

[From Farm to Fork: moving towards a sustainable and resilient food system in the EU](#)



☐☐ In this interview, [Guido Milana \(IT/PES\)](#) answers five questions on [Farm to Fork](#), the new strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system in the EU. The municipal councillor from Olevano Romano and former Member of the European Parliament calls for a radical change in food production and consumption, starting with a shift to greener production systems that respect biodiversity and ecology principles. The rapporteur of the opinion '[From Farm to Fork: the local and regional dimension](#)' stresses that COVID-19 makes it even more urgent to move towards a more sustainable and resilient food system. The opinion is to be adopted during the [December 2020 plenary session](#) of the European Committee of the Regions.

The Farm to Fork strategy proposes ambitious targets in terms of reducing the use of pesticides, chemical fertilisers and antimicrobials, as well as the objective of reaching 25 % of agricultural land in organic farming to promote the transition to sustainable food systems. Is this feasible taking into account the projected population growth rate?

Food systems are responsible for about a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, mostly generated by agricultural production. Reducing carbon emissions from agriculture is certainly the priority. However, we must not overlook the climate impact of all the other areas of food production, such as product packaging, processing and distribution. It is therefore essential that the Farm to Fork strategy proposes ambitious targets for reducing pollutants. We need to steer production systems effectively towards greener forms that respect biodiversity and ecology principles. We need a radical change in food production and consumption and a strong alliance between producers and consumers. However, we cannot bring about this shift overnight, especially if we do not give existing producers enough help to change current production practices into more sustainable ones following new agro-ecological practices. Above all, we must continue funding streams supporting rural development to ensure a sustainable transition. At the same time, we need a strategic focus on research and development. In essence, not only are penalties and constraints needed, but also a package of coordinated policies to promote environmentally- and socially- sustainable forms of production, which are also properly remunerated.

How should the common agricultural policy support the climate and environmental ambitions of the Farm to Fork and biodiversity strategies?

The common agricultural policy (CAP) is a key tool for implementing both the Farm to Fork and the biodiversity strategies. The CAP is intended to ensure that producers are protected economically and facilitate safe access to agricultural land, in particular for the more vulnerable small and medium-

sized producers. It is also supposed to provide appropriate incentive schemes to motivate farmers to move towards greener practices. The lack of ambition in the recent CAP reform is regrettable, especially in the light of the climate and environmental objectives of the Farm to Fork strategy. The climate and environmental objectives cannot be achieved without adequate resources and major investment in sustainable production. The CAP needs to be better aligned with the Farm to Fork strategy, not only environmentally but also in terms of international trade and sectorial policies and instruments. In addition, we must also review the objectives of the common fisheries policy (CFP) in order to change the levy system and start considering the sea as a major area to be cultivated rather than a mine from which fishing resources are simply removed.

How can local and regional governments contribute to building more sustainable food systems? Could you share any examples of initiatives launched at local level?

The local and regional levels of governance are fertile testing beds. They have traditionally been ahead of Europe-wide strategies and deserve to be more involved now. Local and regional bodies across the EU and internationally have been actively delivering local food policies for decades, setting up food policy councils or even bioregions. Cities and regions have shown that they can use local and regional planning tools and integrated local policies to encourage forms of urban agriculture, short supply chains and regional markets, initiating sustainable food procurement for local, seasonal and organic food in public canteens in addition to education and public awareness initiatives to improve local food systems. The Member States and the EU should follow their example and work together with cities and regions to spread emerging good practices at local level. Communication, support and mutual learning between all levels of government are more necessary than ever. For instance, we would like that the strategy proposed by the European Commission draws on the example of participatory models such as the food policy councils that have been set up in many local and regional authorities.

Current patterns of food consumption are unsustainable, from both a health and an environmental perspective. How can this be remedied? Is the onus purely on consumers to change their diets?

Consumption practices are an important driver in the transition of food systems. We can see that change is already taking place. Many more consumers are more attentive and critical in their consumption choices. However, it is important that we move away from catering just for a small section of the public and ensure that healthy and culturally appropriate food choices are accessible to all. It is not acceptable that those who cannot afford to buy "healthy" food are constrained to receive insufficient or highly-processed food. We need to defend everyone's right to access healthy and sustainable food. Consumers, including the most vulnerable and younger generations, need our support, in the form of education and accurate, transparent information, as well as incentives to change consumption patterns. However, we must also encourage and support change by taking a holistic view of the food production system, encouraging the production and market supply of healthy and

affordable food. Social protection measures are also needed to enable the most vulnerable groups to make healthy food choices on their own.

How is the pandemic affecting local and regional food systems? What key initiatives and measures have been put in place to strengthen local and regional food systems in response to this crisis?

The pandemic has certainly led to fractures and short- and long-term changes in local and global food systems. There is much to say about the effects of the crisis. One of the most important consequences is greater inequalities in terms of accessing food and an exponential increase in the number of citizens suffering from economic poverty. This situation definitely requires urgent measures, including action by local authorities and the third sector to ensure food security. As we saw during the 2008 financial crisis, food systems are subject to crisis cycles that test their resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic makes it even more urgent to work towards a more sustainable and resilient food system. In the short term, we need to bring funding and support to recover from the crisis in a targeted and strategic way, but we must not forget the need for a long-term vision to deliver change. We firmly believe that there are valuable lessons to be learned from the COVID-19 crisis. Local authorities have shown that many citizens have benefited from short supply chains and healthy food, and have spent more time during the quarantine period on cooking and preparing homemade recipes. We hope that these healthy practices will continue and even increase after the COVID-19 crisis.

Press Contact: pressecdr@cor.europa.eu

□