



fighting heart disease
and stroke
european heart network

European Heart Network (EHN) response to “The Future of the Common Agricultural Policy” consultation

June 2010

The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and other concerned non-governmental organisations throughout Europe. EHN has 34 member organisations in 26 countries. EHN plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular disease through advocacy, networking and education so that it is no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe. Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are the main cause of death in the European Union (EU), accounting for over 2 million deaths every year, as well as a major cause of disability. CVD cost the EU economy more than 192 billion euros annually.

EHN welcomes the opportunity provided by the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Dacian Cioloş to input into the revision of the European Common Agriculture Policy at a very early stage. This is important as the CAP is now recognised by the European Commission as a ‘European public good’. EHN will respond to the questions with public health in mind.

1. Why do we need a European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?

Europe needs a strong and effective European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), now more than ever as witnessed by recent market volatility and global economic crisis. CAP is essential in guaranteeing how food is produced, distributed and consumed – both at European and global level. The policy should ensure a level playing field among all relevant actors in the food system, guaranteeing food and nutrition security in the European Union (EU) whilst not compromising food security in developing countries or their markets.

Europe needs a CAP that is based on a model of how farming and food can deliver multiple benefits to society where healthy foods remain the focus of agriculture policy.

2. What do citizens expect from agriculture?

European citizens` primary demand from agriculture policy safe, high quality and healthy food at an affordable price, as indicated by the most recent Eurobarometer report (March 2010). People expect that the CAP is based on equity, the universal right to safe, affordable,

nutritious food, and good governance and transparency in the food supply chain, also reaching beyond the EU boundaries.

The citizens support a European agriculture policy that:

- provides a decent standard of living for European farmers without detrimental impacts on agriculture and on economy of developing countries
- contributes to strategies aimed at preventing chronic diseases and at reducing health inequalities by improving the availability and access to healthy foods
- delivers a “greener” agriculture policy aimed at addressing adequately challenges of climate change and protecting the environment by reducing green house gas emissions from food production and transportation. Food and agriculture production make a substantial contribution green house gas emissions, and actions should be taken to reduce the impact on climate change
- contributes to the conservation of natural resources including those relating to biodiversity, soil, and water

3. Why reform the CAP?

The CAP needs to be reformed to be in line with current and future challenges related to chronic diseases, climate change and global food security. In the last 50 years the EU has grown from 6 to 27 Member States, all with different food practices and demands. It is imperative that the new CAP delivers the right produce in the right ways as its contribution to public health and a sound environment.

Today, our food system supports unhealthy diets high in calories, fat and salt, and low in fruit, vegetables and grains; it is dependent on under-priced fossil fuels and does not recognise the limitations of water and land resources. Rising energy costs, losses in biodiversity, climate change and declining water and land resources threaten the future of food production.

Diet related chronic disease is one of the major challenges for sustainable growth in the EU. Cardiovascular disease and cancer are the major causes of death in the EU, and together with obesity and diabetes impose substantial costs to EU Member States. Agriculture and the CAP can play a significant role in preventing chronic disease and improving health. Tackling chronic disease and inequalities in health requires joined up policy.

In terms of public health, the CAP should not promote production and export of “crops” or products defined as public health damaging (such as tobacco) whilst the EU is increasing efforts and funding to encourage healthier lifestyles. The future CAP needs to support healthy diets by prioritising the production of more plant based products, i.e. it should contribute to reduced consumption of products of animal origin and increased consumption of fruit, vegetables and whole grain for human consumption.

4. What tools do we need for the CAP of tomorrow?

Improved coherence of European policies, including public health, food safety, trade, development, regional, environment, climate change, consumer and social policies is needed. The CAP should contribute to the optimal functioning of the food system in relation to these policy areas. Food and agriculture policy should be part of a coherent strategy to address inequalities in health outcomes.

The CAP should promote innovative policy instruments that provide multiple benefits for society i.e. schemes that create market access for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and producers, and improve access to healthy food for Europe`s most vulnerable populations.

Quality of food is one of the prime drivers of what people eat and ensuring quality of the food we eat is important for maintaining consumer confidence. Quality schemes and standards are essential in maintaining EU competitiveness in agriculture. However, they must not be at the expense of the affordability of a safe and nutritious diet for all layers of society.

Current patterns of production and consumption are neither sustainable nor realistic, and EU policies and instruments must provide incentives to create positive change.

The CAP should address extreme volatility in food prices in order not only to ensure the livelihood of farmers but also to ensure that food remains affordable. Therefore, instruments should be developed that not only manage crisis but work towards a more sustainable and fair food system, addressing concentration of power in the food system and chain supply.

EU agriculture policy can – and should – contribute to meeting increasing global demand for food. In order to achieve this, not only technology that increases food production will be required but incentives to move production and consumption towards increasingly plant based diets are needed. CAP tools should ensure production of foods that contribute to maintaining health, in particular fruits and vegetables. This entails less support for the production of meat and dairy.

The CAP must support investment in innovation in agriculture and food, and support a balanced research agenda that invests in agro-ecological and human ecological models of research as well as new technology.

Finally, the future CAP should be based on a sound impact assessment, as a precondition for meeting future policy objectives. Social, health and environmental impact should be given due weight in the Commission Impact Assessment process.