



News Release

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New evidence shows consumers' diets heavily influenced by food sector

Who decides what you eat: new report explores what's secretly influencing consumer diets. The way foods are presented and choices framed needs to change to make sustainable healthy diets easy.

A new report [“The illusion of choice - Why someone already decided what you will eat for lunch”](#) published today highlights how buying, preparing and consuming food are largely the result of food sector decisions rather than consumer choices. It calls on policy makers to make healthy, more plant-based diets with ‘less and better’ animal products easy for European consumers.

This report coincides with the release of a new "evidence review" by [SAPEA](#), a consortium of independent scientists advising the European Commission, which confirms the strong influences consumers’ eating choices are subjected to.

The “food environment” conditions the choices people face – a concept that includes the food sector’s marketing and advertising, promotional offers, food availability and price, and even the spatial layout of shops and supermarkets. Currently, food environments largely push consumers towards unhealthy and unsustainable foods which are the most available, advertised, and often the cheapest options too.

Reineke Hameleers, Eurogroup for Animals CEO, remarked:

“European citizens want to eat food that ensures animal welfare. However, it is often not the higher welfare or plant-based foods that catch their eye from billboards or supermarket shelves, but unsustainable industrial animal products. This needs to change. EU policymakers must take action to enable consumers to shift to plant-based and higher welfare products.”



Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, (The European Consumer Organisation), commented:

“Why does it often cost more to buy fruit than a bag of unhealthy snacks? Eating healthily and sustainably should become the regular choice, not the luxury one. Supermarkets must stop offering deals that push us towards food and drink products we need to consume less of, and instead target price promotions to support healthier and greener diets. Governments too need to step in to ensure all consumers can afford buying food that is good for their health and the planet.”

Dr Milka Sokolović, Director General of EPHA, added:

“Our current food environments are designed to maximise nutritionally poor foods, leading to a long list of non-communicable diseases with an increasing incidence and burden to society. Policymakers bear responsibility for reversing this situation in which our food environments make us ill. They must support people in making the healthy and sustainable food choices by making them the default option.”

Notes for editors:

Both the report and the SAPEA evidence review will be presented today at the high-level event [‘Who decides what you eat?’](#) hosted by Eurogroup for Animals, the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), and the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA).

This autumn the European Commission is due to present a proposal for a legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems (FSFS) as one of the flagship initiatives of the Farm to Fork Strategy. This initiative has the potential to pave the ground for a transformation of food environments towards ones that are healthy and sustainable by default. [“The illusion of choice” report](#) demonstrates how crucial it is that this proposal is adopted by the **Commission**. Specifically, the healthy and sustainable food choice must be:

- The most affordable one
- Widely available and attractive
- The most marketed
- Easy when eating out
- The default choice for public procurement
- And finally, food must become healthier and more sustainable by design.



About the coalition

Eurogroup for Animals, the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) and the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) have joined forces for a project called “Put change on the menu” to move the debate around food environments⁴ to the forefront and campaign for food environments that promote healthy sustainable diets with ‘less and better’ animal products.

In its 2020 ‘Farm to Fork’ Strategy for fairer, healthier, and greener food and farming, the European Commission announced a new EU legislative Framework for a Sustainable Food System for 2023. This horizontal law will introduce definitions, sustainability objectives and principles to ensure that existing and future EU legislation about food consistently contributes towards the goal of a sustainable food system which operates within planetary boundaries.

For Eurogroup for Animals, BEUC and EPHA, it is vital that the Framework for a Sustainable Food System paves the ground for further concrete policy measures addressing specific elements of food environments such as advertising and marketing, labelling, public procurement and the affordability of healthy and sustainable food.



[Eurogroup for Animals](#) represents over eighty animal protection organisations across the EU, UK, Switzerland, Serbia, Norway, and Australia. Since its foundation in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the EU to adopt higher legal standards for animal protection. Eurogroup for Animals reflects public opinion through its members and has both the scientific and technical expertise to provide authoritative advice on issues relating to animal protection. Eurogroup for Animals is a founding member of the [World Federation for Animals](#) which unites the animal protection movement at the global level.

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[The European Consumer Organisation \(BEUC\)](#) acts as the umbrella group in Brussels for 45 independent national consumer organisations. Our main role is to represent them to the European institutions and defend the interests of European consumers.

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The [European Public Health Alliance](#) is a member-led organisation made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups. We work to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. Our actions and campaigns reflect our

values: equity, solidarity, sustainability, universality, diversity, and good governance. Since formal establishment in spring 1993, EPHA has built a solid network of 80 members dedicated to providing better health for all.

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