

NGOs BROADLY WELCOME BOTH ROADMAPS, POINT TO SOME “GLARING OMISSIONS”

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The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) welcomed the vision for the future of nature & farming policies, both central planks of the Green Deal & forthcoming corona recovery plan (May 27). The largest network of environmental organisations with more than 160 members in over 30 countries hailed moves to halve pesticide use on European farms, cut fertiliser use & reduce nitrogen pollution, but regret that “little is said” about transforming diets to be healthier & more sustainable.

EEB Policy Officer for Agriculture, Celia Nyssens, said the F2F sets a “welcome direction of travel ... but the real moment of truth will come when the EU updates its €60bn-a-year CAP.” The target to cut nitrogen pollution from fertilisers was “far from sufficient,” she outlines, urging the EU “to tackle the problem, inc. a phase-out of the use of all synthetic fertilisers.” The WWF European Policy Office also welcomed the “timely roadmaps towards sustainable biodiversity, food & farming policies” for the next decade, amid the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, which “has brought our relationship with the natural world into sharp focus.” The Strategies are “potential game changers” on topics such as protected areas, restoration of nature, organic farming & the reduction of agricultural chemicals. Ester Asin, WWF Director called for the 50% of next week’s recovery package “to be dedicated to climate & environment spending to build stronger, more resilient economies & societies.” On the F2F, it praises the new requirement for Member States “to set comparable targets when drafting CAP Strategic Plans,” but regrets that it “fails to tackle intensive production & excessive consumption of meat and dairy products,” as one of the “most glaring omissions.”

BirdLife Europe said the two Strategies could “change the trajectory of our planetary crises,” saying they will play a defining role in reforming “Europe’s destructive agricultural practices.” They welcome that the key lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken on board, namely that “a healthy planet is a precondition for a healthy human society, science must guide political choices, & a crisis must be acted on before it gets out of control.” Ariel Brunner, Senior Head of Policy at BirdLife said the Commission had presented what “should be the new normal that our planet desperately needs.” “They show that they are not only listening to the science, but they are acting on what it has been telling us for so long,” he added. But the veteran campaigner said the “proof is only in the pudding,” urging EU leaders to “support these proposals & lead society out of the current climate & biodiversity crises that threaten our very existence.”

Greenpeace regrets that the Commission acknowledged the impact that overproduction & overconsumption of meat has on health, nature & climate, but “proposed no action to reduce it.” Following a leaked draft of the F2F earlier in the week when it emerged the Commission was ready to end EU –funded meat advertising, the NGO said the U-turn “indicates last-minute pressure from the livestock industry & their allies.” Marco Contiero, Greenpeace EU agriculture policy director, said the Commission had “finally accepted the science & recognises that producing & consuming too much meat is hurting health, destroying nature & driving climate breakdown - but chooses to do nothing about it.” It was “too cowardly even to end the few million going to EU-funded meat advertising [just over €20 million per year] ... let alone reconsider the billions that support overproduction of meat in the first place.” The environmental NGO calculates that a “climate-safe diet would mean a 71% reduction in European meat consumption by 2030 & an 81% reduction by 2050.”

Meanwhile, Marta Messa, Director of the Slow Food Europe Office, said the EU’s Executive was “taking a promising step towards a sustainable Europe.” The campaigner called for a long-term approach to transition towards a truly sustainable & resilient food system that respects the wellbeing of farmers, farm workers, consumers & environment. Both Strategies are moving in the right direction, she said, welcoming the fact

that they highlight that “farmers & fishers are part of the solution,” requiring support “to achieve the transition towards agroecology.” The Pesticide Action Network (PAN) says the two documents were “clear acknowledgements that current food production systems are completely unsustainable.” PAN welcomes moves to reduce the overall use & risk of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030 & the use of more hazardous pesticides by 50%. PAN Europe’s Chemicals Coordinator Hans Muilerman said “for the first time in history, the Commission dares to listen to science, going against the interests of agri-business & setting pesticide use reduction targets.” “After decades of fighting civil society,” the campaigner hopes that policy-makers “will now make sure Member States properly implement these targets & protect EU citizens & environment as the law already requires.”

IEEP provides commentary: Researchers at the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) say the F2F “represents an important new departure point, bringing existing policies out of their traditionally sectoral & narrow scope.” Academics at the think tank welcome the initiative that “starts to take a more systemic approach to EU food & farming policy-making.” As food systems are responsible for between 21- 37% of the world’s GHG, the F2F “recognises the need for food systems to reduce their environmental & climate footprint and increase their resilience in the face of climate change & biodiversity loss.” Ben Allen, Head of Agriculture & Land Management Programme, said the F2F “represents an important new departure point for a genuine transition towards ‘sustainable food systems’ in the EU that recognises the fragility & vulnerability of our current food & farming approach.” To support a genuine transition towards a more sustainable & low-carbon future, he said “key challenges & trade-offs associated with different policy options must be fully guided by a concrete definition of what ‘sustainable food systems’ look like in practice.”