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# EESC Permanent Study Group on Sustainable Food Systems



European Economic and Social Committee



We believe that building sustainable and healthy food systems will require a profound re-thinking of our policy approach and a culture that attributes the right value to food.

**Peter Schmidt**

President of the EESC Permanent Study Group on Sustainable Food Systems

***“As consumers, farmers, business representatives, workers - we all have to face the interconnected challenges of producing more food to feed a growing population, while using resources more efficiently, consuming more responsibly and reducing food waste” says Mr Schmidt. “To build sustainable, resilient, climate-friendly, healthy and fair food systems, we have to re-think the entire supply chain and design a comprehensive food policy - one that enhances inter-sectoral cooperation, allows operators across the food chain (including farmers, workers and SMEs) to lead a decent life and ensures better integration of food-related objectives and instruments”.***

Food is not a product or a commodity as any other. Food is actually a central part of all our societies; is both dependent on and affects natural resources; has an impact on public health; and plays a pivotal role in the European economy. Food production and consumption present nowadays multiple economic, environmental and social challenges.

While nearly 800 million people around the globe are hungry, almost two billion people are overweight or obese and a third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted worldwide. Environmental concerns are rising as well and are related for instance

to the impacts of climate change, soil degradation, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and water and air pollution.

Created in 2012 as Permanent Study Group (PSG) on Food Security, the EESC PSG on Sustainable Food Systems aims to tackle these diverse challenges through a holistic and integrated approach, for example by promoting sustainable agricultural production while ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food, enhancing fair distribution in the supply chain and reducing food waste.

This overall objective also reflects the Sustainable Development Goals within the UN 2030 Agenda, which provide a crucial framework for joint action to feed the world sustainably by 2030.

The Permanent Study Group on Sustainable Food Systems aims to:

### Contribute to the development of a comprehensive food policy

Promoting an inter-sectoral approach and serving as a forum for cooperation and mutual understanding among various stakeholders along the food chain, the PSG facilitates and promotes dialogue on the need for a comprehensive framework, particularly in the context of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES Food) three-year participatory process “Towards a common food policy for the EU”.

### Promote more resource-efficient and climate-resilient food production

Effective policies for environmentally friendly agriculture, short food supply chains and local food systems, research and innovation, job creation in rural areas - all are necessary measures to enhance the sustainability of food production. The PSG pays particular attention to the importance of tackling soil degradation and enhancing soil productivity as the foundation for food security.

### Support fair distribution in the agro-food supply chain

More sustainable and efficient food systems can only be realised by encouraging fair and transparent relations between farmers, industry, retailers and consumers. The PSG highlights the position of the most vulnerable actors, such as farmers, SMEs and workers, and calls for EU specific legislation to stop unfair trading practices in the food supply chain.

### Foster prevention and reduction of food waste across the food supply chain

Through active participation in the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste and other activities to mobilise civil society, the PSG continues its efforts to promote measures for the prevention and reduction of food losses and waste – working towards the achievement of SDG target 12.3. One of the key areas of intervention identified by the PSG is to facilitate food donation as a way to address food poverty while reducing food waste.

### Promote healthier and more sustainable diets

Sustainable and healthier food choices must be promoted by increasing their availability and accessibility to consumers – for example by creating a stronger market demand, via green public procurement or developing a better labelling system. Throughout its work, the PSG highlights the importance of awareness-raising and education, especially in the context of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025.



The Permanent Study Group on Sustainable Food Systems is composed of twelve EESC members representing business, trade unions, farmers, consumers and other interests' groups. It fosters dialogue on the key topics highlighted above through the organisation of thematic debates and other events, prepares related opinions and promotes the integration of food sustainability considerations in other policy areas.

Key documents prepared in the past few years include the following:

- **Opinion** on "A fairer agro-food supply chain" (October 2016)
- **Opinion** on "More sustainable food systems" (May 2016)
- **Opinion** on "Agricultural trade/global food security" (September 2015)
- **Position paper** on "Civil society's contribution to the prevention and reduction of food waste" (January 2015)
- **Position paper** on "Civil society's contribution to tackling food security" (October 2015)
- **Comparative study** on "EU Member States' legislation and practices on food donation" (June 2014)



### Where to find more information and keep abreast of the PSG work

On the EESC PSG website:  
[www.eesc.europa.eu/sustainablefood](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/sustainablefood)  
Following the hashtag #EESCfood  
By email: [nat@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:nat@eesc.europa.eu)



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