



**Consultation on the
review of the EU school
fruit, vegetables and
milk scheme**

Eurogroup for Animals' response to the public consultation on the review of the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme

Introduction

Eurogroup for Animals welcomes the public consultation on the review of the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme that will “contribute to promoting sustainable food consumption, in line with the Farm to Fork Strategy.”

While the school scheme was designed to increase the consumption of dairy products, reconnect children with agriculture and teach them about healthy eating habits, we believe that it is important to review the school milk scheme in light of the transition to healthy, sustainable diets and the negative environmental impact of intensive animal farming. The design and implementation of the school milk scheme should be based on reaching the targets of the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork strategy, Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and the EU Organic Action Plan.

As noted in the Farm to Fork Strategy, agriculture is responsible for 10.3% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 70% of those come from the animal sector. 68% of the total agricultural land is used for animal production and feed. In addition to its high greenhouse gas emissions and large land requirement, it is well documented in the scientific literature that intensive animal farming also has more negative environmental impacts than other types of farming on biodiversity and deforestation (due to the sourcing of feed grain), soil degradation, overuse and pollution of water and air. The school scheme therefore has an important role in promoting the dietary shift towards more plant-based consumption patterns that can keep the food system within the planetary boundaries.

Eurogroup for Animals proposes that:

- Plant-based drinks should be included among the products that can be funded through the school scheme;
- The school scheme should place emphasis on fruits and vegetables, and include nuts, legumes and whole-grains in its scope;
- All animal-based milk products that are purchased through the scheme should be organic;
- Educational measures should familiarise school children with plant-based food and not be biased towards dairy as the current norm. Educational measures should raise awareness of the impact on animal welfare of different dietary patterns and farming systems.

1. Include fortified plant-based drinks in the school scheme

The Farm to Fork Strategy notes that current food consumption patterns are unsustainable from both health and environmental points of view. Replacing dairy with plant-based drinks based on soy, legumes, seeds, nuts or cereals can reduce the environmental impact.

When fortified, plant-based drinks score similarly to dairy in terms of nutrient density, and they have lesser environmental impact.¹ They are also suitable for children with lactose intolerance or other health conditions that do not allow dairy consumption. Fortified plant-based drinks, enriched with vitamins and minerals, are part of a sustainable, healthy diet and should be included in the school scheme.

In spite of the benefits of plant-based drinks, cow's milk is still often presented as the default choice in public canteens. The school scheme can diversify nutrition by including healthy, sustainable plant-based drinks for funding under the scheme.

Contrarily, the omission of plant-based drinks may contribute to the spread of misconceptions that dairy products are healthy but plant-based products are not, but it also distorts competition between these products on the EU single market by putting the plant-based dairy alternatives at a disadvantage.

Fortified plant-based alternatives to dairy are currently not eligible for organic certification according to Regulation (EU) 2018/848. Fortified plant-based drinks would thereby be excluded in Member States that set organic as the criteria for purchases through the school milk scheme.

This can be an obstacle for those schools that want to purchase 100% organic but cannot choose plant-based drinks that have been fortified with vitamins and minerals. We note that the transformative potential of allowing plant-based drinks in the school scheme would be enhanced if organic plant-based drinks were allowed to be fortified. It is important that the school milk scheme specifies that it includes both fortified and organic plant-based drinks as alternatives alongside dairy products, for which an organic label should be the criteria for eligibility under the school scheme.

2. The school scheme should focus on healthy, sustainable plant-based food that is currently under-consumed

Whole-grains, legumes and nuts are, together with fruits and vegetables, the basis for healthy, sustainable diets. The school scheme should place a greater focus on the promotion of these foods as part of the scheme, and it should include whole-grain, nuts, beans and pulses under its scope.

¹ Rööös, Garnett, Watz and Sjörs, 2018. [The role of dairy and plant based dairy alternatives in sustainable diets](#). Future Foods Report 3. Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, the research platform Future Food.

As recognised in the Farm to Fork strategy, these foods are currently under-consumed in the EU and should therefore be promoted under the EU school scheme as part of the support for healthy, sustainable food habits from childhood. To give school children the possibility to familiarise themselves with plant-based foods and plant-based drinks is of relevance to the Farm to Fork Strategy and Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

The school scheme should contribute towards the Farm to Fork goal of healthy, sustainable diets for all by familiarising all children, regardless of socio-economic background, with plant-based drinks and plant-based food consumption based on fruit, vegetables, nuts, whole-grains and legumes. This measure can provide greater nutritional equity for children from low-income households that may have less access to healthy, sustainable food.

3. Dairy products should be organic and contribute to the target of 25% of EU agricultural land under organic farming by 2030

The school scheme should only fund the most sustainable form of production with the highest animal welfare standards. It means that dairy products from intensive farming systems should not be subject to public funding through the school scheme.

Instead, the school scheme should support farmers in their transition to organic production. The scheme should therefore only give support for organic dairy products to help reach the target of at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming by 2030 as laid out in the Organic Action Plan. The school scheme should be used as a driver and incentive for the conversion to organic farming.

4. Educational measures should be unbiased and focus on healthy, sustainable diets and animal welfare

The school scheme's educational measures should encourage the uptake of healthy, sustainable, primarily plant-based, diets. Sustainability, environmental and climate impacts as well as ethical impacts on animal welfare of different diets should be important features of the educational activities. Education about how different food choices impact animal welfare should be a priority. It should educate children about the conditions for animals in industrial farming and organic farming and how the impact of these systems on both sustainability and animal well-being.

The educational material should be science-based, factual and unbiased and should not contain indirect marketing or advertising. Given the current societal norms around consumption of animal protein as the default option, educational measures should encourage critical thinking to question prevalent norms of animal-based food production and consumption, and mainstream healthy, sustainable plant-based diets.

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