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EP resolution on a farm to fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system

Draft UECBV position

UECBV read carefully the draft EP resolution on a farm to fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system (Report A9-0271/2021).

Key message

UECBV agrees that we all would like to live in a perfect world with nutritious food, sustainable and affordable with fair incomes for food producers.

However, we fear that some elements contradict each other's. We have to face the reality and UECBV calls MEPs to take time to think further what the F2F strategy should look like, in particular taking into account the results of the first studies assessing the impact of the F2F Strategy. **UECBV joins its voice to other stakeholders to postpone the vote on the F2F EP draft resolution.**

We call MEPs to stand for a positive approach, offering a sustainable future to EU agri-food producers.

Going in more details of the report

UECBV wishes to draw your attention on the following part of the draft resolution:

Animal husbandry/densities

19. *“improved animal husbandry practices are key as better animal welfare improves animal health”* + point 21 *“addressing livestock densities in the EU”* + 23. *“Points out that extensive permanent grassland-based, silvo-pastoral or extensive organic animal husbandry”* + *“moving away from farming practices such as high density stocking”* + Point 29. *“animal production systems which involve the confinement of animals of a similar genotype in close proximity to one another can increase the susceptibility of animals to infectious disease, creating conditions for the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases”*

- Both outdoor and indoor farming have challenges as regards animal welfare but they are different. One is not necessarily better than the other one, they are different. As an example, animals raised indoor have less risk of catching diseases from wild animals.
- In practice, we need the diversity of production models that we have in the EU to feed the whole population. “One does not fit all” and the reality is complex and nuanced. Instead of pointing the fingers on some production models, the key message should be rather to encourage all segments to identify its weaknesses and to overcome them towards sustainability.

- Regarding the use of anti-microbials, it is important that they remain available in case of animal diseases. Otherwise, it could create animal welfare issues if the animals could not be treated correctly. One should keep in mind that the main source of AMR is in human health.

Animal Welfare (AW)

27. *Emphasises that animals should experience as little distress as possible when transported and slaughtered and therefore welcomes the intention to revise the existing animal welfare legislation regarding animal transport and the slaughter of animals; calls on the Commission and the Member States to facilitate local slaughter solutions, including mobile slaughter, with smaller units and better staff training on avoiding animal suffering; calls on the Commission to promote alternatives to live animal transport wherever possible;*

- It is important to remind that animal welfare conditions EU standards are high for transporting animals. The efforts should be first on better and harmonised enforcement.
- Animal welfare conditions at slaughter are also high. In all slaughterhouses, it is compulsory to have an animal welfare officer and this is the only industry with the permanent presence of official authorities. Due to these high standards, including on sanitary and environment aspects, high investments were necessary which means higher standards but less slaughterhouses. In addition, farming areas and slaughterhouse areas are not always the same. Animal transportation for slaughter is necessary. Local/mobile slaughterhouses are useful in some specific cases (for example: long horns or dangerous animals), however, the high EU standards make them not viable economically at a larger scale.

30. *“Welcomes the Commission’s recognition of organic farming as one of the strong components on the EU’s path towards more sustainable food systems and the ambition to increase the EU’s agricultural land under organic farming by 2030”*

- UECBV warns MEPs that organic does not mean necessarily “sustainable”. There are other sustainable methods of farming “i.e. agriculture raisonnée” that are worth to examine towards a sustainable agri-food system.

Balanced diets

Point 88. *Highlights the recognition in the strategy that most Europeans’ diets are not in line with recommendations for healthy eating, and that a population-wide shift in consumption patterns is needed towards more healthy foods, diets and lifestyles, including increased consumption of sustainably and regionally produced plants and plant-based foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and legumes, and to address the overconsumption of meat and ultra-processed products, as well as products high in sugars, salt and fats, which will also benefit the environment and animal welfare and secure a more resilient economy*

- Presenting meat as an allegedly unhealthy food lacks any basis. Meat contains many nutrients that are important for a healthy and balanced diet.
- Basically, no classification into healthy or unhealthy foods can be made. A person's dietary pattern is individual and has different effects on the respective organism. Studies also show that the reaction to food is highly individual. In addition, the needs

Commented [IM1]: We suggest to delete these words

are changing during the life. Some people are already under-consuming meat and it can create health disorders if it is not well framed with a medical professional. It should not be underestimated as behaviour can be radical when it comes to meat consumption. The key message should be “balanced diet”.

- There is no correlation between animal welfare and a healthy diet. High animal welfare standards do not automatically lead to a healthy diet. For example, more "animal welfare" does not automatically mean that less medication is used. Consideration for animal welfare does not mean dispensing with medicines, but under certain circumstances the targeted use of medicines to cure illnesses.

Labelling

97. Welcomes the Commission’s initiative aimed at improving origin labelling and its consideration of extending it to a wider range of products; reiterates its call for ~~mandatory~~ **voluntary** origin labelling; stresses that this should be comprehensive and harmonised and cover all food products and should cover catering facilities, restaurants and retail and be fully verifiable and traceable and not undermine the proper functioning of the internal market; emphasises that the food information regulation¹ needs to be revised ~~with a focus on milk and meat as ingredients~~.

Commented [IM2]: Voluntary should replace “mandatory”

Having the experience of mandatory labelling for meat as raw material, UECBV is fine with an extended system for meat as an ingredient as far as it remains voluntary.

- Indeed, a mandatory origin labelling provokes a renationalisation of the EU MS markets, it is going against the single market (or it should be EU/non-EU). In the meat sector, not all parts are eaten by all consumers, there is a need that each cut can find its market. For example, some MS will eat more meat from male animals, or from younger animals, or some parts only. It adds also some costs and burden that are difficult to meet specifically by SMEs. It is better to keep it as a commercial choice. Then it is up to the operator to put in place the appropriate procedure.
- Voluntary labelling does not prevent anyone from advertising that their product comes from regional production, for example.

98. Welcomes the Commission’s intention to create a **voluntary** sustainable food labelling framework

Commented [IM3]: Voluntary should be added to allow a commercial added value and interest

99. Underlines the need to establish **voluntary** labelling on animal products, which should be based on identifying the method of production as well as animal welfare indicators, and contain the place of birth, rearing and slaughter of the animal, and stresses that these requirements should be extended to processed products in order to increase transparency, help consumers to make a better choice and contribute to the welfare of animals; stresses that production and market uptake of plant-based proteins should be better supported, and calls furthermore for the long-overdue harmonisation of requirements with regard to labelling for vegetarian and vegan foods to be put forward without further delay;

Commented [IM4]: To be added

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on the provision of food information to consumers. OJ L 304, 22.11.2011, p. 18.

- There is nothing wrong with an EU-wide animal welfare label as long as it is voluntary. However, there are already numerous animal welfare programmes and labels. A uniform EU label would not bring any progress in animal welfare, but only administrative burdens and control costs.
- In general, compulsory labelling (whether animal welfare, extended nutrition labelling, sustainability, etc.) primarily causes administrative work and costs.
- With regard to sustainability labelling, the question arises as to how a scientific method is to be developed here that makes products comparable with each other.
- There is also the general question of why certain foods should be highlighted. One needs to keep in mind that “plant based protein” are not necessarily healthier (many plant-based alternatives are highly processed) or sustainable. More important: the plant based sector can’t be sustainable without the livestock sector (as livestock is fed with plant by-products that otherwise would need to be disposed). Both are going hand in hand.

Food prices

101. *Underlines that food prices must send the right signal to consumers; considers that true food prices, reflecting the true cost of production for farmers and also for the environment and society, are the most efficient way to achieve sustainable and equitable food systems in the long term; welcomes, therefore, the strategy’s objective to guide the food industry towards practices that make the healthy and sustainable choice the easy, accessible and affordable one for consumers; supports giving Member States more flexibility to differentiate the VAT rates on food with different health and environmental impacts, and enable them to choose a zero VAT rate for healthy and sustainable food products such as fruits and vegetables...*

- UECBV agrees that food price should allow all operators to be fairly remunerated. However, this is a complex issue. What does it mean? Will affordability be preserved?
- Why are “fruits and vegetables” considered as sustainable *per se*? According to which definition of sustainability? It should be at least restricted to “fresh” fruits and vegetables”; Once again, one should be reminded that the plant-based sector can’t be sustainable without the livestock sector (as livestock is fed with plant by-products that otherwise would need to be disposed). Both are going hand in hand.

Regarding Trade issues (points 128 to 143)

- UECBV wishes to recall the importance of Trade with third countries for the viability of the EU agri-food sector (both for exports and imports).
- The level playing field looks important, however, one needs to keep in mind that:
- It should be specified what is meant by this? Can it be “equivalent” systems? For which steps of production? How to enforce and control bearing in mind that other important principles in FTAs (such as regionalisation) are not yet fully implemented? Is the EU still in a sufficient dominating position so that its partners will rather trade between themselves rather than with the EU?
- A pragmatic approach is necessary.



In conclusion, UECBV calls MEPs to postpone the vote so that they can take more time to examine the results of the first studies assessing the Farm to Fork Strategy and to ensure that the guidance to the commission will be pragmatic, fair and realistic.

The **European Livestock and Meat Trades Union (UECBV)**, founded in 1952, is the EU voice of national federations representing livestock markets, livestock traders (cattle, horses, sheep, pigs), meat traders (beef, horsemeat, sheepmeat, pigmeat), and meat industry (slaughterhouses, cutting plants and meat preparation plants).

Brought together within the UECBV are:

- an international association i.e. the **European Association of Livestock Markets (AEMB)**;
- a **Young European Meat Committee (YEMCo)**;
- the **European Natural Sausage Casings Association (ENSCA)**
- the **Organisation of European Shippers (OCEAN)**
- fifty-three national or regional federations in twenty-four of the twenty-eight Member States of the European Union, as well as Japan, Norway, Russia, Switzerland and Ukraine.

In total, some 20,000 firms of all sizes and 230,000 jobs are represented within the UECBV through its national member federations.