

# Experts urge EU to redesign food systems to spark a healthy food transition



Dr Anant Jani discusses with MEP Manuela Ripa | Photo: EuroHealthNet

**BRUSSELS, 27 April 2026** – Leading health and food system experts from [FEAST](#), [EuroHealthNet](#) and [EAT](#), alongside the MEP Interest Group on Health Inequalities, Prevention and Risk Factors, are calling for a decisive overhaul of Europe’s fragmented food policies. At a high-level policy dialogue hosted at the European Parliament last week, they urged EU institutions to align farming, health, and investment policies with the everyday needs of citizens for a healthy, sustainable diet.

European food systems are currently saturated with nutrition-poor products high in fat, salt, and sugar. In the EU, [ultra-processed foods \(UPFs\) now account for 27% of daily calories](#), a trend linked to increased overweight and obesity in children, and a rise in noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. The group warned that current EU NCDs initiatives, including the **Safe Hearts Plan**, have too strong a focus on the individual and lack the integration needed to address the commercial pressures shaping what people eat and to help secure a **healthy food environment**.

During the dialogue, **MEP Manuela Ripa co-chair of the Interest Group stated:** “Diabetes and obesity are rising fastest among the most vulnerable, yet we are still treating the symptoms instead of the causes. We cannot keep asking individuals to make harder choices every day while leaving unhealthy environments unchanged.”

The discussion highlighted growing concern that **EU food policy** is falling behind in addressing concentrated market power and aggressive marketing. With the policy landscape shifting towards simplification and the **EU Sustainable Food Systems framework** no longer there, the group called for health benchmarks in the post-2027 **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** and the next **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**.

With [almost 9% of the EU population](#) unable to afford a proper meal every second day and a rising cost of living, nutritious diets have moved further out of reach for many Europeans. **Dr Anant Jani of the FEAST initiative noted:** “Europe’s food systems are working, but only for certain actors. Market-led models are entrenching inequality, pushing healthy, sustainable diets out of reach as prices rise. Policymakers are enabling a business-as-usual approach that benefits large corporations, despite having the option to choose a different path. Public policy must step in to guarantee fair access to nutritious food.”

The proposed **European Competitiveness Fund, under the next MFF**, is seen as a critical test. Experts warned that while placing health and agriculture in the same investment pillar offers potential, commercial interest must not sideline public wellbeing. **Caroline Costongs, Director of EuroHealthNet, said:**

“Simply telling people to eat healthily is not enough if the environment pushes in the opposite direction. We need to make healthy choices the easy choices, where we live, work, and eat. That means stronger EU rules on food marketing, clear and simple labelling, and better food in schools and public services. Without this shift, the EU will fall short on its health, social, and economic goals.”

#### **The experts set out the following priorities for action:**

- **Incentivise the nutritious choice:** use fiscal measures, public procurement, school schemes and zoning policies to make healthy and sustainable diets the default.
- **Prioritise healthy and sustainable eating:** use the EU's Vision for Agriculture and Food, and the Safe Hearts Plan to reduce reliance on UPFs.
- **Balance power:** protect public policy from commercial conflicts of interest.
- **Tie investment to health:** align the CAP and urban development grants with clear health and equity benchmarks.
- **Track progress:** include meaningful food and health-related indicators in the MFF to track how EU spending delivers visible results for all.

**About**

[European Parliament's Interest Group on Health Inequalities, Prevention, and Risk Factors](#) is a cross-party forum within the European Parliament that brings together policymakers and stakeholders to promote action on reducing health inequalities and addressing key preventable risk factors across Europe.

**EuroHealthNet's** mission is to help build a sustainable, fair, and inclusive Europe through healthier communities and to tackle health inequalities within and between European States. For more on our mission and vision visit: [www.eurohealthnet.eu](http://www.eurohealthnet.eu)

EuroHealthNet has also recently launched a new Thematic Working Group (TWIG) on the Commercial Determinants of Health, creating a space for members to exchange practice, strengthen analysis and support policy action on commercial drivers of health inequalities across Europe.

**FEAST** advances research and innovation by bringing together disciplines across the food system and integrating behavioural insights often missing from solutions. It promotes co-created, scalable community, technological, and policy solutions, with a focus on health equity and vulnerable groups, so all Europeans can benefit from healthier, more sustainable diets: <https://feast2030.eu/>

The outcomes of this policy dialogue will inform FEAST's work on healthier, more sustainable food environments, including upcoming policy outputs and preparations for the project's final conference next year.

**EAT** works at the intersection of science, business & society to make healthy, fair, and sustainable food a reality. Their work connects science, policy, business, and communities to shape better food systems that nourish people, restore nature and support fair livelihoods. By uniting evidence with diverse voices, we are helping build a healthy, fair and sustainable future: <https://eatforum.org/>

**Related resources**

EuroHealthNet (2025). Tackling ultra-processed food for a healthier and just food system. Policy Précis. <https://eurohealthnet.eu/publication/tackling-ultra-processed-food-for-a-healthier-and-just-food-system/>

Miranda, A.R., Meunier, J.M.M., Romagosa Vilarnau, S., Jani, A. and Verger, E.O. (2026) 'Are European diets healthy and sustainable? Evidence from nine countries using the planetary health diet framework', European Journal of Nutrition. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s00394-026-03929-5.pdf>

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This policy dialogue was organised in collaboration with:

