

**EESC Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)**  
**Thematic Study Group (TSG) on Sustainable Food Systems**

**Work Plan 2020-2023**



**Context:**

**Delivering on the European Green *and Social* Deal (EGD)** as a means to achieving **sustainable recovery** and the **implementation of the Agenda 2030** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** will be the cornerstone of the NAT, SDO and TSG work programmes in the 2020-2023 mandate. The EGD is an ambitious EU strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and provide economic impetus, but the social and labour dimension should be strengthened to contribute to the SDGs more comprehensively, to achieve a "wellbeing economy" as a new vision of prosperity for people and planet and to ensure that no person/community/worker/sector/region is left behind.

**Sustainable, healthy, inclusive and fair food systems** are instrumental to achieving the SDGs and the EGD. Food is a common thread linking all 17 SDGs. Transforming food systems will thus provide a powerful lever for the implementation of the sustainable development and climate agendas as a whole.

At the **international level**, the [UN Food Systems Summit](#), to be convened by the UN Secretary-General in 2021, will set the tone on the importance of sustainable food systems for the years to come. It has the ambition to **launch bold new actions to transform the way the world produces and consumes food**, delivering progress on the Agenda 2030. Members of the TSG will also continue to attend yearly the [Committee on World Food Security \(CFS\)](#).

At **EU level**, the "**Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system**" is at the heart of the European Green Deal. It aims at contributing to Europe's climate change agenda, protecting the environment and preserving biodiversity, ensuring farmers' and fishers' position in the value chain, encouraging sustainable food consumption and promoting affordable and healthy food for all without compromising on the safety, quality and affordability of food. Together with the **EU Biodiversity Strategy**, the F2F strategy should contribute to achieving more sustainable food systems. The two strategies are mutually reinforcing, bringing together nature, farmers, business and consumers for jointly working towards a sustainable future.

The **Annex to the F2F strategy** provides a **draft action plan**, including among others proposals for a sustainable food labelling framework, origin indications of certain food products, criteria for sustainable food procurement, and a legislative framework for sustainable food systems. Reducing food loss and waste will also require further actions. Ensuring a proper implementation of the action plan will be essential for the success of the F2F and the overall EGD.

With other institutions and stakeholders, the EESC has strongly contributed to **create the momentum** for the adoption of the F2F Strategy. The Committee has been for years at the forefront of promoting a **comprehensive EU food policy**, providing healthy diets from sustainable food systems, linking agriculture to nutrition and ecosystem services and ensuring supply chains that protect public health for the whole of European society, as well as creating a culture that **attributes the right value to food**.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** is a **wake-up call for change**. The crisis has underlined the fact that getting food "from farm to fork" cannot be taken for granted and has demonstrated the interconnectedness of actors and activities in agriculture and throughout the food system. It has also made us acutely aware of the interrelations between our health, ecosystems, supply chains, consumption patterns and planetary boundaries.

The F2F Strategy and the EU Biodiversity Strategy rightly recognise the need **to build post-COVID resilience** by enhancing the economic, environmental and social sustainability of food systems. **Turning these strategies into meaningful and timely actions is now crucial, and the EESC has a role to play to propose concrete examples of actions/ways forward.** In particular, more **structured involvement of civil society** in the governance of sustainable food systems will be necessary, as a wide range of stakeholders across food systems has a role to play in overseeing the development and implementation of the strategy. We need more than ever **fair, inclusive and sustainable supply chains in the whole food sector.**

**Overall objective and proposed actions:**

The Thematic Study Group on Sustainable Food Systems<sup>1</sup> will, among others, contribute to the first Working Priority of the NAT work programme on **Fostering a Comprehensive Food Policy – Towards a More Sustainable CAP<sup>2</sup>**. This is part of the overarching objective of delivering on the European Green *and Social* Deal, achieving climate neutrality and sustainable recovery, and implementing of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Close cooperation with the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) will be ensured.

In the last term of office, the NAT Section developed a solid framework for action through the development of a **strategic vision on how to promote a comprehensive food policy**. The building blocks of this vision are contained in flagship opinions on [Comprehensive food policy](#), [Sustainable and healthy diets](#), [Fair food supply chain](#), [Short food supply chains/agroecology](#), and [Sustainable consumption](#) (see below for more details).

The new actions should be developed by **building both upon this strategic framework and the F2F Action Plan**. The **megatrends** of **sustainability**, **circularity** and **digitalisation** will cut across the various policy areas and actions proposed for the TG in the mandate 2020-2023 in line with the NAT work programme.

<p><b>Farm to Fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system – follow up</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up, e.g. via thematic debates at TSG meetings, on the application of concrete <b>specific aspects</b> on the F2F strategy such as:</li> </ul>
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<sup>1</sup> In May 2020, the EESC Bureau decided to re-name "Temporary Study Groups" into "Thematic Groups". The TG on Sustainable Food Systems is entitled to 2+1 (if necessary) meetings per year.  
<sup>2</sup> To be validated by the NAT section on 15/12/2020.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transparency/sustainable labelling, consumers' information and education: how to empower consumers to make more sustainable choices (e.g. by proposing an OIO)</li> <li>○ Role of education facilities (pre-schools, schools) with regard to awareness raising for sustainable food/diets amongst the future generations</li> <li>○ How to better prevent and reduce food waste, knowing that as long as about one third of the produced food is lost/wasted (mainly at the end of the supply chain) there will be no sustainable food system</li> <li>● Follow-up on the Directive on <b>Unfair Trading Practices</b> in the food supply chain</li> <li>● Discuss the <b>impact of food systems on biodiversity</b>, e.g. via a study or thematic debates</li> <li>● Ensure <b>structured civil society participation</b> in the implementation of the F2F strategy by advancing the idea of a <b>European Food Policy Council</b>, e.g. via a study to map composition, aims etc. and/or contacts with the Commission, Committee of the Regions and other stakeholders</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustainability in the food supply chain – implementation of the SDGs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discuss how to <b>align agri-food business strategies and operations with the SDGs</b> to achieve sustainable food systems in practice, e.g. building upon and contributing to the recent work of UN SDSN on <a href="#">Fixing the Business of Food and</a> by proposing an OIO</li> <li>● Include considerations on food security, sustainability of supply (e.g. deforestation) and due diligence in the food chain in ongoing works and debates.</li> <li>● Discuss how to <b>apply the vision for a "wellbeing economy"</b> to food systems, e.g. via a <b>joint debate with the Sustainable Development Observatory</b></li> <li>● Look into the issue of <b>sustainable supply of protein crops</b></li> <li>● Explore necessity and feasibility of <b>“Sustainability border adjustment mechanisms”</b> with regard to trade with agri-food products (e.g. via an OIO) to ensure a level-playing field.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Circularity in the food supply chain – food waste and circular bioeconomy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participate in the <a href="#">EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste</a> (TG president is invited to attend meetings)</li> <li>● Foster links with the <b>EESC/EC European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform</b></li> <li>● Provide input to the <b>European Bioeconomy Policy Forum</b> (EESC vice-president has been appointed as a high-level representative)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU Protein-Supply: explore avenues how to harness the potential of EU (regional) protein supply, responding to the needs of farmers, producers and consumers</li> </ul>
<b>Digitalisation in the food supply chain</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building on the <a href="#">EESC opinion on Digitalisation and Sustainability</a>, explore how <b>digitalisation and innovation can help achieve more sustainable food systems</b> (precision farming techniques, traceability, digital labelling, short food supply chains etc.), e.g. by proposing an own-initiative opinion. Digital apps can help keep track of where food comes from and how good it is for our health and the environment.</li> </ul>
<b>Participation in international fora</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore feasibility to contribute to <b>UN Food Systems summit</b> (e.g. compilation of food-related opinions, organisation of independent food systems dialogue, possibility for virtual side event/webinar at the summit)</li> <li>• Link with the preparations of the UN Summits on Biodiversity (COP15) and Climate (COP 26)</li> <li>• Participate in the <b>annual UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS)</b>, which is the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all (3-member delegation)</li> <li>• Further reinforce the <b>relationship with the FAO</b></li> <li>• Explore the feasibility of promoting the <b>UN International Year of fruits and vegetables 2021</b>, as appropriate, through activities aimed at raising awareness of and directing policy attention to the nutritional and health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption, the contribution of fruit and vegetable consumption to the promotion of diversified, balanced and healthy diets and lifestyles, reducing loss and waste of fruits and vegetables and sharing best practices in this regard.</li> </ul>

### Working methods:

In line with the NAT work programme, **new working methods** will be explored to ensure that we use our individual strengths to achieve better results in the new term of office. The TSG president and members, as well as the secretariat have different but crucial roles to play in **co-designing and co-creating** the TSG activities. The TSG president and members will be the story-tellers of the strong narrative on sustainable food systems and be invited to **engage on social media** (Twitter, Instagram) on relevant occasions. The TSG will also **walk the talk** on sustainable working methods via continued cooperation with **EMAS on food-related issues** (food waste reduction in the canteen, food donation scheme, sustainable sourcing of food, etc.) and **optimising use of digital tools**, webinars etc. and making events more inclusive (gender balance, youth participation, going beyond the "Brussels bubble" etc.). It will continue inviting EMAS to TSG meetings when relevant to highlight the links between policy and practice.

Food is at the intersection of various policy areas, and food sustainability is connected to several other issues the NAT and other EESC sections/CCMI are working on, including the CAP, climate change, the circular economy, social inclusion, trade and development, the internal market, consumer protection and industrial change. The **added value and the cross-cutting dimension of the thematic group** are very significant and worth developing further in the coming years, by favouring a **synergistic approach and consistency across the various policy areas** that have an impact on food policy and vice-versa. Regular exchanges with regular exchanges with other sections, thematic groups and observatories could be developed.

### **Building blocks – key opinions from previous terms of office**

- [NAT/711 Comprehensive EU food policy \(rapp. Schmidt\)](#)
  - [NAT/755 Healthy and sustainable diets \(rapp. Schmidt\)](#)
  - [NAT/734 improving the food supply chain/UTPs \(rapp. Schmidt\)](#)
  - [NAT/763 Short food supply chains/agroecology \(rapp. Savigny\)](#)
  - [NAT/787 "From farm to fork": a sustainable food strategy \(rapp. Schmidt\)](#)
  - [NAT/789 Towards an EU strategy on sustainable consumption \(rapp. Schmidt\)](#)
  - [NAT/791 Compatibility of EU trade with the EGD \(rapp. Bryan\)](#)
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