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## Our response to the Farm-to-Fork Strategy

**Revising, expanding and better enforcing farm animal welfare legislation, and a new framework for a sustainable food system: the Farm-to-Fork Strategy of the European Union's Green Deal was presented on 20th May 2020, and shows the EU Commission's commitment to revisit animal welfare legislation after years of stalemate, as well as its acknowledgement that plant-based diets and less meat are good for both health and a sustainable food system.**

With the aim of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent, the [European \(EU\) Green Deal](#) lays out a series of actions for the coming years. The drafting of the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy presented an opportunity to set a brand new course for the EU to move away from intensive animal agriculture to protect the health of people and animals, their welfare, and biodiversity.

While devastating, the emergence of COVID-19 made the EU policymakers reflect: the EU Commission had to take the pandemic into account during the drafting of this strategy, and see it as a timely warning that it's not a minute too soon to rethink our food system and supply chains. The very concrete threats posed by antimicrobial resistance and zoonotic diseases (viral and food-borne) show that in terms of public health it does not make sense to continue supporting the industrial livestock sector. In fact, a bold paradigm shift is necessary and urgent to ensure food safety and security.

Last week, an [open letter](#) from Eurogroup for Animals and its member organisations asked the EU Commission to take our recommendations for the strategy on board, and our members also mobilised to drum up support at national level as part of our "Stop Pandemics – Start Here" campaign. Today it seems that the Commission has taken at least some of these considerations to heart.

The **Farm-to-Fork Strategy** indicates the following commitments:

- The revision and expansion of animal welfare laws to higher standards, including the Transport and Slaughter Regulations. This opens the possibility for other legislation to be reviewed, such as the Broiler and Pig Directives, and for animals such as cattle and farmed fish to have specific legislative protection for the first time. A revision of the General Farming Directive could also deliver on the recent End The Cage Age [ECI](#), and ban the use of cages in livestock systems. The strategy earmarks the end of 2023 as a date to have the European Commission's proposal on such revisions.
- The EU Commission sent some positive signals regarding the need for a reduction of meat consumption in the systemic change needed. It is now accepted that moving to more plant-based diets and less meat consumption is good for health and sustainable food systems. One of the areas of research listed to be funded by Horizon Europe is meat substitutes. Finally, the EU Commission states that marketing campaigns advertising meat at very low prices must be avoided. Nevertheless, the wording on the end of promotion of meat was removed at the last moment and replaced by a softer statement that the Commission will undertake a review of EU promotional support for

agrifood products with a view to enhancing its *“contribution to sustainable production and consumption”*. We expect this review to lead to a transparent conclusion that meat should *not* be promoted, and we regret that the language has become so weak in the final version.

- The strategy aims to reduce the sales of antimicrobials destined to farmed animals and in aquaculture by 50% by 2030, acknowledging their role in the development of antimicrobial resistance. This creates an opportunity for the animal advocacy movement to stress the root cause of the current excessive use of antimicrobials in animal farming: intensive farming practices.
- A shift from an agricultural to a food policy is very welcome and, although still rather vague, the initiative for a new framework for a sustainable food system could pave the way towards the transformation of food production.
- It is very welcome that the Farm-to-Fork Strategy has connected the upcoming Strategic Guidelines for the Sustainable Development of European Aquaculture to the process of revising and strengthening farm animal welfare legislation. Further, it has stressed the importance of algae playing an increased role in our food supply chains. For wild capture fisheries, the strategy merely restates the implementation of the existing and failing Common Fisheries Policy.

In terms of the Farm-to-Fork implementation process, Eurogroup for Animals has the following views:

The central element of the forthcoming sustainable food framework law should be a much lower reliance on industrial livestock production. The role of this industry in spreading zoonotic diseases is remarkably missing in the strategy. The EU Commission should prioritise a decisive shift away from intensive systems and promote a diversified diet, including the production of pulses for human consumption, to drive the necessary shift in consumption such that farm animals are no longer the main source of dietary proteins in the EU. It should also favour innovation in the plant-based sector, for instance by supporting research and development of clean meat. In order to deliver this, animal welfare should be included in the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy as a key pillar in the framework for a sustainable food system.

While the commitment to a new framework for a sustainable food system is laudable, we trust that the Commission will make robust financial measures available to support farmers in the transition towards nature-inclusive agriculture and higher animal welfare systems. We trust, too, that it will listen to science and the [concerns of EU citizens](#) and phase out the use of cages in all animal productions, as well introducing method-of-production labelling for all animal products. This would allow consumers to make informative choices and to drive change for farm animals. Crucially, we want to see the EU Commission put an end to long-distance live animal transport and promote the trade of meat and carcasses, as well as genetic material: shifting to this trade would not only improve animal welfare, but it would also deliver on the strategy’s intentions to reduce the distance between farm and fork and to cut the emissions coming from the transport sector.

This strategy has a great potential to lead to systemic change, and it is the next phase that will dictate the impact it can generate. The question is how the almost finalised new Common Agricultural Policy and other tools will play an essential role in ensuring the delivery of ambitious goals and business as usual will not be enough.

Another grey area is governance. It is unclear from the text of the strategy if and to what degree the Commission envisages to formally involve civil society and other stakeholders in advising on and assessing

the progress of the to-be-defined action plan. We believe that, considering the economic interests at play, transparency and inclusiveness will be extremely important to ensure that the strategy delivers on its promises.

Ultimately, livestock farming should only be carried out in ways that contribute to regenerating soil fertility and boosting biodiversity, and with full respect for the specific behavioural and ethological requirements of the various farmed animal species. The Farm-to-Fork Strategy asserts that *“the Commission will ensure the implementation of this strategy in close coherence with the other elements of the Green Deal, particularly the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030”*, which has committed to keeping existing environmental policies strong, and states that at least 25% of the EU’s agricultural land must be organically farmed by 2030.

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