



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

**Farm to Fork Strategy**

## **PLENARY MEETING OF THE ADVISORY GROUP ON SUSTAINABILITY OF FOOD SYSTEMS**

12 MAY 2023

### **Summary Record**

#### **1. OPENING REMARKS**

The Acting Director of SANTE Directorate E (Food safety, sustainability, and innovation) opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

He informed participants of the re-establishment of the Animal Health Advisory Committee, a sub-group of the Advisory Group on Sustainability of Food Systems (AGSFS) and explained that COM envisaged the organisation of ad hoc meetings to consult the group on matters related to the Framework for Sustainable Food Systems (FSFS).

#### **2. PLANTS OBTAINED BY CERTAIN NEW GENOMIC TECHNIQUES – STATE OF PLAY**

COM presented a state of play on the preparation of a proposal for [legislation on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques](#) (NGTs), focussing on the context, scope and objectives of the initiative. COM further explained the policy approaches and gave an overview of the process and the timeline. COM noted that the internal regulatory quality analysis by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB) is a standard part of the impact assessment process and informed participants that the adoption of a legislative proposal is provisionally planned in June 2023.

##### Comments and questions raised

FoEE and ECVC raised concerns about the intended legislative proposal, advocated for the continued application of the GMO legislation, which would ensure safety and full information available to consumers.

COM explained that the Impact Assessment (IA) had examined a wide range of options including the one of maintaining plants produced with NGTs under the current GMO legislation and added that, after the comments from the RSB, COM had reinforced the analysis of how consumers understand NGTs and what information they would appreciate.

FoEE asked how COM would provide an assessment of potential environmental impact, which was requested by the RSB.

COM reminded that the legislation is about safety of genetic modifications and referred to the relevant opinions of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which conclude that plants obtained by certain NGTs have the same risk profile as conventional plants. COM added that the available evidence on safety would be presented in the IA.

ECVC asked to clarify the timeline for the presentation of the legislative proposal.

COM replied that there was no confirmed date, but provisionally the adoption was planned for June.

Euroseeds and COCERAL asked whether COM had taken into account the international environment and whether it considered additional regulatory frameworks at international level.

COM replied that the regulatory environment of third countries related to plants obtained by NGTs was examined in the IA as part of the analysis of competitiveness of the EU industry. COM noted that some third countries, which have similar legislation as the EU on GMOs, were moving into adapting their regulatory oversight for certain types of NGT organisms.

Slow Food asked about the basis for the planned sustainability assessment.

COM explained that different choices were analysed in the IA how and if to address sustainability in this policy initiative. One option examined was to leave sustainability to horizontal frameworks. Other options examined were to consider specific provisions on sustainability, either as an incentive or as requirements. No final decision had yet been taken on the option to follow.

### **3. FRAMEWORK ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS – STATE OF PLAY**

COM provided an oral update on the progress with regard to the new Framework Legislation on a Union Sustainable Food System (FSFS) in terms of timeline and additional challenges.

COM reminded participants of the aim of the FSFS, namely to act as an enabler both for public authorities and food business operators.

COM informed participants that work on the Impact assessment is ongoing, notably with a view to further clarify aspects concerning the articulation of the future legislation with existing and sectoral legislation and the gaps that the new legislation would cover, especially with regard to the internal market.

COM underlined the limitations to the evaluation and assessment of the impact of the legislation, due to its nature. As a framework legislation, the content of most of the provisions would be operationalised through implementing or delegated acts, or through the subsequent revision of sectoral legislation. COM explained that the FSFS would lay down definitions, relevant to food systems and sustainability, and establish objectives and principles. COM thanked stakeholders for received contributions and position papers and informed participants that it would organise dedicated meetings with MSs and stakeholders in the upcoming weeks to have a more in-depth discussion on the principles.

With regard to public procurement, COM explained that, in the Farm to Fork Strategy, the intention was announced to establish mandatory sustainability requirements and criteria in food public procurement and services. COM informed stakeholders of the work it was carrying out together with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and that survey would take place after the summer of 2023 in the context of the JRC work. COM called on stakeholders to express their interest in participating in that survey by sending an email to [SANTE-Advisory-Group@ec.europa.eu](mailto:SANTE-Advisory-Group@ec.europa.eu).

Finally, COM informed participants that the adoption of the legislative proposal for the FSFS was planned for September 2023.

#### Comments and questions raised

Several stakeholders expressed support for the FSFS initiative (AVEC, BEUC, COPA-COGECA, EFFA, EPHA, EuroCommerce, Eurogroup for Animals, FEFANA, Slow Food and WWF).

COPA-COGECA commented that a letter was sent to COM on behalf of 31 agri-food chain organisations. COPA-COGECA welcomed the FSFS initiative on behalf of the agri-food chain but emphasised that it would like agri food chain organisations to be more involved in the process and would like to see a precise scope, based on ground realities, which would allow all sectors to contribute to sustainability.

EUFRAS enquired about the coherence between the Green Claims Directive and the FSFS. On public procurement, EUFRAS remarked that cheap prices were often in conflict with sustainable goals and asked how the FSFS would deal with this issue.

BEUC expressed willingness to provide input and hoped the timeline could be maintained.

FoodDrinkEurope welcomed a dedicated meeting on FSFS and enquired about the format and date. With regard to the prioritisation exercise on sustainable requirements, FoodDrinkEurope asked clarifications on how COM envisaged to proceed and asked whether COM would prioritise some sectors.

Eurogroup for Animals enquired about the date for re-submission to the RSB.

FEFAC asked to clarify how COM would address the Business to Business (B2B) in the framework legislation.

EFFA asked that best practices by the industry would be taken into consideration.

EUREAU asked whether COM would take into account that food from areas where ground water has been polluted or overexploited, would not be considered as sustainable. EUREAU further enquired about efforts to strengthen cooperation between farmers and water associations.

Compassion in World Farming (CWF) commented on the perceived lack of ambition in the implementation of the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Green Deal and hoped for very ambitious proposals. CWF asked COM what it would do to ensure the implementation of the EU commitments.

EuroCommerce asked COM for clarification on how to ensure its involvement in the process of the development of implementing and delegated acts.

EPHA underlined the link between food and health and asked COM to push for a better food environment, with sustainable and healthy choices by default.

AVEC highlighted the contradiction between what consumers say and what they do when buying food. AVEC stressed the importance of the social pillar and the necessity to focus on food security and food affordability and urged COM to introduce realistic views into the FSFS.

Slow Food acknowledged FSFS as a key initiative. Slow Food stressed the importance of healthy diets, environmental and animal welfare aspects, and the necessity of affordable and accessible food.

FVE enquired about the sustainability indicators that JRC was working on.

WWF urged COM to involve MSs to increase food affordability.

FEFANA asked whether COM would recommend the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) as the preferred method.

The Chair welcomed the strong support and noted that COM could not answer questions pertaining to the content of the proposal, since the work was still ongoing, and referred to the dedicated meeting that would be organised to provide input and ask questions related to the content.

With regard to questions on the process and meetings, COM explained that there were two different issues. The surveys that would be carried out, would be specific on the

sustainability criteria on public procurement. This work was ongoing in parallel to the drafting of the framework, which would be general and would establish the obligation and process of how to determine the criteria. COM stressed the necessity of additional collaboration with the JRC.

COM clarified that the dedicated meeting on FSFS would be a brainstorming workshop with stakeholders to exchange information and benefit from their expertise. The date had not yet been confirmed.

COM confirmed that the re-submission of the Impact Assessment was scheduled for the beginning of June 2023.

COM further underlined that the framework law would not resolve all problems and would not contain detailed requirements for all operators. COM would prefer a wide scope, covering all food system actors and all food system related legislation and policies, which would call for new definitions. COM would welcome concrete stakeholder suggestions.

On the questions regarding affordability and food security, COM stressed that they were fundamental concepts and that they would be reflected in the objectives and principles that would underpin food sustainability legislation.

Concerning coherence with other legislation, COM clarified that the FSFS would build on the Green Claims with regard to the environmental dimension but reminded participants that the FSFS would go beyond the environmental claims and would include other aspects of sustainability, including animal welfare, nutritional aspects and social aspects.

On sustainable procurement and how to combine it with cheap prices, COM highlighted that the issue was not new and that mandatory criteria for sustainability existed in public procurement in other areas. COM acknowledged the necessity for a certain degree of flexibility for MSs.

With regard to cooperation between the different parts of the food chain, COM expressed belief that the FSFS would help to provide a basis to reinforce cooperation between food system actors. COM confirmed that it would not only be B2C but would also take into account the B2B dimension.

Concerning the implementation through implementing or delegated acts, COM acknowledged that consultations and impact assessments might be necessary.

Finally, COM stressed the importance of transparency and stakeholder involvement in the development of future FSFS legislation.

#### **4. PLANT HEALTH AND PLANT REPRODUCTIVE MATERIAL – STATE OF PLAY**

##### *Legal Implementation of the EU Plant Health Regime*

COM gave a presentation on the [Legal Implementation of the EU Plant Health Regime](#).

##### *Plant and Forest Reproductive Material*

COM gave a short update on Plant and Forest Reproductive Material (PRM/FRM).

COM informed stakeholders that it had presented the revision of the legislation on Plant and Forest Reproductive Material to the RSB and received a positive opinion with scrutiny reservations. COM elaborated on the ongoing work on the draft legal proposals for a Regulation on Plant Reproductive Material and a Regulation on Forest Reproductive Material. The intention of the proposals was to align them the [Green Deal](#) and the different strategies ([Farm to Fork Strategy](#), [Biodiversity Strategy](#), [Adaptation to Climate Change Strategy](#), [New EU Forest Strategy](#) (for FRM)).

### Comments and questions raised

Euroseeds asked to clarify the meaning of ‘final use’ with regard to the derogations for amateur gardeners on material which is exclusively intended for final use.

COM replied that this terminology was already used in the current legislation and that the meaning would be along the same lines.

ARCHE NOAH enquired about the timeline.

COM replied that no exact date had been set, but that COM envisaged to adopt both proposals in June 2023.

## **5. SUBSTANTIATION AND COMMUNICATION OF EXPLICIT ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS (GREEN CLAIMS DIRECTIVE) – STATE OF PLAY**

COM presented a comprehensive state of play on the [Green Claims Directive](#), addressing the context, the reason for setting requirements on environmental claims and the scope of the proposal. COM further addressed the substantiation and communication of environmental claims, the regime for environmental labelling and the verification of environmental claims and labels. Finally, COM elaborated on enforcement and monitoring.

### Comments and questions raised

IFOAM Organics Europe asked to clarify whether a company could go to any Member State (MS) in order to make a claim and how COM would ensure harmonisation between MSs.

COM stressed that the impact of organic farming had been taken into account and referred to the explanatory memorandum, which allows operators more flexibility in the assessment of environmental claims. One verifier would issue a certificate of conformity, which would be valid in all MSs.

EDA supported the single market approach and commented that the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) had proven its efficacy.

BEUC reminded that environmental scores (e.g. planetscore, ecoscore) would be banned and wondered what would happen to environmental scores established under national law.

COM confirmed and added that if there was national legislation requiring the mandatory provision of environmental information in the form of an aggregated score, this would not qualify as a voluntary green claims in that country.

FEFAC endorsed BEUC’s comments and stressed the importance of harmonised methodologies. FEFAC commented that it fell outside of the scope (FEFAC activities focus on business-to-business while the proposal for a Directive is about business-to-consumers claims) and further raised concerns about misleading claims. FEFAC asked how COM envisaged to reduce the risks of market fragmentation. Finally, FEFAC asked what tools COM would foresee with regard to development of sectoral databases.

COM explained that the scope of the proposal would be Business to Consumer (B2C) and that no change was planned in the Council and the European Parliament as COM followed the same scope as the Empowering consumers proposal. Outside the scope, COM supported the efforts of the feed sector to use the PEF methodology and have more specific rules in order to have a benchmark. On the development of a database, COM replied that work was ongoing.

## **6. INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH ACTIVITIES ON FARM TO FORK SFS CHAPTER – STATE OF PLAY OF FTA NEGOTIATIONS**

COM gave a short presentation on the [International bilateral outreach on Sustainable Food Systems](#), elaborating on the objective, cooperation areas, the different forms of international outreach and the dialogues under the Foreign Partnership Instrument. COM further explained about the chapter on Sustainable Food Systems (SFSC) that was being included in the free trade agreements (FTAs). COM concluded with a state of play of the negotiations, indicating that the negotiations of the SFSC has successfully concluded with Chile, New Zealand and Australia and are ongoing with India.

### Comments and questions raised

EDA highlighted its support for the plural use of food systems and enquired about COM's position in international negotiations on sustainable food systems, in view of the fact that the EU did not have a definition or a European framework yet.

COM underlined that it wanted to respect the other existing food systems, hence the plural.

On the international negotiations, COM stressed that it was very proud to lead according to the mandate and to establish cooperation with third countries. COM added that it was amazing to see the results reached through outreach and dialogue.

With regard to the definition, COM explained that it follows the definition from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

ECVC endorsed EDA's comment on the definition. ECVC further expressed concern that opening trade and new markets would destroy peasantry all over the world and stressed that no sustainability would be possible if farmers disappeared.

COM replied that the debate would take years and that it could not wait until the legislation was in place. COM acknowledged the concerns, but urged ECVC to take a full view of the free trade agreements. COM stressed that in order to be eligible for free trade, third countries would need to meet a substantial package of requirements.

Slow Food asked whether COM planned to include a chapter on Sustainable Food Systems in the revision of the WTO.

COM replied that it is working in parallel on the bilateral and on the multilateral side. WTO is a separate organisation.

COCERAL supported Slow Food's comment and added that Codex Alimentarius would be a convenient forum for its request for consensus and harmonisation.

FEFANA asked to clarify whether the FTAs that are concluded would have to be renegotiated once the framework on SFS would be in place.

COM replied that agreements were renegotiated from time to time, but that when the framework on SFS would be in place, there would be no need to renegotiate all FTAs, due to the provision that all products that enter the EU market, should comply with all EU requirements.

FEFAC enquired about international standard making bodies.

COM reiterated that it was working in parallel on the bilateral and on the multilateral side in order to harmonise the work and emphasised that it introduced these topics in all fora. COM further referred to the [United Nations Food System Summit \(UNFSS\)](#), which took place in September 2021 and the Food Systems Summit stocktaking event, which would take place in Rome from 24 – 26 July 2023, and in which Codex Planetary and other international standard setting organisations, including FAO and WTO, would participate.



## **7. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS OF ANNEXES II AND III TO REGULATION (EC) No 853/2004 LAYING DOWN SPECIFIC HYGIENE RULES FOR FOOD OF ANIMAL ORIGIN - PRESENTATION**

COM presented the [Proposed amendments of Annexes II and III to Regulation \(EC\) No 853/2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin](#), starting with the purpose and an overview of the proposed amendments. COM elaborated on each amendment and concluded with the expected timeline for adoption and publication.

### Comments and questions raised

EUFRAS welcomed the proposed amendment of the approval of mobile slaughterhouses. FVE informed that it would comment on the public consultation on the issue of mobile slaughterhouses.

CLITRAVI commented that the conditions with regard to airflow should be better specified.

COM replied that it had taken good note and that it could consider amending the proposal according to the comments.

## **8. OFFICIAL CONTROLS REGULATION GUIDANCE - OVERVIEW AND HIGHLIGHTS**

COM presented an update on the ongoing work on the OCR Guidance on Commission Notice on the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 (2022/C 467/02), through means of two comprehensive presentations: [OCR guidance](#) and [Commission Notice on the implementation of Regulation \(EU\) 2017/625 - Official Controls Regulation \(2022/C 467/02\)](#)

A [first package](#) of clarifications and guidance elements was adopted in December 2022, but COM continued to draft further elements of clarification on additional OCR provisions with the intention to adopt an updated second version.

COM presented:

- (a) The timeline for the adoption of the second version and an overview of the new guidance elements.
- (b) An analysis of the explanations provided in the published guidance on the Second expert opinion.
- (c) An analysis of new guidance elements:
  - audits vs inspections;
  - e-commerce controls;
  - reporting on infringements;
  - delegation of tasks and accreditation of delegated bodies;
  - official certification;
  - the role of the official veterinarian and auxiliary;
  - the entry of consignments in the Union.

### Comments and questions raised

FVE expressed support for the document and volunteered to provide feedback.

COM welcomed the input and explained that stakeholders would be consulted via email.

EUFRAS expressed concern with regard to the development of online shops by short food supply chain smallholders and asked how controls would be handled for these specific channels and whether this issue would be part of the guidance note.

COM replied that – in principle – the same rules would apply for sales in a store and online and both would be subject to official controls, but invited EUFRAS to provide more detail in writing.

## **9. AOB**

ECVC raised concerns regarding the FAO and the stocktaking event that will be organised in July as a follow-up to the UNFSS, and which, according to ECVC, contributed to the marginalisation of small farmers, NGOs and civil society. ECVC further questioned the process and governance at global level.

FAO clarified that the stocktaking event is organised by the UN, even though it is hosted by the FAO.

The Chair advised ECVC to write to the FAO and the international unit in DG SANTE to flag its concerns.

The Chair informed participants of upcoming events, namely:

- Animal Health Advisory Committee meeting (AHAC): 2 June 2023
- Dedicated meeting on the FSFS: date to be confirmed
- Second plenary meeting: 17 November 2023

The Chair thanked all speakers and participants for their constructive contributions and participation and closed the meeting.