

# The CAP & Food Consumption

## Food Consumption

Europeans are consuming and often over-consuming increasing amounts of pre-processed foods high in sugar, salt, trans- and saturated fats and foods of animal origin. Substantial portions of our food also end up as waste, both at consumer level and along the food chain. This means that the European food system has a far bigger environmental footprint than necessary.

Current EU food consumption levels do not only have significant impacts on the environment but also cause serious health effects, such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorder, cancer and diabetes<sup>1</sup>.

Traditional approaches focus on individual behaviour as the problem and seek to change it. However, behavioural change depends on a sequence of changes: changes in information, attitudes, motivation, skills and resources, access and availability, social norms and cultural expectations. Purchases are strongly influenced by what is available, by price, by past experience and by marketing messages.

Public policies can play a significant role in stimulating, informing and empowering citizens and by ensuring sustainable production methods. While the rhetoric around the CAP emphasises good, healthy and secure food, in reality the CAP is not doing enough to promote healthy and sustainable food.



### Facts & figures

- Around 33% of a household's total environmental impact in the EU is related to food and drink consumption<sup>2</sup>.
- The main threat to maintaining progress in human development comes from unsustainable production and food consumption patterns<sup>3</sup>.
- The number of overweight people worldwide has surpassed the number of malnourished people<sup>4</sup>.
- Meat consumption in Europe is twice the world average; for dairy produce it is even three times. The total per-capita protein consumption (including vegetable sources) is about 70% higher than recommended<sup>5</sup>.
- The production of 1 kg wheat requires 1,300 litres of water versus 3,300l for 1 kg of eggs, 3,400l for 1 kg of broken rice and 15,500l for 1kg of beef<sup>6</sup>.
- Approximately 90 million tonnes of food, or around 179kg/per person per year, is wasted annually in the EU-27<sup>7</sup>.
- 30-80% of adults in Europe are overweight or obese, causing 2-8% of health costs and 10-13% of deaths in different parts of Europe<sup>8</sup>.

### Recommendation

**The CAP needs profound change to support the kinds of farming Europe needs in the 21st century. Public money must support public goods. Taxpayers must see real value for the billions they invest in the CAP. Those who farm sustainably must be effectively supported while those who harm the environment should receive no public money.**

**If politicians are serious about sustainable and healthy food consumption they must support a fundamental CAP reform now.**



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## Promoting reduced meat consumption

The livestock sector is responsible for the bulk of environmental impacts from farming, with nearly 33% of the earth's land now dedicated to feeding livestock. Increasing meat and dairy production is probably the biggest single cause of biodiversity loss<sup>9</sup> and livestock is estimated to account for 18% of global GHG emissions<sup>10</sup>.

With world demand for meat and milk expected to double by 2050<sup>11</sup>, changing consumption patterns is critical if these dire impacts are to be reduced. Excessive consumption of livestock products is

also a major public health problem in the developed world and is becoming an issue in many developing countries.

However, government campaigns that promote healthy eating habits can be effective<sup>12</sup>. Germany's federal environment agency had issued an advisory that people should reserve eating meat for special occasions<sup>13</sup> and the Belgian city of Ghent is trying to convince citizens and restaurants to be vegetarian for at least one day per week by calling for Thursday 'Veggie day'<sup>14</sup>.



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## Information campaigns driven from the bottom up in Germany and the UK

In order to change consumption patterns, it is necessary for more sustainably produced food to be available and information (or labelling) campaigns should be set up to allow concerned consumers make informed choices.

Many private initiatives have been taken to ensure information comes to light. For example, since the popular Jamie Oliver television series "Jamie's School Dinners" and the launch of the "Feed Me Better campaign" in 2005, both the UK Government and the

British public have come to understand that food plays a vital role in children's education<sup>15</sup>.

In May 2006, the Community initiative of the Tollwood Festival and the Department of Health and Environment of the City of Munich started the pilot project "Bio für Kinder" (Bio for Kids). The goal of the project is to support Munich's child care facilities in the conversion to 100% organic food. They want to show together with committed entrepreneurs that "Bio for Kids" is feasible and affordable<sup>16</sup>.



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© Damon Taylor, waste

## Production of waste in the UK

It is estimated that 8.3 million tonnes of food and drink waste per year is generated by households in the UK. This is the equivalent to 330kg per year for each household in the UK, or just over 6kg per household per week<sup>17</sup>. The amount of food (including liquid and solid foods but excluding drink) wasted per year is 25% of that purchased (by weight).

The GHG emissions associated with avoidable food and drink waste is the equivalent of approximately 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, so reducing this waste has important climate change implications.

In addition, more than two-thirds of packaging waste is related to the consumption of food. The move towards purchase of pre-prepared and convenience food has resulted in large increases in the amount of packaging waste - on average more than 160kg per person per year in the EU-15<sup>18</sup>.

Policy should ensure the pricing of products takes into account their external and often harmful impacts in order to give the right signals to consumers.

Prepared by:

