



EuroHealthNet response to DG AGRI Public Debate: The Future of the Common Agricultural Policy

EuroHealthNet (www.eurohealthnet.eu) is a not for profit organisation networking public bodies working in the fields of health promotion, public health, disease prevention and health determinants – the factors behind good or ill health. We comprise of national and regional bodies working on policy, research and implementation approaches which contribute to improving health, wellbeing and equity between and within all the countries that are members of or associated with the European Union.

EuroHealthNet is a member of the ***European Public Health and Agriculture Consortium*** (EPHAC), an alliance of health organisations advocating for healthy, more sustainable Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).

EuroHealthNet recognises the important role the Common Agricultural Policy constitutes in European society; not just in terms of its economic impact but also its social, environmental and health impact. Through a variety of measures affecting food availability, quality and cost, the CAP has a profound effect on the health of the population. While previous reforms rounds of the CAP failed to effectively take health concerns into account, the present discussion on the future reform of the CAP offers a unique opportunity to incorporate health aspects – including access to safe, nutritionally balanced food at affordable prices – into a healthier, more sustainable and greener CAP.

Through its participation in the European Public Health and Agriculture Consortium, EuroHealthNet will work to advocate for a healthier, greener and more sustainable CAP. We look forward to the next steps in the CAP reform process and will be happy to provide additional information about our activities and/or our position regarding the CAP reform upon request.

Summary of response:

EuroHealthNet would like to highlight the following recommendations and encourage DG AGRI to:

- ✓ Apply the guiding principles advocated by the ***European Public Health and Agriculture Consortium*** (EPHAC):
 - Ensure that access to safe and healthy food for all forms a crucial part of the future agricultural policy while also contributing to a coherent strategy that tackles inequalities in health;
 - Promote sustainable production based on environmentally friendly farming methods while promoting consumption that is based on healthier and more sustainable diets;
 - Protect consumers against price volatility and ensure more transparency in the governance structure of the food system;
 - Develop policy making on sound impact assessment procedures that take a stronger account of output on health outcomes ⁽¹⁾.

- ✓ Review and implement the relevant recommendations from the World Health Organizations (WHO) Commission on the Social Determinants of Health:
 - Encourage healthy eating through retail planning to manage food availability and access;
 - Integrate health equity in rural development programmes, including action on sustainable employment;
 - Apply a Health equity impact analysis to agricultural transport, fuel, buildings, industry and waste as part of climate change strategies (2).

- ✓ Strengthen current approaches and develop further initiatives at the local, national and EU level that stimulate links between agriculture policy and healthier food choice. For example, build on existing EU initiatives, including the:
 - School Milk Scheme;
 - School Fruit Scheme;
 - Most deprived Persons scheme.

- ✓ Consult the key messages from the [DETERMINE](#) project, a DG SANCO co-funded and EuroHealthNet coordinated project, and reflect and implement these in the CAP policymaking process. For example:
 - The EU and its Member States should invest in and coordinate efforts to develop better regulation and ensure the most efficient and effective use of public resources to improve health equity. This requires to:
 - Undertake economic analysis of policies and programmes that directly or indirectly affect health and ensuring greater consideration of the costs relating to health outcomes and the distribution of these outcomes (equity). Investing in the improvement of methodologies to undertake such analyses can strengthen the rationale for action to reduce health inequities;
 - Invest in research, development and evaluation of policies and programmes that address the social determinants of health and health inequities and in improved methodologies to undertake such evaluations, in order to build a strong evidence base (3).

Question 1: Why do we need a European common agricultural policy?

Europe needs, now more than ever, a strong and effective European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) due to the recent global economic crisis and its adverse impact on social and economic conditions. A key component to the recovery of the European economy is the health and well-being of EU citizens. Health, which is prerequisite for economic growth and inclusive societies, is heavily influenced by what we eat and how our food is produced. Thus, the CAP as the guardian of food policy in the EU has a vital role in affecting our health as it play a major role in determining how we access, how much we pay and how nutritious our food is and therefore, has a direct impact on our health and overall well-being.

The CAP is essential in guaranteeing how food is produced, distributed and consumed, both at the local national, European and global level, and has therefore a direct impact on our dietary patterns (1). Although diet is influenced by many different factors of social, medical and cultural origin, people's choice of food is also largely determined by price, access and availability, most notably among people from lower socio economic groups (4). The CAP should address food insecurity and make that all EU citizens are able to have an adequate diet in terms of its quality and quantity. In addition, it should promote a sustainable food system that can supply safe and healthy food, with a low environmental impact while contributing to overall wellbeing. Europe needs a CAP that is based on a model where farming and food can deliver multiple benefits to society including positive public health outcomes, in particular contributing to the reduction in health inequalities both within and between Member States (1).

A reformed CAP, incorporating the principles of equity, sustainability and well-being and aiming at the reduction of green house gas emissions from food production and transportation would not only complement EU strategies to reduce health inequalities and prevent chronic disease. It would also contribute to the aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy of “smart, green and inclusive growth” (1).

Question 2: What do citizens expect from agriculture?

According to a Eurobarometer survey in March 2010, European citizens’ primary expectation from agriculture policy is access to safe, high quality and healthy food at an affordable price (5). At present, 17% of EU citizens have such limited resources that they cannot afford the basics (6). Therefore, people generally expect that the CAP should be based on equity, the universal right to safe, affordable, nutritious food, and a transparent food supply chain (5).

Furthermore, the CAP can contribute and complement strategies aimed at reducing health inequalities and assist in preventing chronic diseases by improving the availability of and access to healthy foods. For example, by increasing the supply and reducing the cost of fruit and vegetables and by encouraging healthy dietary patterns, the CAP could significantly contribute to improving the health and well-being of EU citizens. Particularly lower socio-economic and excluded groups will benefit most as they generally consume fewer fruits, vegetables, milk products and vitamins and suffer from a higher incidence of ill health.

In addition, EU citizens generally support a CAP that provides a decent standard of living for European farmers and Europe's regional areas without causing detrimental impacts on the agriculture and economy of developing countries (5). The reformed CAP should make a greater commitment to follow a "greener" agriculture strategy that mitigates against the challenges of climate change and protects the environment by reducing green house gas emissions from food production and transportation. Food and agriculture production make a substantial contribution to green house gas emissions, and actions should be taken to reduce the impact on climate change. Therefore, innovative actions must be encouraged to improve farming and production techniques in order to make farming more eco-friendly and ensure that the production of healthy nutritionally balanced food does not cause adverse consequences to agricultural environments.

Question 3: Why reform the CAP?
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While successive attempts to reform the CAP have mitigated some adverse impacts, previous reform rounds have largely overlooked public health concerns. In recent times, the increased demand placed on civil society organisations such as the European Federation of Food Banks (FEBA) highlights the fact the CAP can be further improved and function more effectively. The European Federation of Food Banks reports that the economic crisis has had the biggest impact on the 79 million people who live below the poverty line in Europe (7). FEBA asserted that among them, 30 million suffer from malnutrition – with single females, elderly people and big families the most affected (7). Therefore, CAP must be reformed to be in line with current and future challenges related to reducing health inequalities, the burden of chronic diseases, food security and climate change (1).

Today, our food system supports unhealthy diets that are high in calories, fat and salt, and low in fruit, vegetables and grains. Although dietary and health aspects constitute only one strand of the CAP, it does not mean it is any less important than any other strand – especially in terms of its impact on the health of the EU population. Diet related chronic disease pose one of the greatest challenges for sustainable growth in the EU. WHO Europe reports that obesity, cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes collectively pose the greatest burden of disease (77%) in the European region. The report further identified diet as one of the major modifiable risk factors for these four Non Communicable Diseases (4). Societal and cultural trends have indicated that EU Member States are moving towards converging diets characterised by energy dense, highly processed, nutrient poor foods. This, combined with lower levels of physical inactivity, plays an important role in increasing rates of chronic non-communicable diseases. As a result, this leads to diminishing health status, a decreasing overall wellbeing and therefore a stifling economic growth (8).

Moreover, policy makers should undertake economic analysis of CAP policies and programmes that directly or indirectly affect health outcomes to quantify the economic cost associated with ill health. Policy makers should ensure that greater consideration of these costs and outcomes are reflected in policy making (3). Not only will this nutrition-related disease significantly reduce a person's wellbeing and quality of life but it will also constitute a significant economic burden for health-care systems. For example, in England, the Sustainable Development Commission estimates that the cost of obesity to the economy could be up to £3.7 billion per year (9).

Therefore, change is needed in the environments in which people live, but also a policy structure should be in place that supports making the healthy choice the easy choice. This includes making progress towards an increased availability and accessibility of nutrient dense foods like fruit, vegetables, pulses and whole grains (10).

In conclusion, agriculture and the CAP can thus play a significant role in preventing chronic disease and improving health by engaging with other policy sectors and pursuing a joined up policy approach (1).

Question 4: What tools do we need for the CAP of tomorrow?

Improved coherence across policies area's including public health, food safety, trade, development, regional, environment, climate change, consumer and social policies is imperative. The CAP should contribute to the optimal functioning of the food system in relation to these policy areas, and food and agriculture policy should be part of a coherent cross-sectoral approach to address inequalities in health outcomes (1).

Moreover, regarding the tools and policy instruments we need for the CAP of tomorrow, EuroHealthNet strongly endorses the key principles promoted by the European Public Health and Agriculture Consortium. In particular:

- The CAP should promote innovative policy instruments that provide multiple benefits for society i.e. schemes that create market access for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and producers, and improve access to healthy food for Europe's most vulnerable socio-economic groups (1).
- Quality of food is one of the prime drivers of what people eat and ensuring the quality of the food we eat is important for maintaining consumer confidence. Although quality schemes and standards are important, quality is essential in maintaining EU competitiveness in agriculture. This must not be at the expense of the affordability of a safe and nutritious diet for all layers of society (1).
- The sustainability of agriculture production includes economic viability, social inclusion and environmental protection. Both production and consumption patterns need to be addressed to encourage healthier and more sustainable diets. Current patterns of production and consumption are not sustainable, and EU policies and instruments must provide incentives to create positive change, without compromising the European agriculture's ability to compete in the market (1).
- The CAP should address extreme volatility in food prices in order not only to ensure the livelihood of farmers but also to ensure that food remains affordable for the citizens. Therefore, instruments should be developed that not only to manage future crises in the food system but also to addresses problems association with concentration of power in the food supply system (1).
- The EU agriculture policy can – and should – contribute to meeting an increasing global demand for food. In order to achieve this, not only technology that increases food production will be required but incentives to move production and consumption towards plant based diets are needed (1).

- The CAP must support investment in innovation in agriculture and food, and support a balanced research agenda that invests in agro-ecological and human ecological models of research as well as new technology (1).

Finally, the future CAP should be based on a sound impact assessment, as a precondition for meeting future policy objectives. Strengthening and systematising impact assessment procedures to ensure that there is also a strong focus on health impacts and their distribution across socio-economic groups and making certain that the findings from these impact assessments are integrated into the final policy and its implementation process (3).

For further information visit:

www.equitychannel.net | www.health-inequalities.eu

www.eurohealthnet.eu | www.health-gradient.eu

Notes

1. European Public Health and Agriculture Consortium (EPHAC). Towards a healthier, more Sustainable CAP - EPHAC Background Paper on the post 2013 CAP. Brussels, 2010.
2. Closing the gap in a generation. Report of the World Health Organization Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, Geneva, 2008.
3. DETERMINE Consortium. The story of DETERMINE: Mobilising Action for Health Equity in the EU. Brussels: EuroHealthNet; 2010.
4. Fact Sheets: Tackling Europe's major disease: the challenges and the solutions. WHO, Regional Office for Europe. 2006.
5. Special EUROBAROMETER 336. Europeans, Agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy. Brussels, 2010.
6. European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion - www.endpoverty.eu
7. European Federation of Food Banks - www.eurofoodbank.org
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9. Health, place and nature: How outdoor environments influence health and well-being: a knowledge base. Sustainable Development Commission. London, 2008.
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