

# Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FCSD)

## Opinion on a Sustainable Food System

- Requested by Mr Magnette, Minister for Climate and Energy, in a letter dated 28 October 2008
  - Prepared by the ad hoc sustainable food system workgroup
  - Approved by the General Meeting of 26 March 2010
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### Summary<sup>1</sup>

#### **Main lines of the Opinion**

- [a] The current food system runs into economic, social and environmental limits through the entire chain. The way we produce, process and finally consume food must be adapted so as to make the transition to a more sustainable food system.
- [b] The Minister calls on the FCSD to:
- Draw up a definition of a sustainable food system;
  - Indicate areas in which additional research is needed;
  - Propose measures to be taken at federal level;
  - Take stock of existing measures at all levels in our country.
- [c] The FCSD does not broach the problem of protein in this opinion, although it is considered a major challenge by all the members. The Council considers that this matter should be examined in greater depth and discussed specifically (as regards the import of plant proteins and the production and consumption of animal proteins). The Council undertakes to issue an opinion on the matter by mid 2010.

#### **Definition**

- [d] A sustainable food system guarantees the right to food, abides by the principle of food sovereignty, provides for sufficient and healthy food for everyone in the world at an affordable price, and ensures that the final price of a product reflects not only the overall production costs, but also internalises all the external social and environmental costs. Such a system uses raw materials and resources (including labour and natural resources such as soil, water and biodiversity) at their rate of recovery, and respects the different facets of food culture. All the actors in the food chain and the authorities must contribute to bringing about such a sustainable food system.

#### **Research**

- [e] To promote a more sustainable food system, the Council recommends:
- Additional research in feasible strategies to make agriculture and food systems more sustainable;
  - Correct research data on the impact of the food system, in particular by monitoring and updating the 2004 food survey;
  - The further assessment, honing and development of existing information on sustainability so as, ideally, to arrive at a single method and/or instrument at European level in the long term;

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<sup>1</sup> The complete notice runs to 50 pages.

- the indispensable transition– as well as the guidance and support and financing – of our food system;
- the nature of wastage: who, what, where, when, and how much.

### ***Federal measures***

[f] The FCSD has reached consensus on the following policy proposals at federal level:

#### A long-term vision and a transition to a sustainable food system

[g] The FCSD calls for the development of a long-term vision concerning the attainment of a sustainable food system, and for the establishment of a national policy platform to provide advice and support during the transition to such a sustainable food system.

#### A coherent policy is indispensable

[h] The FCSD demands that the long-term vision be integrated in the policy to ensure coherence.

[i] In addition, the regulatory framework must be adapted better to small structures.

[j] The public authorities must take initiatives, at EU and international level, to provide the necessary support to companies. Greater coherence must be encouraged and measures defined at European and international level for a sustainable food system worldwide.

[k] The principles of the right to food and food sovereignty as well as the social rights of food producers and workers in the sector must be upheld.

#### Towards a sustainable agriculture and fisheries model worldwide

[l] The FCSD calls for the establishment of a sustainable agriculture and fisheries model worldwide to ensure greater sustainability of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and to stimulate more sustainable fisheries.

[m] Family agriculture must be sustained in developing countries through cooperation for development. The FCSD demands that 15% of the Belgian development aid be actually allocated to agriculture in accordance with decisions taken previously.

#### A decent income

[n] A sustainable food system guarantees that workers, producers and other actors in the entire production chain have sufficient income to enable them to lead a decent life under decent working conditions.

#### Workers' rights

[o] The Council calls for an increase of the means and resources allocated to the OECD contact point to implement OECD directives regarding multinationals.

#### Balanced relations between the different links in the chain and a correct price are indispensable

[p] The FCSD calls for support in implementing the conclusions of the EU Commission's *functioning food supply chain in Europe*.

[q] A policy is moreover needed to reconcile supply and demand better, and initiatives for greater transparency on the pricing of food products and for a correct distribution of added value in the chain must be supported.

[r] The Council also believes that additional measures to regulate the market, such as supply management, inter-professional agreements, market-driven demand

management, strategic stock management and the like should be taken to avoid extreme price fluctuations.

#### Improve and support existing concepts

- [s] Although the FCSD believes that none of the existing concepts can offer a full guarantee for sustainability, it demands that concepts that already exist be applied, assessed and honed:
- Short channels and shortening of the chain;
  - Seasonal products;
  - Organic products;
  - Integrated farming.
- [t] It also demands that a healthy and balanced diet be promoted.

#### Access to information and awareness raising

- [u] The FCSD believes that the administrative charges relating to the exchange of information on products must be reduced and that awareness raising must be pursued throughout appropriate information channels. Young people must also be familiarised better with more sustainable food.
- [v] The Council calls for the various actors to be convened in order to draw up a single seasonal calendar for fresh fruit and vegetables. Furthermore, existing sustainable seafood guides must be combined and developed further in consultation with all the actors concerned. Furthermore, the European regulation on ecological and/or health claims for products must be reviewed within 2 years.

#### Increase the supply

- [w] The FCSD calls for a systematic increase of the supply of products from sustainable food systems through financial or technical support. It calls for the extension (after prior assessment) of pilot projects through which sustainable products are provided in government and school canteens, and for a sufficient budget for that purpose.
- [x] In concrete terms, the authorities can require their suppliers to subscribe to sustainability standards and to apply them in their production chain. They can also encourage, support and, where necessary, supervise choice editing initiatives for the chain.
- [y] The contracts concluded by the authorities do not constitute the only channel through which changes can be made. The FCSD calls on the public authorities, in their capacity of guarantors of the public interest, to promote a more sustainable food system and to assess the utility of developing a regulatory framework to attain this objective.

#### Preserving, packaging and wastage

- [z] The FCSD calls for building on the results obtained in the selective collection and recycling of packaging and for paying the necessary attention to operators who elude this system. The conversion to energy-efficient systems in the sector must then be accelerated and initiatives to raise consumer awareness about wastage must be maintained.

#### Other measures (no agreement in the FCSD)

- [aa] The members of the FCSD could not reach agreement on the following matters:
- The use of products with a potentially harmful impact on health such as certain additives, glucose syrup, endocrine disrupters, trans fatty acids;
  - The need to become less dependent on biocides and pesticides and to reduce the negative impact of their use;

- The introduction of regulatory mechanisms to ensure that workers' rights are respected; the imposition of transparency and social traceability criteria in the entire chain and a legal obligation to comply therewith, and the subordination of trade and investment policy to compliance with international labour regulations;
- Promoting Fair Trade as a best practice regarding sustainable goods;
- The drafting of legislation to protect young people, including outside school, against the influence of advertising;
- The use of palm oil in food.

### ***Inventory***

[bb] Finally, Annex 1 of this opinion provides an inventory of existing measures, at all levels, pertaining to a sustainable food system.