

A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system

2020/2260(INI) - 30/09/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development jointly adopted an own-initiative report by Anja HAZEKAMP (GUE/NGL, NL) and Herbert DORFMANN (EPP, IT) on a farm to fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system.

On 20th May 2020, the Commission published the farm to fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, together with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 as part of its Green Deal.

Need for action

The European food system has played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating its resilience with farmers and their cooperatives or producers organisations, workers employed along the food value chain, processors, distributors and retailers working together under difficult conditions. Although the EU's internal market and agricultural system largely and rapidly overcame the interruptions to supply amid the COVID-19 crisis, the situation revealed certain vulnerabilities in intricate food supply chains, demonstrating the need to ensure long-term food security, resilience and short supply chains.

The report stressed the need for urgent and bold policy and legislative change to improve the sustainability of the current food system. It also called for a structured dialogue between Parliament, Member States and all food system actors, including citizens, to seize all the opportunities offered by this strategy and to discuss gaps, opportunities and challenges in the development and implementation of a holistic common EU food policy.

Members welcomed the Commission's proposal to develop a contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in order to coordinate a common European response to crises affecting food systems. They insisted that a prevention approach is needed to avoid panic movements and overreactions by people, firms or Member States. They urged the Commission to consider strategic food stock issues in the way that it does for strategic petroleum stocks across the EU.

According to the report, Member States should be given more flexibility to differentiate the VAT rates on food with different health and environmental impacts and enable them to choose a zero VAT rate for healthy and sustainable food products such as fruits and vegetables and a higher VAT rate on unhealthy food and food that has a high environmental footprint.

Improving access to farming

The report stressed the importance of EU funding for research and innovation, especially for SMEs and smallholders, as key drivers in accelerating the transition to a more sustainable, productive and inclusive European food system. It pointed out that the introduction of new smart-farming technologies and techniques, including digitalisation and protected cropping systems, can be beneficial for improving efficiency.

In addition, Members highlighted the key role that young farmers will have in accomplishing the transition to sustainable farming and in delivering on the aims of the strategy. As regards the issue of concentration of farmland as well as land-grabbing in the EU, Members called on the Commission and Member States, as well as regional and local administrations, to put an end to such practices in order to support young farmers and to facilitate their entry into farming.

Promoting the global transition

Members called on the Commission and the Member States to:

- ensure that all food and feed products imported into the EU fully comply with relevant EU legislation and the Union's high standards;
- maintain a holistic approach as the implementation of certain farm to fork strategy targets in the EU must not lead to the relocation of parts of agricultural production to other regions with lower standards than the EU.

Lastly, Members welcomed the Commission's commitment to promoting the global phasing out of pesticides no longer approved in the EU and to ensuring that hazardous pesticides banned for use in the EU in accordance with the relevant legislation are not exported outside the EU. They also considered that the EU should support developing countries to help them reduce the imprudent use of pesticides and promote other methods to protect plants and fishery resources.