlets as this would require an extensive and detailed review of additional data which was beyond the scope of the current Advice. In addition, public procurement was explicitly outside of the scope of the Opinion as it is already covered by the Farm-to-Form strategy.

### ***Education, food literacy, awareness and behaviour change***

- Some stakeholders deemed food education to be the quintessential measure for changing consumer behaviour in the long run. As such, stakeholders' efforts needed to be supported by increasing consumers' **food literacy and skills** of consumers. This includes understanding the nutritional composition of foods, reading labels, knowing healthy portion sizes, the environmental impacts of different foods, etc. It was stressed that consumers could only eat more sustainably if they were readily able to recognise viable alternatives to climate-damaging foods.

<sup>20</sup> EFSA Scientific Opinion. 2022. Scientific advice related to nutrient profiling for the development of harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling and the setting of nutrient profiles for restricting nutrition and health claims on foods. <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2022.7259>

<sup>21</sup> Reference was made to the joint [Manifesto for establishing minimum standards for public canteens across the EU](#) (2022) which presents seven actionable propositions for establishing minimum standards for public canteens in Europe.

- Although outside the scope of the work, some stakeholders called for improving the information about **animal welfare**, for example by providing welfare or method-of-production **labels** on all products containing animal-source ingredients.
- Several participants stressed the importance of looking beyond education to affect **social norms and promote behaviour change**. They suggested that interventions in schools, not only curriculum-based but also through the provision of balanced meals in canteens, could help shape children's dietary habits from a young age. This would allow them to get used to consuming more balanced diets. The GCSA confirmed that this had been addressed in the report and acknowledged that influencing and shifting social norms could have a lasting and far-reaching impact.
- The recommendation to have **food literacy and education provided through closer contact with producers** was challenged by some of the stakeholders, who warned against conflicts of interest, since food producers had commercial interests and may have limited knowledge outside their specific area of expertise. The GCSA stressed that food education in schools was key but that farmers also had a role to play and that the recommendation they made was to reconnect consumers to primary food producers, which they feel would increase food literacy and empower consumer to make better choices. Mention was also made in the report of self-provision of food, which is still prevalent in certain regions, as well as urban agriculture.
- Beyond education, participants emphasized the importance of positive motivation in bringing about changes in diets. Neuroscience research has shown that **positive motivation** is more effective in influencing behaviour. It was suggested that future research should delve deeper into this area. The education of consumers, notably by providing motivational information, was deemed a promising strategy to pursue in order to foster healthier and more sustainable dietary choices.
- Regarding **product placement**, a stakeholder highlighted that the allocation of shelf space is part of contractual negotiations, so different actors in the supply chain are involved.
- Initiatives were mentioned that support parents in their efforts to promote healthy lifestyles for their children, notably by encouraging the **marketing** of certain foods and reducing exposure of minors to **advertising** of others. It was stressed that some companies are working through national self-regulatory pledges<sup>22</sup> and are striving to adhere strictly to national, regional, and European regulatory frameworks, such as the [European Commission's Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#). Stakeholders argued that self-regulatory standards on responsible food and beverage marketing to children have proven to be effective in limiting the exposure of children to advertising of products high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS). It was therefore advised by one stakeholder that advertising self-regulation and self-regulatory codes should continue to be recognised within the future legal framework and be accounted for in any legislative initiative, in accordance with the Principles for Better Self- and Co- Regulation (SRCR) endorsed by EU Commission's Better Regulation Agenda.
- However, another participant argued that **imposing restrictions on the advertising** of 'unsustainable foods' relied on the formulation of a clear and practical definition. Moreover, it raises a fundamental question of fairness: if the advertising of 'unsustainable' food were to be restricted, it would logically necessitate similar restrictions on advertising of various other products and services which would be rather impractical to implement. The stakeholder did not detail the argument further.

<sup>22</sup> See for example the [EU Pledge](#), a voluntary initiative by leading food and beverage companies to change the way they advertise to children which has been replicated at national level for example in Belgium and Greece.

- Yet, another stakeholder shared a report to support the recommendation that advertising to children should be restricted and that voluntary industry commitments do not have the desired effect.<sup>23</sup>
- It was also mentioned that there is a need to raise the **awareness of producers** on the role of protecting nature to guarantee future production and to provide training, skills, and resources to help farmers switch to producing healthy and sustainable products or make their production methods more sustainable.
- Stakeholder warned that the EU's proposals to **prohibit the use of meat-related terms for plant-based products**, as well as the restrictions on plant-based alternatives to dairy products using terms like 'milk' or 'cheese', could hinder consumers' perception of these alternatives as sustainable replacements. These measures were seen as making it more challenging for consumers to recognise and consider these plant-based options as viable and more sustainable alternatives.
- Some stakeholders criticised the **EU's approach to promotional campaigns**, which, for example, saw more funding for meat and dairy products in 2021 than for vegetables and fruit.
- One stakeholder remarked that, through a focus on peer-reviewed scientific literature, one may miss **real-life experiences** of some of the recommended approaches by business. Such learnings should be reflected in impact assessments of proposed regulation.

To conclude the meeting, the GCSA members expressed their appreciation for the active participation and diverse perspectives shared by all the stakeholders. The engagement of all stakeholders was key to setting and achieving common goals. To this end, it was hoped that the three reports published by the Scientific Advice Mechanism (the Scientific Opinion, the SAPEA Evidence Review Report and this Stakeholder Meeting Report) would be widely circulated in order to stimulate dialogue at EU but also local levels.

---

<sup>23</sup> BEUC. [Food marketing to children needs rules with teeth](#), report, 2021.



## AGENDA

*Date: 9 June 2023, 10:00- 13:00*

*Venue: Virtual workshop*

Meeting Chair: Prof. Nicole Grobert,  
Professor of Nanomaterials, Department of Materials, University of Oxford

Time		
10:00-10:05	Welcome	Nicole Grobert, Chair of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors
<b>Part I: General background</b>		
10:05-10:15	Presentation on the European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism	Nicola Magnani, Policy officer, European Commission RTD.02
10:40-11:05	Overview of the key messages under consideration for the Scientific Opinion	Erik Mathijs, Chair of the SAPEA Working Group
<b>Part II – Discussion- Chair: Nicole Grobert</b>		
11:05-12:50	Stakeholder views, comments and reactions	All participants
12:50-13:00	Wrap-up	Eric Lambin, Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND OTHER ATTENDEES**

<b>Business and Civil Society</b>	
AnimalHealthEurope	Roxane Feller
AVEC	Birthe Steenberg
BEUC- The European Consumer Organisation	Camille Perrin
CEFIC - European Chemical Industry Council	<i>[written feedback only]</i>
CELCOA - European Liaison Committee for Agricultural and Agri-Food Trade	<i>[written feedback only]</i>
CIWF- Compassion in World Farming	Olga Kikou
CLITRAVI- Liaison Centre for the Meat Processing Industry in the European Union	Paolo Patrino
Copa-Cogeca	Eva Sali
EDA- European Dairy Association	Alexander Anton
Edelman Global Advisory on behalf of EU Pledge	<i>[written feedback only]</i>
EU Specialty Food Ingredients	Clara Colonna
Eucolait	Alice O'Donovan
EUFIC- European Food Information Council	Betty Chang
Euro Coop	Fabrizio Fabbri
EuroCommerce	Els Bedert
Eurogroup for Animals	Camilla Björkbom
EuropaBio	Anne-Gaelle Colliot
European Academies' Science Advisory Council (EASAC)	Fears Robin
European Environmental Bureau- EEB	Isabel Paliotta
European Feed Manufacturers' Federation- FEFAC	Anton van den Brink
European Institute of Innovation & Technology Food- EIT Food	Flavio Antonelli
European Livestock and Meat Trades Union - UECBV	Hélène Simonin
European Plant-Based Foods Association- ENSA	Michela Bissonni
European Public Health Alliance- EPHA	Alba Gil
FABRE TP- EFFAB- Farm Animal Breeding & Reproduction Technology Platform, European Forum of Farm Animal Breeders	Ana Granados Chapatte
Federation of European Aquaculture Producers - FEAP	Szilvia Mihalfy
FoodDrinkEurope	Bo Dohmen
FOODSAFETY4EU	Veronica Lattanzio
Freshfel Europe	Joanna Nathanson
German Food Retail Association - BVLH	Miriam Schneider
International Platform of Insects for Food and Feed- IPIFF	Steven Barbosa
Jeremy Coller Foundation- FAIRR/JCF	Lara Pappers
Plant-based Food Alliance- EAPF	Siska Pottie
ProVeg	Lucia Hortelano
EuroVeg	Rafael Pinto
WWF European Policy Officer	Riedo Giulia
<b>Policy stakeholders and Agencies</b>	
FAO- Food and Agriculture Organization	Ana Islas Ramos
EEA- European Environment Agency	Andrea Hagyo

<b>Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM)</b>	
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors	Nicole Grobert
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors	Maarja Kruusmaa
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors	Eric Lambin
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors	Alberto Melloni
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors	Nebojsa Nakicenovic
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors	Eva Zazimalova
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors - Alumni	Janusz Bujnicki
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors - Alumni	Carina Keskitalo
SAPEA	Erik Mathijs
SAPEA	Agnieszka Pietruczuk
SAPEA	Céline Tschirhart
SAPEA	Nina Skocak
European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation	Leonard Engels
European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation	Nicola Magnani
European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation	Ingrid Zegers
European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation	Annabelle Ascher
European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation	Agnieszka Friedrichs
European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation	Gilles Laroche
European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation	Mihalis Kritikos
Scientific Writer	Marie Jo A. Cortijo
<b>EC Observers</b>	
European Commission Directorate General for Health and Food Safety	Alice Pignacca
European Commission Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development	Orsolya Frizon Somogyi
European Commission Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development	Patricia Lopez
European Commission Directorate General for Health and Food Safety	Isabelle Rollier
European Commission Directorate General Joint Research Centre	Laurent Bontoux