



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Farm to Fork Strategy

**AD HOC MEETING OF THE ADVISORY GROUP ON SUSTAINABILITY OF FOOD SYSTEMS ON THE
PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE MONITORING OF THE FARM TO FORK STRATEGY**

19 SEPTEMBER 2023

Summary Record

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR

DG SANTE welcomed the participants and opened the meeting of the Advisory Group on Sustainability of Food Systems dedicated to the preparatory work for the monitoring of the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy.

The Commission informed the Members of the Advisory Group about the state of play of the project initiated by DG SANTE, in collaboration with other DGs. Furthermore, the Commission highlighted that monitoring was explicitly mentioned in the F2F strategy and informed about the challenges to capture all dimensions of sustainability through a limited number of existing indicators.

The Commission also explained that the work on monitoring was an iterative process, and that there is clearly a need for new indicators (for which placeholders are being suggested in the monitoring framework) in order to arrive at a more balanced coverage of different parts of the food system and different aspects of sustainability. The first output of this work will be a dashboard that aims to be as comprehensive and balanced as possible with the currently available indicators, while work can continue in the future to further improve it.

**2. PRESENTATION BY THE JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE ON THE ONGOING PREPARATORY
WORK FOR THE MONITORING FRAMEWORK OF THE FARM TO FORK STRATEGY**

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) presented an [outline of the framework for the monitoring of the F2F Strategy](#).

The JRC explained that the framework is developed on the basis of an integrated food system sustainability model to link the targets and objectives of the F2F Strategy to the Food System (FS) model, across the three sustainability dimensions (environmental, economic, social). The proposed sustainability model will consist of 13 thematic areas and 40 domains. Over 350 existing indicators were collected and documented covering the whole food supply chain (primary production, food processing, food distribution and food consumption) and after evaluation according to their fitness for the purpose, only some of these indicators were selected (as per the presentation). The JRC also proposed 44 placeholders - conceptualising indicators that should be developed in the future.

Furthermore, the JRC presented the indicators for the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability that are currently being considered for the dashboard.

The JRC closed the presentation by highlighting that the FS sustainability model and the proposed indicators were based on the outcome of the ongoing discussion within the Commission services and welcomed the contribution from and collaboration with the members of the Advisory Group on Sustainability of Food Systems.

3. EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND WRAP-UP

Questions and comments raised by stakeholders

FEFAC enquired whether “circular feed” had been considered as an indicator.

Regarding antimicrobials, FVE asked whether the European Surveillance of Veterinary Antimicrobial Consumption (ESVAC) methodology and outcomes were considered.

ECVC enquired about the link with the legislative framework for sustainable food systems (FSFS). ECVC asked whether the monitoring framework would show evolution and give direction, and how it would relate to policies and their impact on sustainability of food systems. Regarding farming systems, ECVC commented that NGTs were not sustainable. Concerning the economic aspect, ECVC asked for more information on investments and subsidies in capital assets. On the social aspect, ECVC highlighted the importance to be able to feed people. ECVC further commented on land issues, in particular land concentration and the situation with young farmers, food environment (food insecurity and access), the lack of mention of ultra-processed food and short food chains.

BEUC enquired what definition would be used for ‘healthy diets’. BEUC stressed the importance of labelling and promotion and commented that it would be happy to contribute to the development of indicators. BEUC further commented that – in its opinion – the indicators linked to food access and food affordability were redundant. In addition, it is the access to healthy food that matters for sustainability. BEUC suggested to add the adherence of the population to dietary guidelines as an indicator. On governance, BEUC referred to the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI), a project for exchange of policies among countries, as an example. On subsidies, BEUC suggested listing harmful ones, as well as good ones. Lastly, BEUC suggested an indicator to monitor how many F2F actions had been delivered.

On nutrition, FEFANA asked why a placeholder was indicated for food processing, but not for primary production.

COCERAL asked to clarify how self-sufficiency was considered for resilience purposes. In the open strategic autonomy concept, diversification of streams of production and trade flows could be more relevant than just self-sufficiency.

EFFAT remarked that it missed indicators on collective bargaining coverage as an indicator for good employment and that precarious employment was linked justly to the length of the employment.

On resilience indicators, EUROMONTANA suggested measuring the quality and quantity of water resources in agriculture. In this respect, monitoring the water footprint of different diets is needed. Regarding governance, EUROMONTANA asked which

territorial level would be measured, regional or national, and stressed the importance to measure at regional level.

EPHA echoed ECVC's concerns regarding ultra-processed foods and the quality of meat. On the environmental indicators, EPHA remarked that other air pollution than GHG emission was not mentioned, even though monitoring the NO_x emission of the food chain would be important. EPHA further endorsed BEUC's comment with regard to 'healthy diets'. EPHA suggested to add the lack of access to healthy food as an indicator. EPHA stressed that health impacts of unhealthy diets were broader than obesity. EPHA welcomed the inclusion of food heritage, and stressed the importance of extending food labelling. Finally, EPHA enquired about the status of the proposal for the legislative framework for sustainable food systems (FSFS).

IFOAM welcomed the integration of organic farming and food as an indicator. Regarding the consumption footprint, IFOAM raised concern about the evaluation of environmental impact through Life-Cycle Assessment (LCA). On pesticides, IFOAM asked for more precision on indicators suggesting using substance-based indicators instead of volume-based ones. As for animal welfare, IFOAM expressed concern about the low number of indicators.

EEB endorsed the comments made by BEUC, ECVC, EPHA and IFOAM. EEB further asked how the monitoring framework would relate to the FSFS and whether the difficulties relating to the definitions would be resolved.

Birdlife asked how COM would ensure to get the relevant data for some of the indicators, especially for agriculture and biodiversity.

SAFE enquired how the indicators were managed and weighed and commented that it would be difficult to combine sustainability, affordability and health in diets, e.g. plant-based diets on ultra-processed food might be sustainable, but not healthy, due to the use of additives. SAFE further asked whether there were indicators for local consumption. Lastly, SAFE asked about indicators to measure food waste at consumer level.

FoodDrinkEurope enquired about the link of the monitoring framework with the FSFS and other Farm to Fork initiatives, especially with regard to the definitions and targets. FoodDrinkEurope raised concern for a potential misalignment between the FSFS and of the monitoring framework and noted that the adoption of given definitions for the monitoring framework might pre-empt/influence the development of definitions within the FSFS. FoodDrinkEurope also draw attention to the fact that several indicators (e.g. food labelling, animal welfare, pesticides, etc) are linked to legislative proposals that have not yet been tabled/adopted. FoodDrinkEurope further highlighted that indicators should be data driven and evidence-based, hence "ultra-processed foods" should not be included among the indicators. FoodDrinkEurope stressed that the "ultra-processed food" classification is still highly debated in the scientific community and referred, in this regard, to UK Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) position statement on processed foods and health (from July 2023) and the conclusions on "ultra-processed food" by the [Nordic Nutrition Council](#).

CLITRAVI commented on the presentation, more specifically on the slide ‘Nutrition and health’ and the indent ‘global burden of disease (GBD)’. CLITRAVI did not agree with the indent and asked for evidence that linked red meat consumption to diseases.

PROFEL commented that climate adaptation and climate mitigation should be separated and that it would welcome a stronger focus on climate adaptation, with indicators that measure progress in climate-proofing the food systems. Soil organic carbon levels should be a headline indicator instead of a placeholder. PROFEL further suggested the development of water storage - water collection/reservoir construction – as an indicator for climate adaptation.

EHN informed that, in collaboration with WHO and EFSA, it had developed population-based objectives to set cardiovascular healthy diets, with intermediate targets that should be achieved over 10 years, as well as long term targets. EHN suggested that the indicators set in the monitoring framework should contribute in the long term to measuring progress on these objectives.

Several stakeholders enquired about the deadline, which COM had initially set at 3 October 2023. UECBV and CELCAA requested an extension of this deadline to allow for further reflection.

Replies by JRC

Antimicrobials

On antimicrobials, JRC replied that the indicator does not concern the use, but the sale of antimicrobials. The data and methodology originated from the European Medicines Agency (EMA/ESVAC).

Water resources

JRC took note of EUROMONTANA’s comment on water resources. JRC added that resilience indicators were interlinked with environmental indicators. JRC would look in the indicator database to see whether water resources could be incorporated.

Governance

JRC confirmed that measurement of the indicators, would be at MSs level.

Food environment and healthy diets

JRC commented that it encountered challenges to access quality information from food consumption estimates. JRC said it looked to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) Food Consumption Platform for data and that it was in the process of mapping current definitions and principles on healthy and sustainable diets of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO).

About monitoring access to healthy diets, JRC explained that it used the percentage of the population unable to afford healthy diets, as reported annually by FAO. JRC acknowledged the need to reflect on the meaning of affordability of healthy diets in the context of the EU.

JRC stressed the challenge to gather quality data for healthy diets and for dietary guidelines. Nevertheless, future collaboration with EFSA could ensure access to better estimates and progress in the monitoring of healthy diets.

JRC acknowledged the concerns raised regarding ultra-processed food.

On the Food-EPI index, JRC confirmed that it checked the feasibility of using the information, however, even though it was an important project, it did not provide readily usable information and required the adherence and involvement of MS. At present, it was considered unfit, nevertheless it was included in the pool of indicators.

JRC took note of CLITRAVI's comment concerning the GBD and confirmed that it would be addressed. JRC highlighted the complexity of the issue.

Food security and food access

JRC explained that aspects of food security are present in the Food environment (Food access, Food availability), and Nutrition and health (Nutrition and healthy, sustainable diets) thematic areas. Because of the overlaps of these, food security was not explicitly mentioned as standalone thematic area.

Biodiversity

JRC acknowledged IFOAM's concerns regarding the consumption footprint. JRC explained that the purpose of the biodiversity indicator would be to assess the impacts biodiversity along the entire food chain and not only in the primary production. JRC proposed a bilateral exchange to address IFOAM's concerns.

Pesticides

JRC explained that the pesticides indicator gathered both aspects of quantity related to the sale and general toxicity towards humans. JRC added that a new framework is under development to include a larger spectrum of active ingredients and to work with toxicology against many taxa, including humans and large mammals. The concerned indicators were under discussion.

Air pollution and Nitrogen Oxide

JRC explained that the presentation focussed on headline indicators, but that there were many other indicators in the pool. JRC reiterated that the system would be dynamic and that indicators could become headline indicators and be visible on the dashboard if more data would become available or if its relevance would be highlighted. JRC further stressed the solidity of methodology.

Animal welfare

JRC agreed with comments on the low number of indicators related to animal welfare and explained that this was due to a lack of reporting flows on animal welfare on European level. Theoretically, the best indicator would be stocking density per livestock category, but there was very little data available.

Land concentration

JRC commented that there are relevant data, but more work is needed. The data could be recovered from the pool.

Investment subsidies

JRC explained that there was an indicator for farm modernisation, which measures the support around investments in restructuring and modernisation. Regarding subsidies, there was an indicator, which JRC thought not important at that stage, but which could possibly be brought back.

Water resilience

JRC confirmed that water resilience was included in one indicator and had been taken into account.

Climate adaptation and mitigation

JRC explained that these two aspect were put in one domain, nevertheless indicators for both adaptation and mitigation would be included.

Link and definitions

With regard to stakeholders' question about the link between the FSFS and the monitoring framework and FoodDrinkEurope's concern regarding a potential misalignment of the definitions, JRC assured that the teams working on the respective projects were connected - with some people working on both files - in order to ensure harmonisation.

Transparency

On the question about how indicators were weighed and measured, JRC explained that it endeavoured to be fully transparent and that it consulted the policy DGs frequently about policy implications. JRC used a quality assessment framework to determine whether an indicator should be included. This phase was followed by a review cycle - in collaboration with the policy officers - to decide which indicators should become headline indicators and which should be placeholders.

Replies by SANTE

Regarding the deadline, SANTE said that it would discuss with JRC regarding a possible extension of the deadline and that it would inform stakeholders by email. In addition, a table, which JRC had prepared to facilitate stakeholder input, would also be shared by email after the meeting.

On BEUC's suggestion that COM would monitor the number of actions of the Farm to Fork Strategy that were delivered, SANTE replied that it took note. SANTE added that the dashboard by JRC focussed on the substance and indicators linked to the core objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy.

SANTE stressed the importance of the FSFS, not only for the monitoring framework. The development of the FSFS and the monitoring of the Strategy were two different workstreams. SANTE underlined that the monitoring framework was not a legal document, but a necessary tool for the development of future policies.

SANTE reiterated that the monitoring framework would be a dynamic system. Furthermore, it would be an iterative process and certain indicators might need to evolve.

It would not be contradictory to have the monitoring framework in place before the adoption of the FSFS.

SANTE further explained that the FSFS could provide a basis for the development of a monitoring mechanism to collect data.

Regarding the state-of-play of the FSFS, SANTE explained that it was still in the process of finalising the draft proposal and processing stakeholder comments. SANTE thanked stakeholders for the many contributions it received following the Ad hoc meeting on FSFS, which took place on 12 July 2023. SANTE explained that the exact date for adoption was pending, but that the work was ongoing. Whether or not SANTE would organise a second round of discussions with stakeholders, would be determined by the date of adoption.

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