

Why We Need A Common Food Policy for the EU: An Open Letter to Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission

4th April 2016

Dear President Juncker,

As a diverse grouping of European scientists working for food systems reform, we write to you today with a request to make a bold move towards reforming the food systems in the EU. We believe the "last chance Commission", as you called it in your inaugural speech to the European Parliament, has a unique opportunity to achieve gains at multiple levels - for the environment, for public health, for rural development and for development cooperation - if it moves towards a 'Common Food Policy' for Europe.

Currently, the food we eat and the food systems we possess are shaped by a variety of distinct policy frameworks, from agriculture to food safety to employment and education policies. Inevitably, these policies are developed by policymakers working within their specific policy areas, in dialogue with industry groups, civil society organizations and scientific bodies whose own interests are often bounded by the same political and disciplinary siloes.

Meanwhile, policies at various governance levels are often disconnected from one another. School boards, municipalities, neighbourhoods, sometimes whole regions, are now trying to develop sustainable food systems at a local level. They are often poorly supported by higher governance levels, while sectorial policies (e.g. for trade, agriculture or public procurement) are sometimes perceived to be undercutting their efforts. These disconnects raise questions of accountability. When poor outcomes duly arise, from burgeoning obesity rates to livelihood stresses for small-scale farmers, it is difficult to hold specific actors to account, or to know where reforms should start to put food systems onto a sustainable path.

A 'Common Food Policy' for the EU would bring urgent environment, health and development priorities to centre-stage. It also holds major potential for farmers, who continue to struggle while "sandwiched" between highly concentrated industries upstream (inputs, machinery) and downstream (processing, distribution and retail)¹. Farmers require allies in their quest to produce high-quality foods, manage the natural environment, and be fairly remunerated for doing so. Those allies can be found among the multiple groups advocating for environmental protection, healthy diets and sustainable development, and the millions of citizens and consumers who expect their food systems to deliver on all of these fronts.

Widening our focus from agriculture to food policy also offers a major opportunity to redefine the EU's mission over the coming years and decades. Food is an entry point for joined-up policymaking across multiple sectors and governance levels, and for reconnecting European citizens with the policy measures put in place at the EU level.

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) is now joining forces with other scientific groups, civil society organizations and policymakers in order to develop a vision of what a 'Common Food Policy' might look like.² This process will build on the rich ideas already being explored by a range of actors. In particular: the calls for an inter-DG platform and a Common Food System Policy in the Joint Research Centre's Global Food Security

¹ ¹ *Where should the CAP go post-2020?* Allan Buckwell, in 'The Political Economy of the 2014-2020 Common Agricultural Policy' (Centre of European Policy Studies).

² See the IPES-Food concept note, 'Towards a Common Food Policy for the EU': http://www.ipes-food.org/images/Reports/CFP_ConceptNote_FINAL.pdf

2030 assessment³; reflections on a Sustainable Food Policy convened by the Dutch Government and Dutch EU Presidency in March 2016⁴; and the integrated bioeconomy approach of the EU Standing Committee on Agriculture Research (SCAR)⁵. We hope that the European Commission will be able to join the reflection on a 'Common Food Policy'.

It is our view that in parallel, urgent reflections are required on reforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which is no longer commensurate to address the multiple, urgent and mutually-reinforcing challenges in food systems. For example, the global decline in insect pollinators - driven in large part by agriculture - now puts the very basis of agriculture and its future crop yields at risk: some 35% of global cultivated crops depend on pollination⁶. We welcome the current and upcoming mid-term reflections on the 'greening' of the CAP, which allows for some reconsideration of current tools. However, a wider-ranging reflection is needed in order for the CAP to be transformed; that should be the ambition of a 'Fitness Check' of the CAP, as requested by civil society and farming groups in their letter of 22 March 2016⁷.

We are aware that simplifying the CAP is a key European Commission goal, and one that is considered to have been insufficiently achieved in the last reforms⁸. However, food systems are inevitably complex, and such complexity cannot be ignored in reform efforts. While agricultural policies will always coexist uneasily with the complexity of outcomes and objectives across food systems, joined-up food policies will allow this complexity to be embraced. A wealth of local initiatives are already changing European food systems. EU policy frameworks have the potential to embrace the diversity and complexity of these experiments, supporting them to flourish and helping them to spread: more than ever, the role of the Union in support of local experimentation shall be key.

It is our hope that over the coming years the European Commission can align EU policy with the challenges at hand. This requires the CAP to be subjected to the necessary scrutiny, and the development of new policy frameworks better-equipped to deliver the sustainable food systems of the future.

Yours sincerely,

Olivier De Schutter, IPES-Food co-chair; former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

Corinna Hawkes, Professor of Food Policy, City University London; IPES-Food panel member.

Hans Herren, President of the Millennium Institute; IPES-Food panel member.

Emile Frison, former Director General of Bioversity International; IPES-Food panel member.

Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy, City University London.

Erik Mathijs, Professor of Bioeconomics, KU Leuven.

Christopher Birt, President, European Public Health Association (EUPHA) Section for Food and Nutrition; Department of Public Health and Policy, University of Liverpool.

Aileen Robertson, Public Health Nutritionist, Metropolitan University College, Denmark.

Stefan Kreft, Policy Committee Chair, Society for Conservation Biology (Europe).

Klaus Henle, Head of the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research.

³ <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC94867/lbna27252enn.pdf>

⁴ http://epha.org/IMG/pdf/Towards_a_sustainable_food_policy_agenda.pdf

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/research/scar/index.cfm?pg=foresight4th>

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/biodiversity/components/pollinators/en/>

⁷ <http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm/news-events/news/ngos-call-for-major-review-of-eu-food-and-farming-policy/>

⁸ *Achievements and Constraints of the 2013 CAP Reform*, Tassos Haniotis, in 'The Political Economy of the 2014-2020 Common Agricultural Policy' (Centre of European Policy Studies).