



Input to 2021 programme on promotion of agricultural products

“If biodiversity is to be restored in Europe and opportunities are to be created for crop production utilizing biodiversity-based ecosystem services such as biological pest control, there must be a Europe-wide shift towards farming with minimum use of pesticides over large areas”
(Geiger, F. et al. 2010)

PAN Europe’s input for the definition of priorities in the Annual Work Programme for 2021 concerning promotion of agricultural products

PAN Europe proposes that the Commission aligns the 2021 work programme on promotion of agricultural products with the European Green Deal and therefore focuses on promotion of circular and sustainable models rather than on competitiveness.

Furthermore, since tourism has been particularly hit by the impact of COVID-19, and rural agricultural areas have a lot to offer while guaranteeing social distancing, we propose to consider promoting sustainable concepts – connecting farmers and citizens - rather than products.

General remarks to the European Commission’s promotion programme

While PAN Europe and its members fully recognise the potential of diversification as a marketing tool, we believe that an EU policy solely focussed on a competitiveness objective should be withdrawn with the European Green Deal (EGD). The EGD aims at mapping ‘*a new, sustainable and inclusive growth strategy to boost the economy, improve people’s health and quality of life, care for nature, and leave no one behind*’.

The Farm to Fork Farm to Fork strategy (F2F) specifies this further, stating: ‘*A shift to a sustainable food system can bring environmental, health and social benefits, offer economic gains and ensure that the recovery from the crisis puts us onto a sustainable path. Ensuring a sustainable livelihood for primary producers, who still lag behind in terms of income, is essential for the success of the recovery and the transition.*’

PAN Europe and its members oppose the standardised approach currently being used in the EU’s promotion programme, following the argument that just because it’s from Europe, it’s good. We remind readers that there are also [pesticide residues in European food](#) and that [European annual pesticide sales](#) remain stable at around 400,000 tonnes of active substances; moreover, there are huge differences between how farmers use pesticides and the production methods they apply, making these large scale generalisations erroneous.

Finally, we point to the fact that one of the few positive aspects of the COVID-19 lockdown has been that people have started paying more attention to food. The consumption of organic agriculture has increased significantly, people are cooking more and citizens are increasingly looking to nature-based solutions for positive experiences. For instance, 78 000 Danes followed online when Danish organic dairy farmers let their cows graze outside this spring, with happy heifers jumping around. So, we should use this moment to zoom in on farming and working with nature.

The F2F says: *Even as societies become more urbanised, they want to feel closer to their food. They want food that is fresh, less processed and sustainably sourced. And the calls for shorter*

supply chains have intensified during the current outbreak. Consumers should be empowered to choose sustainable food and all actors in the food chain should see this as their responsibility and opportunity.

COVID-19 also almost immediately showed and touched upon the weak spots in the food chain which relies on a very concentrated distribution chain: while the farmers kept on farming and consumers kept on consuming, people had to wait in long lines outside the supermarkets to get their food, as illustrated very well by [ARC2020](#).

Therefore, there has never been a better moment to reconsider the EU's promotion policy for agricultural policy to align it with the objective of the F2F.

The F2F says: *The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of a **robust and resilient food system** that functions in all circumstances, and is capable of ensuring access to a sufficient supply of affordable food for citizens. It has also made us acutely aware of the interrelations between our health, ecosystems, supply chains, consumption patterns and planetary boundaries. It is clear that we need to do much more to keep ourselves and the planet healthy. The current pandemic is just one example. The increasing recurrence of droughts, floods, forest fires and new pests are a constant reminder that our food system is under threat and must become more sustainable and resilient.*

We cannot wait until the ongoing revision of the promotion policy to make the necessary changes. In these COVID-19 times, spending another 200 million EUR of European citizens' taxpayer money to pay agri-business up to 80% compensation for promoting European exporting conventional agricultural products around the world seems simply inappropriate. Instead, we should focus on 2021 (and if possible the remaining part of 2020) to obtain increased transparency in the European farm to fork (business to consumer), and better links between farmers and consumers. Doing so will not only help European citizens make better consumer choices, it could also be a way to help kick off the recovery in parts of the sector which suffered enormously from the COVID-19, such as tourism.

Ideas for 2021 work programme on European Commission's promotion programme

1) No funding for promotion of conventional agricultural products for export in 2021

The F2F says: *The transition to sustainable food systems is also a **huge economic opportunity**. Citizens' expectations are evolving and driving significant change in the food market. This is an opportunity for farmers, fishers and aquaculture producers, as well as food processors and food services. This transition will allow them to make sustainability their trademark and to guarantee the future of the EU food chain before their competitors outside the EU do so. The transition to sustainability presents a 'first mover' opportunity for all actors in the EU food chain.*

While PAN Europe and its member find that it would be most appropriate to stop offering support for promotion of exports, we call on the European Commission to, as from 2021, start selecting products from a pesticide use reduction angle and in the coming years only allow pesticide-free front runners to be part of the programme.

Example of pioneers in the ecological transition should be promoted:

Organic wine producers, examples from [our films](#), illustrate how a few front-runners moved towards organic even before the EU had its logo, while other companies are moving in the that direction now, like [Ferrari-Trento](#).

We are aware that probably many agro-businesses currently part of the scheme will oppose chemical inputs becoming a criterion for export promotion, we believe the EU should encourage a '**non-toxic business model**'. This is not only what is identified in the F2F: most importantly, it is what citizens want.

The issue of absence of residues of chemicals in food is of special interest for European citizens. Again and again pesticide residues found in fruit, vegetables or cereals are the number one concern about 'food related risks' in regular surveys made by [European Food Barometers](#).

Some national strategies have provided encouraging results:

The more than 30 years of pesticide reduction policy in Denmark is one of the reasons why Danish fruit and vegetables have lower levels of pesticide residues. The Danish consumer organisation [Forbrugerraadet](#) recognises this and therefore echoes the [Danish authorities](#)' call for Danish consumers to choose Danish-produced fruit and vegetables over European ones, while only choosing imported products as a last resort.

But the food-related risks of pesticide residues are also of increasing interest to consumers outside Europe. [A study from December 2014](#) shows for instance that the Chinese are worried about all food-related hazards, including food containing pesticides or veterinary drug residues, and as China is one of the main growing destinations, that seems a relevant aspect to consider.

Therefore, we should neither wait for this to happen as part of the ongoing revision of the promotion policy, nor wait for the European Commission to publish a legislative proposal for a framework for a sustainable food system before the end of 2023 as mentioned in the F2F, but already act now.

Such an approach would go hand in hand with the F2F objective of *seeking commitments from food companies and organisations to take concrete actions on health and sustainability, focussing in particular on: reformulating food products in line with guidelines for healthy, sustainable diets; reducing their environmental footprint and energy consumption by becoming more energy efficient; adapting marketing and advertising strategies taking into account the needs of the most vulnerable; ensuring that food price campaigns do not undermine citizens' perception of the value of food.*

While anticipating that the European Commission has also promised in the F2F to '*revise **marketing standards** to provide for the uptake and supply of sustainable agricultural, fisheries and aquaculture products and to reinforce the role of sustainability criteria taking into account the possible impact of these standards on food loss and waste. In parallel, it will strengthen the legislative framework on **geographical indications** (GIs) and, where appropriate, include specific sustainability criteria.*'

2) Sustainable short supply chains as a diversification measure focusing on farmers and agronomic practices

The website [Chafea - Promotion of agricultural products](#) mentions that the purpose of the 2021 call, among others, is to *'highlight the specific features of agricultural production methods in the Union, particularly in terms of food safety, traceability, authenticity, labelling, nutritional and health aspects, animal welfare, respect for the environment and sustainability, and the characteristics of agricultural and food products, particularly in terms of their quality, taste, diversity or traditions'*.

PAN Europe has asked the European Commission on several occasions about how the promotion programme considers pesticides, and we invited the EC to focus on agronomic practices. The European Commission often replied stating that the programme has been supporting organic agriculture, but also recognises that no other special focus has been given to promote products with low levels of pesticide residues.

The F2F sets an objective that the EU's pesticide sale and use is reduced by 50% by 2030, reminding farmers of the need to apply Integrated Pest Management (IPM, even if IPM was supposed to be mandatory for farmers as from 2014): The F2F says: *IPM will encourage the use of alternative control techniques, such as crop rotation and mechanical weeding, and will be one of the main tools in reducing the use of, and dependency on, chemical pesticides in general, and the use of more hazardous pesticides in particular.*

For this to happen, as mentioned in the F2F, it will be of paramount importance that CAP funding becomes conditional upon farmers applying these practices, and **as a consequence, promotion policy should updated to only support those products.** Meanwhile, direct links between farmers and consumers also need to be increased. As COVID-19 is showing us, our food system's weak link is the concentrated and overstretched, less resilient, distribution chains.

The F2F says: *to support primary producers in the transition, the Commission envisages clarifying the competition rules for collective initiatives that promote sustainability in supply chains. It will also help farmers and fishers to strengthen their position in the supply chain and to capture a fair share of the added value of sustainable production by encouraging the possibilities for cooperation within the common market organisations for agricultural products and fishery and aquaculture products. The Commission will monitor the implementation of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive by Member States. It will also work with co-legislators to improve agricultural rules that strengthen the position of farmers (e.g. producers of products with geographical indications), their cooperatives and producer organisations in the food supply chain.*

PAN Europe and its members propose that the European Commission focus the 2021 promotion programme on projects aiming to deliver sustainable and short supply chains.

Examples of local approaches which should be included into any promotion policy:

Farmers' cooperatives selling directly to consumers in Wallonia and Brussels include [Agri-covert](#), while direct sales examples include (from Brussels) [Aux Porte du Radis](#), but also [Community Supported Agriculture](#); examples from peri-urban farms include [La ferme du Chant des Cailles](#) and Groupe d'Achats Solidaires de l'Agriculture Paysanne ([GASAP](#)).

The F2F specifies that: *The Commission will take action to scale-up and promote sustainable and socially responsible production methods and **circular business models** in food processing and retail.*

Example on how retailers can scale up sustainable and socially responsible production methods:

Swedish producer association KRAV also involved NGOs to appeal to Swedish retailers on the need to give them shelf-space during COVID-19 (read [here](#)).

3) Transparency in the food chain by selling a concept rather than a product

The purpose of the promotion programme is also to raise awareness among consumers of the efforts made by European farmers to provide quality products.

However, the reality is that any industry these days wants to appear as sustainable, while very few are willing to pay a fair price for a fair product. In many countries, the word Integrated Pest Management means following standard procedure while applying calendar pesticide spraying. And while this approach might appeal to the industry, it certainly does not appeal neither to the farmer nor the consumer. Therefore, informing about real sustainability of systems and giving consumers advice on the benefits of consuming organic products would be a very appropriate way to spend European funding on promotion, and also a huge opportunity to kick off the concept of slow tourism, a concept that probably will be of concern to us all this summer.

Example of how a few farmers are willingly engaging with other farmers and citizens in discussions about production methods and sustainability:

See for instance the videos of Paolo Mosca and Carsine Orsine on sustainable rice growing on PAN Europe's homepage: <https://www.low-impact-farming.info>

Pesticide Action Network Europe (PAN Europe) was founded in 1987 and brings together consumer, public health, environmental organisations, and women's groups from across Europe. PAN Europe is part of the global network PAN International working to minimise the negative effects and replace the use of harmful pesticides with ecologically sound alternatives. For further information contact: [Henriette Christensen, henriette@pan-europe.info](mailto:henriette@pan-europe.info)