

WE CALL FOR AN EU ACTION PLAN FOR PLANT-BASED FOODS

EU food and farming are at a crossroads. In the coming years, Europe will face crucial decisions that will shape the future of agriculture and ensure that it continues to be a cornerstone of our society and economy. Both Member States and the European Commission should embrace and support this transition on both supply and demand-side in order to position the EU as a global leader in competitive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems.

A shift to healthier, more sustainable, affordable and balanced diets is essential for a successful transition to a more sustainable food system - and plant-based foods are part of the solution.

The Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture acknowledged that “The time for change is now”. We agree.

Building on this momentum, we urge Commissioner Hansen and the European Commission **to develop an EU Action Plan for Plant-based Foods by 2026**, to strengthen plant-based agri-food chains - from farmers to consumers. This plan should be a key element of the Vision for the Future of Agriculture and Food, following the recommendations from the Strategic Dialogue. Moreover, such an Action Plan should be accompanied by appropriate funding that boosts the production and consumption of plant-based foods, with a focus on organic and agroecological products.

Plant-based foods covered by this plan could range from fresh fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, legumes, nuts, edible fungi, tofu, tempeh, as well as plant-based alternatives to animal-sourced products that are nutrient-rich and compatible with WHO guidelines on salt, sugar and fat content.¹

WHY AN EU ACTION PLAN FOR PLANT-BASED FOODS?

An EU Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods will help to deliver on EU climate and environmental targets, improve health, profitability, resilience, and overall policy coherence while also saving costs and strengthening the EU's strategic autonomy. Current policies and efforts are not sufficient to bring about the much-needed shift to a more sustainable and efficient food system at the production, and processing level.

Moreover, current policies do not ensure healthy, sustainable, and balanced diets are the easy or affordable choice for European consumers. New policies are critically needed to increase plant-based production and consumption.

While welcoming the work on the Protein Strategy, we stress the need for a complementary EU Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods, which adopts a holistic approach to addressing the entire agrifood value chain, as well as broadening the scope of proteins by including foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes and wholegrains.

Achieve strategic autonomy in proteins - The EU currently has a deficit in plant protein production and relies on imports for 66% of its high-protein feed, thereby exposing EU producers and consumers to global food price fluctuations and supply chain vulnerabilities while also creating

unfair competition for farmers given that imported feed is not subject to the same environmental requirements.² A crucial opportunity to contribute to closing the protein gap is to increase plant-protein production for direct human consumption, as this avoids a conversion loss of more than 75%,³ boosting land-use efficiency, and the EU's self-sufficiency and competitiveness by doing better with less.

New business opportunities for farmers - European farmers, including small-scale and young farmers, could benefit from diversifying their production by introducing new crops, particularly if this is accompanied by financial support. Increased production of protein crops for human consumption could provide farmers with higher profit margins, reduce costs due to less reliance on inputs by integrating nitrogen-fixing legumes, and income diversification by waste stream valorisation and growing protein crops.⁴

Improve health - Diets across the EU are significantly misaligned with healthy eating guidelines: 80% of Europeans are not eating enough wholegrains, legumes, fruits and vegetables.⁵ This underconsumption is a key driver of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and kidney disease.⁶ In the EU, diets low in legumes account for the loss of an equivalent of 2 million years of good health (DALYs) and 130 000 avoidable deaths from all causes.⁷ The hidden costs of unhealthy diets are estimated at almost €900 billion per year across the EU.⁸ To address these issues, the EU urgently needs an action plan to promote more balanced, whole-food, and plant-rich diets.

Protect the climate and our environment - The EU faces significant challenges to agricultural resilience due to climate change, including soil degradation and declining soil fertility, which threatens long-term food security. Leguminous crops, such as peas and beans, enhance soil health by naturally fixing nitrogen, while reducing our reliance on synthetic fertilizers that contribute to environmental harm. By supporting more plant-based protein crop production, the EU can improve soil quality, reduce emissions, and create a more resilient agricultural system that is less vulnerable to climate-related disruptions.

Save costs - The opportunity to save on public spending is enormous.⁹ In 2022, the economic costs of animal-based food production and consumption in the EU, including its impact on animal welfare, human health, climate, land use, water and air pollution, amounted to €3 trillion — over seven times the economic costs of their production and consumption. A scenario with healthier and more plant-based diets could save 43% of these externalities, amounting to €1.3 trillion annually (>20 times the size of the CAP budget).¹⁰

Improve policy coherence - All EU member states have dietary guidelines that recommend a higher consumption of wholegrains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, and nuts. Some countries, such as Denmark,¹¹ the Netherlands,¹² Finland,¹³ Spain,¹⁴ and Germany¹⁵ are already developing and implementing food strategies to promote a shift to eating more plant-based foods. To ensure policy consistency and support from both farmers and consumers, a coherent EU-wide policy is needed to drive alignment with dietary guidelines across all parts of the value chain. An EU Action Plan could align national efforts, help adhering to dietary guidelines, and ensure essential policy coherence.

We urge the European Commission to seize this opportunity to develop an EU Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods which builds a healthier, more sustainable, and resilient food system for all.

Signatories:

Full list of 130+ signatories below



References:

- 1 WHO International Factsheet [Healthy Diet](#) (2020)
- 2 JRC Publication [Closing the protein gap - drivers, synergies and trade-offs](#) (2024)
- 3 Alexander et. al. [Human appropriation of land for food: the role of diet](#). Global Environmental Change (2016)
- 4 DG AGRI [Factsheet EU Legumes](#) (2020)
- 5 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20220104-1>
- 6 Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Global Burden of Disease Study (2019), see in particular: <https://www.thelancet.com/gbd/summaries>
- 7 Disability-adjusted life years (DALYs); see https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/health-promotion-knowledge-gateway/legumes-pulses_en
- 8 Impact Institute [External Costs of Animal Sourced Food in the EU](#) (2023)
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 FAO [Valuation of the health and climate-change benefits of healthy diets](#) (2020)
- 11 [Danish Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries](#) (2024) (in Danish)
- 12 [Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment](#) (2024) (in Dutch)
- 13 [Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare](#) (2024) (in Finnish)
- 14 [Spanish Ministry of Consumption](#) (2022)
- 15 [German Nutrition Society](#) (2024)

Signatories (in full):

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 Caring Farmers
 Changing Markets Foundation
 Climate Action Network France
 CMR Chrétiens dans le Monde Rural
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 European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
 European Heart Network
 European Public Health Alliance
 European Vegetarian Union
 Fair Finance International
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 The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation
 The Swedish Consumers' Association
 The Vegetarian Society of Denmark
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