

# BEUC'S VISION FOR A STRATEGIC DIALOGUE ON THE FUTURE OF FOOD IN THE EU

Everyone agrees that the way we produce and consume food in the EU is unsustainable and needs to change. But not everyone agrees on how. The strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture announced by President von der Leyen<sup>1</sup> on 13 September 2023 therefore offers a much-needed opportunity to overcome polarisation on food and farming issues. For this dialogue to succeed, consumer groups from across Europe underline it must be designed along the following principles:

## 01 Legislative work must go on

Many important initiatives - such as on sustainable food systems, front-of-pack labelling and animal welfare - remain in the policy pipeline. **The strategic dialogue must not delay their publication**, but instead can usefully inform the legislative work by the Council and European Parliament on these proposals.

## 02 Focus on food, not just agriculture

Food is what ends up on people's plate. Whether they live in cities or rural areas, food is a topic which all Europeans can relate to and engage with. **We need to have a societal debate on what food we produce in the EU and how.** Such debate can even be a catalyst to generate interest for, and participation in, the upcoming European elections.

## 03 Make it inclusive

- **A whole-of-society approach.** Farmers are legitimate stakeholders to be part of any debate on the future of food. **But equally so are the 447 million consumers who choose, buy, prepare, and consume food every day.** Consumer organisations deserve a seat at the table, alongside with civil society at large. Actors of the 'middle of the chain' such as industry and retailers should also be convened given the enormous influence their activities have on farmers and consumers alike. Taking inspiration from similar exercises carried out in Germany<sup>2</sup> and France<sup>3</sup>, a strategic dialogue on the future of food must bring all those affected around the table - **and importantly, with an equal say.**
- **Work across institutional silos.** Echoing the diversity of actors which need to be involved in the dialogue, **the Commission should task a cross-DG team with the design, coordination and conduct of the dialogue.** Indeed, policy coherence is critically lacking in current EU legislation affecting food. The development of a consistent EU vision for the future of food requires addressing a broad set of issues, ranging from agriculture and health and nutrition, through to social justice, climate and environment, as well as trade.

## 04 Encourage a science-based debate

EU agencies such as the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Environmental Agency (EEA), the Commission's in-house science body (Joint Research Centre) as well as the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors can all make an essential contribution to the dialogue by ensuring it is informed by science, facts, and evidence.

## 05 Address sustainable food consumption

The topics for debate as part of the dialogue should be co-decided with all the different actors around the table. From the consumer perspective, we believe **the dialogue should consider ways (including policies) to make sustainable, healthy food an easy and affordable choice.** The EU will not achieve its climate and health goals without prioritising sustainable food consumption. This topic, therefore, must have a prominent place in the strategic dialogue.

<sup>1</sup> State of the Union [address](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [German Zukunftskommission Landwirtschaft](#).

<sup>3</sup> See French [Etats généraux de l'alimentation](#).