



Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

## **Towards a sustainable food system**

### **Stakeholder Meeting Report**

**Scientific Advice Mechanism**

*18 February 2020, Brussels*

## **Towards a sustainable food system**

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

**18 February 2020, Rue du Champ de Mars 21, Brussels**

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

The Group of Chief Scientific Advisors held a stakeholder meeting on its forthcoming scientific opinion “Towards a sustainable food system”, which seeks to address the following question: *What are the 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?*

The main purpose of the meeting was to hear stakeholder views on the feasibility of the recommendation areas being considered by the Group, their impacts on different groups and additional points for consideration. Participants were also asked what would help them as actors in the food system to become (more) sustainable.

As a scene setter, preliminary conclusions of the Evidence Review Report, developed by the Science Advice for Policy by European Academies (SAPEA) consortium, at the request of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, were presented by SAPEA Working Group Chair Peter Jackson. The recommendation areas being considered for the scientific opinion were presented by Chief Scientific Advisors Rolf Heuer and Carina Keskitalo.

The stakeholder meeting was co-hosted by the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors and European Commission services responsible for the forthcoming Farm to Fork Strategy for Sustainable Food – a key component of the European Green Deal. The morning part of the stakeholder meeting was dedicated to the scientific advice of Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, which informs the Farm to Fork Strategy. The forthcoming Strategy was discussed with the stakeholders in the afternoon.

The meeting was attended by representatives of a wide range of relevant stakeholder groups, scientific organisations, and policy actors involved in the development of the Farm to Fork strategy (see the list of participants at the end of this report).

The following is an unattributed synthesis of the morning meeting only – devoted to the forthcoming scientific opinion “Towards a sustainable food system”.

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

*Scene setting*

## 1) Key preliminary conclusions of the Evidence Review Report (Peter Jackson):

- 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).
- ‘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.
- 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).

- 2) Recommendation areas being considered by the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors (Carina Keskitalo):
- Ensure a truly integrated approach to sustainable food: frame 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.
  - 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; increase the policy focus on food manufacturers and retailers; improve traceability of food, due diligence and accessibility to transparent, comparable sustainability information to ensure proper market functioning.
  - Utilize a complete policy mix: combine regulatory, financial, behavioural, communication, participatory and voluntary measures; voluntary means as supplementary rather than main drivers.

#### *System governance*

One participant inquired whether policy coherence will be addressed directly (whereby policy in one area should not counter other policies) – the response was affirmative.

One participant asked whether common metrics can be considered as a key enabler. The response from the panel was there is some discussion of metrics in the evidence review - as shaping outcomes and not only measuring them – and that some good local practices that have been measured against metrics have been presented.

#### *Alternative approaches to sustainability*

Questions were raised about a compatibility of, or the need to make choices between, ‘sustainable intensification’ vs. ‘agro-ecological’ approaches in primary food production. Some argued that the agro-ecological approach is seen in many reports as a main strategy for achieving the transition to sustainability as it takes a broader perspective than a production focus, and cautioned that the sustainable intensification model could be hijacked for maintaining production focus. A comment on that from the panel was that the agro-ecological approach inevitably produces food that is more expensive – raising questions on how to deal with affordability (and hence the transfer of costs between groups). Questions were raised about the impacts of the two pathways over time, and about the possibility of a comparative risk assessments for those two pathways. One participant argued that the discussion between the two models is a critical point, since there is consensus on remaining

issues. Both approaches have been mentioned in the evidence review, with arguments for and against both, and the areas under consideration for the opinion as parts in the sustainable landscape, without advocating one or the other.

#### *Food retailers and manufacturers*

Some participants pointed out that large and small manufacturers and retailers seem to be mixed in together, whereas they face very different problems.

#### *Consumer behaviour and consumer choice*

Overall, there was support for avoiding an approach whereby most responsibility would be placed on the consumer as part of the dominant narrative of ‘consumer choice’.

A key role of public acceptability was stressed – an example of negative public reactions to the policy of reusing fish discards was mentioned. A member of the panel cautioned that public acceptance is not the only consideration – and must be balanced e.g. by accessibility and affordability.

While agreeing on the point on consumer responsibility, one participant argued that consumer diversity is missing from the picture – e.g. consumption trends, diverse consumer expectations, and the role of business to meet those.

#### *Vulnerable groups*

Some pointed out the importance of economic sustainability for farmers: ‘farmers cannot be green if they are in the red’. A representative of small farmers pointed out that small and sustainable farmers provide much of the high-quality food and they help to ensure diversity for consumers.

#### *The policy mix used for achieving a sustainable food system*

Overall, the idea of ‘not putting all the eggs in one basket’ received support, and there was agreement that education and communication (while necessary) are not sufficient. One participant pointed out that regulatory measures have an even higher impact than fiscal ones.

One participant asked whether consumer information measures such as certification and labelling are not too complex, and how to address it. The panel responded that consumers already find the amount of information on labels baffling and the evidence review weighs the pros and cons of simplification; information should not be only for consumers.

Questions were raised by several participants on policies concerning meat production and consumption, and the transition to more plant-based diets. One participant asserted that European livestock production is the most efficient, hence reducing it in Europe could lead to unsustainable livestock production increase elsewhere. Another observation was that extensive livestock breeding, with reduced herd sizes, could help farmers would increase profits. Another participant enquired what concrete measures are being advocated to address the issue of overproduction and overconsumption of livestock – e.g. concerning the fair price of meat. The reply was that the evidence review and the scientific opinion aim to set a direction but not to define any absolute measures such as the tax rates that should be

applied to meat. One participant pointed out that plant-based food is often equated with sustainable food, whereas it is often ultra-processed and not necessarily sustainable.

#### *Other observations*

Some participants pointed out possible biases arising from the fact that all the stakeholder consultation is in English, and from the fact that the cultural significance of food – particularly in southern Europe – may not be sufficiently paid attention to.

One participant pointed to the need to consider use of land in general, including the massive strain that the production of biofuels places on land, whereas land is needed for carbon sequestration.

One participant inquired about whether the work took into account the precautionary principle as applied to novel food technologies. The panel responded that other scientific opinions address this; public concerns are not only about technological risks but also the corporate model; precautionary principle is key is sometimes misused.

Some stressed the importance of trade and global impact, as e.g. 50-60% of land and water use for producing food for the EU is outside EU.

A few participants stressed the role of innovation, including e.g. biotechnology and bio-economy, in speciality feed ingredients, insects as food.

One participant pointed out that animal welfare does not appear to be given attention, whereas it is integral to a sustainable food system. The response from the panel was that this could be an aspect of transparency and traceability.

## AGENDA

### **Agenda Part A**

Stakeholder meeting

## **Towards a Sustainable Food System – Insights from social sciences**

Tuesday, 18 February 2020 – 9:30 – 12:30 – Meeting Room CDMA - meeting rooms -1/SDR1 & 2

Rue du Champ de Mars 21, 1050 Ixelles (Brussels)

**Objective:** *The European Commission’s Group of Chief Scientific Advisors is developing a Scientific Opinion with recommendations on the topic of “Towards a Sustainable Food System: Insights from Social Sciences”. As one of the final stages in developing this, the Chief Scientific Advisors wish to conduct a meeting with stakeholder representatives, in which they will present the main draft elements of the advice under consideration and gather stakeholder views.*

**Discussion chair:** *Prof. Rolf Heuer, Chair of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors*

**Co-chair:** *Prof. Carina Keskitalo, Chief Scientific Advisors leading this Scientific Opinion*

**1. Opening remarks, background information and objective of meeting**

*Rolf Heuer, Chair of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors*

*09:30-09:50*

**Part I – General background**

**2. Main findings of the SAPEA Evidence Review Report underpinning the Scientific Opinion**

*- Peter Jackson (University of Sheffield), SAPEA Working Group Chair*

*09:50-10:10*

**3. Overview of draft key messages under consideration for the Scientific Opinion**

*- Carina Keskitalo, Chief Scientific Advisors leading this Scientific Opinion*

*10:10-10:30*

**Part II – Discussion**

**4. Stakeholder views, comments and reactions**

*10:30-12:50*

**5. Wrap-up of this part of the stakeholder meeting**

*12:50-13:00*

**- LUNCH -**

## **Agenda Part B**

Stakeholder Consultation

### **'Farm to Fork' Strategy**

Tuesday, 18 February 2020 – 14.00 – 17:00 – Meeting Room CDMA - meeting rooms -1/SDR1 & 2

Rue du Champ de Mars 21, 1050 Ixelles (Brussels)

**Objective:** *As part of the European Green Deal, the European Commission will adopt, in Spring 2020, a 'Farm to Fork Strategy' to design a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system. The strategy will put forward an integrated approach, involving all key players, and combining both regulatory and non-regulatory initiatives to reach its objectives. The aim of the meeting is to exchange views with stakeholders on the objectives of the strategy, the challenges, the intervention areas and the possible regulatory or non-regulatory initiatives that need to be considered in the context of the strategy.*

**Chair:** Sabine Jülicher, Director Food and feed safety, innovation, Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety

**1. Opening remarks and objective of meeting**

Sabine Jülicher, Director Food and feed safety, innovation,  
Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety  
14:00 - 14:10

**2. Presentation of the Farm to Fork Strategy – Roadmap**

Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, Head of Unit, Food information and composition, food waste  
Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety  
14:10 – 14:30

**3. Key challenges, trade-offs and the way forward**

*Presentation by the Commission (DG SANTE, DG AGRI, DG MARE) on key issues*  
14:30 – 15:00

- 4. Exchange of views on the Farm to Fork strategy:** general objectives, intervention areas, possible actions (legislative and non-legislative) including citizens' engagement initiatives  
*What are the key political priority areas in stakeholders' views? Are any elements missing? How can we address the challenges and trade-offs? Where are the biggest areas of opportunity? How can we best harness citizens' support for sustainable food systems?*  
15:00 – 16:30

**5. Wrap-up and next steps**

*Information by the Commission on the consultation strategy, process and timeline*  
16:30 – 17:00

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND OTHER ATTENDEES

Professional Associations		
AVEC (Association de l'Aviculture, de l'Industrie et du Commerce de Volailles dans les Pays de l'Union Européenne)	Paul-Henri	Lava
Animal Health Europe	Clare	Carlisle
BEUC (Bureau of European Union Consumers)	Camille	Perrin
CELCAA (European Traders in AGRI-Food commodities)	Pascale	Rouhier
CLITRAVI (Centre de liaison des industries transformatives de viande de l'UE)	Paolo	Patruno
COCERAL (Comité du commerce des céréales, aliments du bétail, oléagineux, huile d'olive, huiles et graisses et agrofournitures de l'UE)	Iliana	Axiotiades
COPA-COGECA (European farmers Association and COGECA – European agricooperatives Association)	Riccardo Thomas	Siligado Sanchez
Euro Commerce	Elisabeth	Bedert
ECSLA (European Cold Storage and Logistics Association)	Christine	Weiker
ECPA (European Crop Protection Association)	Géraldine	Kutas
EDA (European Dairy Association)	Kinga	Adamszwili
EFFA (European Flavour Association)	Béatrice	Dohmen
EFPRA (European Fat Processors & Renderers Association)	Alm	Martin
Europeche ( Association of National Organiations of Fishing Enterprises in the EU)	Thierry	Missonnier
EIT FOOD (European Institute of Innovation & Technology)	Lucia	Hortelano Villanueva
ENSA (European Plant-based Foods Association)	Corina	Georgiana Pasol
EUROSEEDS	Catherine	Lang'at Chepkru
EU Speciality Food Ingredients (Federation of European Specialty Food Ingredients Industries)	Maryse	Hervé
EUROPABIO	Agnes	Borg
EUROPARC Federation	Stefania Elisa	Petrosillo Tuillon
EWPA (European Whey Processors Association)	Hélène	Simonin
FEFANA asbl (European association of specialty feed ingredients and their mixtures)	Giuseppe Joerg	Capodiec Seifert
FOODRINK Europe	Dirk	Jacobs
Foodservices Europe	Alisan Cristina	Patricia Bambury Moraes Leitao Freitas da Costa Cagliardi
FRESHFEL Europe	Nicola	Pisano
FRUCOM (European Federation of the Trade in Dried Fruit, Edible Nuts, Processed Fruit & Vegetables, Processed Fishery)	Anne	Boulova

Products and Similar Foodstuffs)		
FVE (Federation of Veterinarians of Europe)	Francesco	Proscia
IBMA-Global (International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association AISBL)	Isabelle	Pinzauti
INDEPENDENT RETAIL EUROPE	Else	Groen
IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements)	Eric	Gall
IPIFF (International Platform of Insects for Food & Feed Association)	Christophe Constantin	Derrien Muraru
SMEUnited	Kata Sara	Porganyi
SNE (Specialised Nutrition Europe)	Laure	De Hauteclocque
UECBV (Union Européenne du Commerce du Bétail et de la Viande)	Angelantonio Sune	D’Amario Christensen
Via Campesina	Geneviève	Savigny
<b>Scientific Organisations</b>		
IPES-Food (International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems)	Francesco	Ajena
<b>Policy Stakeholders and Agencies</b>		
EEA (European Environment Agency)	Lorenzo	Benini
EFSA (European Food Safety Authority)	Stephen	Pagani
EMSA (European Medical Students’ Association)	Saif	Ahmed
<b>Non Governmental organisations</b>		
BirdLife	Harriett	Bradley
ClientEarth	Lara	Fornabaio
Compassion in World Farming	Olga	Kikou
EEB (European Environmental Bureau)	Célia	Nyssens
EHN (European Heart Network)	Marleen	Kestens
Ellen Mac Arthur Foundation	Nicholas	Jeffries
EPHA (European Public Health Alliance)	Nikolai	Pushkarev
EFNCP (European Forum on Nature Conservation & Pastoralism)	Xavier	Poux
EUFIC (European Food information Council)	Laura	Celemin Fernandes
EU Food Policy Coalition	Ines	Jordana
EURO COOP (European Community of Consumer Co-operatives)	Rosita Giulia	Zilli Tarsitano
Greenpeace	Marco	Contiero
PAN Europe (Pesticide Action Network Europe)	Henriette	Christensen
Slow Food	Yael Madeleine	Pantzer Coste

TestBiotech	Astrid	Österreicher
ZWE (Zero Waste Europe)	Pierre	Condamine
WWF (World Wide Fund)	Jabier Ruiz	Mirazo
<b>Scientific Advice Mechanism</b>		
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors	Rolf-Dieter Carina	Heuer Keskitalo
SAPEA	Peter Céline	Jackson Tschirhart
SAM Unit	Johannes Jeremy Gerjon Piotr Jacques Sigrid	Klumpers Bray Ikink Kwiecinski Verraes Weiland