Jointly organised with SWGs AKIS & Food Systems

ARCH
European Agricultural Research towards greater impact on global CHallenges

REPORT

CONSUMERS AND GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Pre-Event to the European FOOD 2030 High Level Conference

Date Tuesday 11th October 13.00 – 17.30

Venue Madou building, Brussels

Summary

The main objective of this Pre-event was to highlight the increasingly international dimension of food systems and the need to include the perspectives of consumers in Europe and outside Europe, and to strengthen their involvement in research and innovation. The event was organized to contribute to the broader DG RTD FOOD 2030 High Level Conference 'Research and innovation for tomorrow's nutrition and food systems' held in Brussels on 12-13 October 2016.

During the event, representatives from a broad range of organizations, institutions and companies shared their experiences as well as findings from research. These included the European Consumer Organization, the Youth Food Movement, Eurocoop, the World Resources Institute, and several other knowledge institutions and representatives from EU level and member state initiatives.

Headlines from the Pre-event

1. The most sustainable food or value chain choice is not necessarily the most obvious one. Discussions made it clear that there is a need for more diversity in the food system, for reducing food wastage, and for value chain actors to take more responsibility, including for impacts in low- and middle-income countries.
2. The assessment of the sustainability impact of food systems should be multi-dimensional. This means looking for indicators beyond the well-known 'People, Planet, and Profit' dimensions, and should include ethics, fairness, culture and other aspects that are not always taken into account. For example, a Life Cycle Analysis may be scientifically sound and it is a very useful approach, but it doesn't address ethical aspects.
3. While it is important to be clear about what needs to be measured, it is also necessary to know who participates. Sustainability impact assessment should not just be a scientific activity but a multi-stakeholder process.
4. There is a need to raise consumer awareness about where and how food is produced, and to go a step further, working on consumer empowerment. Education will form the basis for subsequent behavioral changes, and possibly for change at system level.
5. Another type of research is needed, including harmonized models for measuring consumer behavior, sharing data, etc. Consumer and citizen involvement in research is welcome, although expectations should be realistic given the often limited resources available. In multi-actor research, various private sector actors also need to be included (retailers, SMEs, MNCs). Examples of successful engagement of multinational companies were mentioned, though reality shows that this involvement has been less ideal in other cases.
6. To foster the sustainability of food systems, there is an important role for the youth. Educating young children and youth about food can be effective. But, at the same time, there are movements engaging people of all age groups which foster food system change, be it from a health perspective or for ethical or environmental reasons.

These headlines from the discussions as well as more specific examples should be taken further by the participants and others, when they continue their discussions in their respective networks. While some of the headlines seem obvious to many participants of the Pre-Event, the call for specific attention for the consumer side of agri-food chains is still a rather 'innovative' perspective for most agri-food sector actors. The Pre-Event clearly substantiated the relevance of further work, including in the area of Research and Innovation, on the role of consumers within a more sustainable food system.

The organizers would like to encourage participants, speakers and others to link up to improve cross sectorial interaction and exchange of ideas. Specifically the organizers propose that the SCAR Strategic Working Groups Food Systems, ARCH and AKIS include follow up actions in their respective work plans including a possible joint analysis on how to strengthen sustainable consumption.

Together we can make a difference!!

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Please follow the following link to find the event programme and the different presentations.

1. Not just the obvious

The most sustainable food or value chain choice is not necessarily the most obvious one. Discussions made it clear that there is a need for more diversity in the food system, for reducing food wastage, and for value chain actors to take more responsibility, including for impacts in low- and middle-income countries.

Promoting sustainability in food systems in both Europe at global level is a huge challenge. Current trends show a rise in meat consumption in some countries, while it is stable or declining in others, increasing global greenhouse gas emissions, persistent food wastage across food value chains, while 800 million people go hungry and two billion are malnourished. Influencing consumers' consumption behavior in this context starts with the recognition that food purchasing behavior is not a rational process, but driven more by habits, cultural drivers, the location of a product in the store, etc. The World Resources Institute has analyzed different food marketing examples and developed the 'Shift Wheel' model which draws knowledge from the marketing sector and includes different dimensions of effective influencing strategies: minimize disruption, sell a compelling benefit, maximize awareness, and evolve social norms. For effective change, barriers for both consumers and retailers need to be addressed, and collaboration between stakeholders is a key factor. Just calling for abstinence ('stop eating meat') or sharing information ('poor farmers earn a better income if you buy this product') is not enough.

2. Assessing the sustainability impact

The assessment of the sustainability impact of food systems should be multi-dimensional. This means looking even beyond the well-known 'People, Planet, and Profit' dimensions, and should include ethics, fairness, culture and other aspects that are not always taken into account. For example, a Life Cycle Analysis may be scientifically sound and it is a very useful approach, but it may be considered incomplete as it does not address ethical aspects. It is also challenging to know who participates. Sustainability impact assessment should not just be a scientific activity but a multi-stakeholder process.

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES) approaches these challenges from a food systems angle, as explained in their report From Uniformity to Diversity (June 2016). IPES expects that just working within the current food system, in Europe and beyond, is not going to be effective, as is shown by the triple burden of malnutrition (undernutrition, over-nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies), is environmentally unsustainable, and reinforces social inequities while neglecting cultural values. A new paradigm is needed, focusing on diversified agro-ecological systems and respecting planetary boundaries, with economic, environmental, health, social and cultural dimensions. These different dimensions need to be assessed when measuring food systems' sustainability impact.

IPES sees emerging opportunities for a transition to sustainable food systems, such as a growing global recognition of the need for more sustainability, changing policies, more integrated landscape thinking and food systems science; and a growing interest in healthier eating and sustainable sourcing. At the same time, change is hampered by eight 'lock-ins', such as the concentration of power in the global agricultural markets and 'feed the world' narratives that focus only on total volume and crop yield.

In the EU PF7 Glamur project, 25 case studies compared local and global food value chains. The results from this project confirm the need to use a comprehensive set of (existing and new) indicators to measure agri-food chain impact. The analysis checked whether local food chains have advantages over global chains, and found that 'local is a slippery concept' as boundaries between local, continental and global chains cannot easily be defined (e.g. cattle feed sourcing). It is important to understand the complexity and realize that 'buying local' is not sustainable per se. The Glamur project sees several scenarios for the future development of food systems: from a business as usual scenario, to a free trade and affordability scenario, to a situation where sustainability shapes the food system. The latter implies a profound change in food governance, reengineering skills and data.

To properly assess the sustainable impact of food systems, a science-based assessment is necessary, but not enough as this generally does not capture multi-dimensionality. It needs the interaction of multiple stakeholders at different levels, to take into account multiple perspectives, values and interests, especially as later decision-making about agri-food systems development involves trade-offs and is as much political as technical.

3. Consumer awareness, consumer empowerment

There is a need to raise consumer awareness about where and how food is produced, and to go a step further, working on consumer empowerment. Education will form the basis for subsequent behavioral changes, and possibly for change at system level.

The experience of BEUC is that if consumers have quality information about how and where food is produced, they generally want more information on how to make better or healthier choices in view of sustainability. As many consumers are disconnected to how food is produced nowadays, they are often almost shocked to know how interrelated and complex food value chains have become (e.g. when learning that a single pizza can have ingredients from 35 countries).

Increasing consumer awareness is important as a basis for healthier and more sustainable food choices, even if it is not a sufficient step in terms of attaining behavioral change. To reduce food wastage for example, a combination of interventions at multiple levels is needed (e.g. improved product labels). Consumers need to be involved in solutions to change the food system, and, therefore, their empowerment and proper engagement is conditional.

Consumer involvement in research projects would be welcome too, in this context, but in practice the lack of resources hinders this as has been the case for BEUC's participation. Still there is a need to better understand the gap between consumer's attitude and behavior in order to identify the most effective incentives to enhance sustainable consumption. BEUC's impression is that consumers tend to favor low-tech (e.g. behavior change) instead of high-tech solutions. At the same time, trust in science is at stake, for several reasons including shrinking public funding for research.

4. What would research look like

Another type of research is needed, including harmonized models for measuring consumer behavior, sharing data, etc. Consumer involvement in research is welcome, although expectations should be realistic given the often limited resources available. In multi-actor research, various private sector actors also need to be included (retailers, small and medium enterprises, multinational companies).

Research in the area of Food Loss and Waste was the entry point for discussion about the opportunities to strengthen food system research approaches. The EU research project addressing food waste, REFRESH, served as an example. In the programme, 26 partners from 12 European countries and China collaborate, working towards SDG 12.3 (reducing food waste). The approach includes multi-actor platforms and is not limited to technological innovations; it also includes looking at social structures, and works with social entrepreneurs who think about how to change the system. Efforts are ongoing to harmonize methodologies to analyze consumer behavior across the various European countries. Partners share data, share actions, work in a coherent way, and put the consumer in the center, in their search for local solutions that can be embedded in local structures. Countries learn from other domains and from each other; e.g. in Norway an integral approach has led to a substantial reduction in food waste.

In the project, lessons have been learned on consumer behavior: the role of education is important. The 'Food battle model' was successful. ICT tools can have a role to play; this also offers opportunities for business. Recommendations are that a future food system design based on a circular economy perspective will create a story that consumers will buy. More personalised and customised food supply chains offer lots of opportunities to link global challenges to local ecosystems.

5. Role of stakeholders

During the event, several examples of multi-actor collaboration were discussed. Examples of successful engagement of multinational companies were provided, though reality shows that this involvement has been less ideal in other cases. To foster the sustainability of food systems, there is an important role for youth. Educating young children and youth about food can be effective, if you do it properly. But, at the same time, people from all age groups can foster food system change - it is everybody's responsibility.

The sustainable growth in Norwegian Aquaculture was discussed as an interesting example of sector development following a clear demand from consumers for healthy, safe and sustainable food. Sustainability has been a leading principle for this sector's development over the past few years, supported by the SDG agenda and FAO definitions. A paper was submitted to Norwegian parliament, which stated that impact on the environment is the determining factor for industrial growth of the aquaculture sector. The sector developed a strong knowledge base to support the responsible management of the aquaculture sector, and used strong monitoring tools to guarantee food safety and an open database allowing for full transparency. Another example discussed was the Eco-regions, started in Italy and expanded to several mainly Southern European countries. Within one Eco-region, all stakeholders collaborate through a participatory approach: research agencies, producers, consumers, the government, etc. This has positive results, including technological, know-how related, organizational and social innovations, skills building, increased youth employment and greater community welfare.

The role of food policies was illustrated based on experiences in Scotland. The Scottish agri-food sector has made a collaborative effort to strengthen the sector, creating one organization including the cooperatives movement, the farmers union, and all relevant other actors. Key principles were to provide premium food, and address health, provenance and sustainability issues, while building upon the assets of the Scottish agri-food sector, and building business skills for value addition and innovation. A record food and drink industry turnover resulted including a double manufacturing growth rate (including SMEs), and lots of specific initiatives some of which linked to tourism. Impacts of these food policy initiatives on other indicators remain to be assessed. Scotland also signed the Milan Food Policy Pact, amongst others to make sure city food policies contribute to better health.

As a movement of farmers, consumers, retailers, traders, and chefs, the Youth Food Movement (YFM) advocates for a more sustainable food system. A key moment was the gathering of the YFM during the Milan Expo: via crowd-funding they managed to sponsor many young farmers to attend. The movement calls for a fair price for farmers, and for consumers. 'Only together we can change the system.' It is important to recognize food has so many dimensions – health, social, migration, etc. – and that everybody is linked to it. The YFM initiates and takes part in different campaigns (e.g. on obligatory food education) and awareness raising initiatives, including with the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs.

Cooperative supermarkets also take responsibility, as was illustrated by Euro-Coop's representative with examples from several European countries. These consumer cooperatives promote the use of vegetables with an unusual shape for food processing purposes, to reduce waste, are part of the Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil, and collaborate with the African coffee roasters. Their initiatives can be reinforced through effective policies and legislation, such as the Food Waste Law in Italy, which simplifies the donation of surplus food for retailers. Harmonized EU food wastage legislation and policy coherence at EU level would help further. More in general, corporate social responsibility is important, and civil society groups have a role to advocate for it.

Discussion

Global Food and Nutrition Security (FNS): This event mainly focused on European food systems and did not really explore how consumer choices relate to the economic wellbeing and food and nutrition security of farmers and consumers in lower and middle income countries (LMICs). A participant observed that the event did not sufficiently address international trade and development policies and how these promote the industrial food model. It was argued that the objectives of the EU (growth) and of low- and middle income countries (build food security) diverge. A panelist observed that 'we have sufficient food in the world to feed the world's population', while another panelist said food security, and particularly access, should be the

central aim. Several speakers and participants advocated that a radical change of global agri-food systems was required to face current challenges, but the question was raised whether such radical change was realistic or only gradual change was feasible though it may not be sufficient to reach sustainability targets in time. All of these aspects should be further explored.

***Short chains**:* have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but this should be assessed carefully, as explained by the Glamur project. They may be good to foster availability of fresh food, for example in urban areas, but it may also be necessary to integrate global and local chains such as imported feed for livestock.

***Consumers**:* There is a need for a vision on how to engage the consumer in both research and in the necessary behaviour change to arrive at sustainable food systems. It may be helpful to explore lessons about behavioral change approaches from the HIV and AIDS movement or general health promotion. Generally, it is recommended to be creative in influencing consumer behavior, addressing parallel and system issues, and being aware of the target groups to be reached. Youth are among the early adopters, while those who buy most sustainable brands are young mothers and 'empty nesters'. Some consumers buy organic and fair trade products and that is how they relate to producers in LMICs. Some consumers will want to make these choices by themselves, if they can afford to do so, if they have the skills and if they have the time. It is important to be aware of the barriers for consumers to make the change and to choose the most effective option – an EU regulation or pricing may sometimes be more effective than relying on voluntary steps.

***Private sector**:* The role of the private sector and how it may contribute to changes in the food system was extensively discussed. Some participants raised the issue of conflict of interest. Others said that the private sector - which may be considered to include farmers - is critical for solutions at scale and for sustainability in design of food products. Participants from the consumer organization and from research, referred to positive experiences working with the private sector, highlighting also that the private sector is very diverse and that it is not always the dominant companies of the sector who oppose change (cf initiative launched at the last Davos Forum by 40 CEOs of large agri-food companies). The comment was made that companies do not want competitors to know their research agenda, but they do see that there is a shared 'upstream agenda', for example to reduce food waste and energy consumption in food value chains, and to develop options for plant-based proteins.

***Policy**:* The discussion confirmed the importance of a clear food policy: 'if you don't have a food policy, you should have one'. The cases from Italy and Norway discussed during this event, which managed to make the system more sustainable, have had strong policy support, which has been the basis for achieving major breakthroughs in the system. Government policies and regulations can also help raising the bar for multinational companies - and the latter also expect governments to do that.

Particular innovations discussed

- The potential of cultivated meat, as a future direction: if safety is guaranteed, consumers could consider buying it.
- How to develop a consumer driven diet offering high quality clean label plant based proteins?
- How can high-value protein products and fats be developed based on residue products?
- What is the potential of precision farming as an entry point to foster sustainability? Reactions differed, some warning that this doesn't transform food systems or add to the nutritional aspects of the food or to

social relations, others thought that the principles of precision-farming may be used for non-industrial agriculture, e.g. allowing for the realization of the sustainability agenda through more precise production techniques.

Research and Innovation

Participants showed an interest in innovations that serve the further sustainability of food systems. It was mentioned that it is important to explore how to deal with unintended, unforeseen system shocks. The consumer organization acknowledged it could be interesting that citizens and consumers contribute more to research, even if it could be difficult to channel that through the consumer organizations who generally work with limited resources. It became very clear from the debate that multiple solutions are required, which implies an approach to research and innovation that fosters diversity and needs the involvement of all stakeholders. Such an approach could be based on the concept of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI).

Please find copies of the presentations used by speakers during this unique event on the ARCH website, in the workshops section: https://www.ard-europe.org/arch/workshops/