

The (potentially) upcoming EU framework for a sustainable food system

Lighthouse Europe

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ANALYSIS

Context

As **Spain** has taken over the **last Presidency of the Council of the European Union** (EU) before **the 2024 European elections**, the **European Commission** still needs to present a **series of proposals** before the end of its mandate, on **31 October 2024**.

Since its appointment in 2019, the European Commission [gave priority to two main policy files](#) including “**A European Green Deal**”. The [Green Deal](#) aims at achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and “the EU’s greenhouse gas emission reductions target for 2030 to at least 50% and towards 55% compared with 1990 levels”. Additionally, the [Fit for 55 package](#) has created an obligation for the EU to reduce its emissions by at least 55% by 2030.

Part of the Green Deal, the Commission presented, in May 2020, its [Farm to fork strategy](#) (F2F) to make **food systems** more sustainable. The main objectives of this strategy are to ensure the EU can provide a **safe, nutritious and of high-quality food production** in the EU while limiting the **impact of the agri-food sector on environment and health**. The European Commission also stressed the need to **support the global transition to sustainable agri-food systems** and to **ensure food security** in the face of a **fast-growing population**.

The latest **health and geopolitical crisis** increased the urgent need to adapt the food production to the contemporary challenges: achieve the **sustainability of food chain** and the **food sovereignty**. These challenges are fundamentally tied and question the way we are producing (pollution, energy, transport, distribution, packaging) and consuming (processing, organic, local, etc.).

While the European Commission had made considerable progress to achieve the objectives of the Green Deal, a few files are still pending and the stakeholders are eager to know what the Commission is concocted.

Updating the EU framework for a sustainable food system

In its F2F strategy, the European Commission announced its ambition to “make **a legislative proposal** for a **framework for a sustainable food system** before the **end of 2023**”. The regulation will translate, in the EU legislation, the objectives of the strategy and should limit the negative impacts of the food system which “remain one of the key drivers of climate change and environmental degradation”.

From 28 September to 26 October 2021, the European Commission [asked stakeholders](#) to share their feedbacks on its **inception impact assessment**. In this document, the EU institution detailed a few elements of its plan to “establish **new foundations for future food policies** by introducing sustainability objectives and principles on the basis of an integrated food system approach”. The main goals of the future regulation have been identified as follows by the Commission:

- Build **comprehensive and common principles** as well as **objectives of sustainability** for the EU food system, going beyond the linear food supply chain approach;
- Address the **divergences** and **inconsistencies** resulting from **national and sectoral levels** practices;
- Define minimum **standards** and **sustainable labelling**;
- Create **incentives** to support sustainable production of the stakeholders of the food system;
- Reduce **food loss and waste**;
- Promote a **global transition** based on **common sustainability criteria**.

More than 200 stakeholders and **citizens** [have shared their views](#) on the inception impact assessment and the European Commission received 2 669 feedbacks to its [public consultation](#) opened from 28 April to 21 July 2022. More than **90% of the respondents** expressed that our existing EU food system is not sustainable in the long term and is not ready neither to meet future environmental and climate change challenges.

The long-awaited and challenging next steps

As the European Commission should present its regulation for an EU sustainable food system **between 3rd and 4th quarter 2023**, stakeholders want to make their voices heard and are calling out to the Commission for months.

Several **non-governmental organisations** (NGOs) asked, in [February](#) and [September](#), the Commission to “ensure that a strong proposal for an EU legislative framework for sustainable food systems is presented by September 2023” or at least “before the end of (its) mandate”. They are concerned about the “**delay of essential policies**”, the **potential lack of ambition** of the text and the distortion of the **geopolitical context** to **weaken the F2F strategy objectives**.

On the other hand, the **businesses** and their representatives such as Copa Cogeca [called](#) the Commission for **further dialogue** between the EU food chain's actors and the European institution. They also asked the EU for a clear **definition** of sustainability, a precise **scope** of the legislation, a high level of EU **harmonisation**, an adapted **support**, and a clear link between **food security** and sustainable food systems.

The latest negotiations within the **European Parliament** on legislations resulting from Green Deal have created major deadlocks. As it has been observed before the vote on the **Nature Restoration Law**, **political groups** were in conflict and struggled to adopt their position. Representatives of civil society, political groups, as well as EU officials are of course sharing common fights but **seem to be torn between two priorities that should be inextricably linked**: the need to fight the climate crisis and the need to ensure food security. Food sovereignty/security isn't a new debate but it has been largely discussed since the health pandemic and the war in Ukraine and it appears that it concretely reveals the complexity to reach both challenges simultaneously.

On its side, the Council of the EU and its **trio presidency** (Spain, Belgium and Hungary) [stated](#) its will to “support the work on a legislative framework for sustainable food systems and on the various labelling initiatives for achieving an autonomous European food policy. In this respect, the trio will pay special attention to the sustainability of agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture, innovation and digitalisation in those sectors, and animal welfare, while safeguarding European food safety and food security and strengthening the resilience of the European food system.”

However, the proposal has, in early October, still not been presented by the European Commission. In its **2023 State of the Union Address**, President Ursula von der Leyen, [did refer to](#) the need to ensure “food security, in harmony with nature” but did not particularly name the regulation for an EU sustainable food system in her speech, neither on her [Letter of Intent](#) to Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, and Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of Spain.

The institutional life of the European institutions is also disrupting the presentation of legislative proposals related to climate policies with the **resignation** of Executive Vice-President **Timmermans**, the upcoming **European elections** and the start of the **election campaign** by political groups and national parties, enhancing political boundaries.

As the proposal should currently be in the hand of the **European Commission** – the **2024 Commission work programme** will put an end to this uncertainty – expectations of political groups, Members States and stakeholders are high. The main **Directorates General** in charge of the text (SANTE, AGRI, ENV, MARE) must consider various interests as well as all the challenges the EU is now facing. The text of the proposal is long-awaited by the EU bubble and must answer the concerns of all: ensure food security and sovereignty, support the producers in their transition, attract private investment and demand, ensure a just transition for all, limit the short-term impacts of the regulation on prices, create a single market for food system while considering sectors and geographical features, avoid any conflict with other European pieces of legislation, etc. While the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, [reminded](#) in late July the "clear and urgent need to make our agri-food systems more sustainable", the suspense is still at its peak around this regulation.

Contact us

As a public affairs firm based in Brussels and Paris, Lighthouse Europe supports its clients in the analysis of European mechanisms as well as French and European political priorities, particularly in the environmental and digital sectors. If you would like to learn more about the impacts of the EU legislative framework for a sustainable food system, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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