

to identify and deal with knowledge and skills gaps, overcoming obstacles to the transition. Furthermore, the above-mentioned actors should invest in agriculture-related education and food literacy to increase public and professional awareness of sustainable food systems, highlighting the benefits, risks, and trade-offs associated with different approaches.

Specifically addressed to the European Commission is the Strategic Dialogue's recommendation to evaluate and revise, where needed, the design, governance and functioning of farming extension and advisory services, aimed at providing farmers and food producers – in an inclusive way – with access to free and independent expert guidance, technical assistance, and training programs. It also should strengthen the implementation of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) within independent farm advisory services.

5.2. Increasing investments and partnerships in Research & Innovation

Increased funding for education on agriculture and food systems, lifelong learning and independent advisory services is needed. These programs and services will play a vital role in guiding the new generation of farmers in their efforts to farm sustainably. Funding lines are also needed to encourage social innovation and experimentation at the local level, for instance in the development and implementation of local food policies. To achieve this, the European Commission and EU Member States should better leverage existing funds to facilitate effective dissemination of skills and safe technological advancements. They also should support and strengthen innovation hubs and experimental settings (such as testbeds, field/living labs, landscaping initiatives and demo farms) across

different regions within the EU, where farmers, food business operators, technology developers and public authorities can collaborate to pilot and assess the effectiveness of new or existing technologies and knowledge, while showcasing these in real-life settings. Member States are requested to increase EU funding for RDI initiatives specifically on sustainability-focused agri-food technologies and innovations, allocating a higher percentage of the Horizon Europe to projects aimed at developing and testing new technologies and innovations for sustainable agriculture, food production, and distribution.

Agri-food systems actors, research institutes and universities, Member States, and the European Commission should work towards establishing and strengthening public-private partnerships between research institutions and the private sector to generate investment, facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration in developing cutting-edge solutions for the agri-food sector, ensuring adequate public funds are dedicated to basic research. They should also support the development of networks of organizations, communities, enterprises, and individuals within which improvements are generated and spread. For all these initiatives, the multi-actor approach will help creating opportunities for co-learning and collective action that support the sustainable transitions. To that end, the European Commission should introduce public-private partnerships in cluster 6 of the Horizon Europe programme.

Next to the recommendations on the use of excising knowledge, the strategic dialogue points the European Commission to the importance of developing new knowledge, innovation and technology to keep the agrifood sector in Europe competitive and support the transition to sustainable practices, such as those mentioned in this report (see sections C.2.2.2., C, 2.2.3, C2.3.1,

C.3.2.1, and C.3.2.2.). It therefore recommends earmarking significant portions of suitable funds, like LIFE, DIGITAL and Horizon, specifically for these goals.

5.3. Streamlining regulatory procedures for the access to market of new technologies and innovations

Currently, the evaluation and market approval of some new technologies and innovations in the EU is sometimes an issue. Streamlining and accelerating EU administrative and regulatory processes and procedures of agri-food innovations is needed, maintaining a robust and comprehensive risk assessment based on the precautionary principle. Securing a healthy and sustainable food system for the future in Europe requires us to marry sustainable innovation with the promotion and preservation of our positive culinary heritage.

To achieve this,

1. the European Commission, the Member States, and the European Parliament, together with EFSA, should work together to identify faster regulatory pathways for innovative products and processes clearly focused on increased sustainability, while respecting the need for robust risk assessment.
2. The European Commission and Member States, moreover, should aim to harmonize standards and certification processes across EU Member States to reduce barriers to market entry for innovative agri-food products and technologies, ensuring a level playing field, enabling seamless adoption and scaling across different regions.

5.4. Using the opportunities of digitalization in a responsible manner

Food systems are becoming increasingly digital. Today, in parts of Europe, crops, animals, or trucks are more and more monitored by smart sensors, satellites, drones, and machinery equipped with GPS and cameras. The result is a wealth of data with unprecedented potential to support smarter decisions by businesses or consumers, to trace food integrity, and to support public decision-making by governments.

The shift towards digitalization transcends mere technological advancements; it entails profound social, cultural, economic, and institutional changes. Data utilization can offer significant benefits and support the benchmarking system (see C.1.2) and data exchange in the agri-food systems. It also raises concerns about fairness, quality and privacy. Hence, robust data governance frameworks and their proper implementation are essential.

To promote digitalization in agri-food systems, the European Commission and Member States should prioritize and work towards a transparent data governance model with clear rules on data ownership, interoperability and ethical use, aiming at fair and secure use of data for the benefit of all, taking into account legal and ethical aspects. Investments in digital infrastructure should be accelerated, ensuring a good coverage of high-speed internet connectivity in all (rural) areas across Europe, including maximizing the roll-out of broadband networks (see C.4.4.). Incentives, e.g. within the CAP framework, are needed for the adoption of precision agriculture technologies, including IoT sensors, drones, AI, and satellite imagery, thereby improving resource efficiency and crop management. This must go hand in hand with sufficient funding for research,

development and application of data acquisition, interpretation and development of relevant algorithms and AI tools.

The European Commission and Member States should also provide life-long training in digital skills, literacy and information on digitalization for farmers and workers in food systems in general, paying special attention to availability in rural areas. Overall robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be established to assess the impact of digitalization initiatives in the agri-food sector. Data on adoption rates, productivity gains, environmental outcomes, and socio-economic results should be collected to inform future policy decisions.

5.5. Social Innovation as an enabler of sustainable farming

Many challenges in the agri-food systems mentioned in different parts of this report (e.g. generation renewal, rural exodus, need for decent income, food insecurity, environmental degradation, lack of infrastructure and services in rural areas) will find some solution in “social innovations”. Those innovations come from grassroot initiatives, often based on collective and local approaches, to address unsolved problems. For example, many groups of small farmers have developed collective tools to sell their products directly to consumers using internet marketing and social media or have gathered to organize the preservation of local plants and animals, sometimes with the support of scientific teams. Crowdfunding, collective cultural and artistic projects, as well as locally organized food assistance schemes for lower-income consumers are further examples.

All those initiatives to improve the food system need to be better acknowledged in public policies, also in financial terms, and good

experiences and best practices need to be more widely shared. Barriers to social innovation, including the legal status of rural project holders and access to public finances, need to be further investigated.

CONCLUSION



Announced by the President of the European Commission in her State of the Union Address on September 13th 2023 and launched in Brussels on January 25th 2024, the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture, has added a new, unaccustomed format to the participation procedures at EU level. In an intensive dialogue process, stakeholders with different, sometimes opposing vested interests jointly negotiate prospects and pathways for the further development of a particularly important, highly complex and very controversial policy area and recommend their shared perspectives to the EU executive as an orientation for action.

Seen in the light of this paradigmatic innovation, the Strategic Dialogue shows a twofold result. The first is the final report presented here. It is by no means the conclusion of all debates and the answer to all questions. But it is – as all members hope – an important step on the way to economically profitable, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible agriculture, food systems and rural areas in the European Union.

The second result of the Strategic Dialogue is the emergence of a new culture of engagement between the members, which makes it possible to relate and balance the different points of view and interests of the various stakeholders in the entire sector in a way that is more effective than was often the case before. The Strategic Dialogue was characterised by confidentiality, a certain legitimate non-transparency, and above all mutual trust. The latter originates essentially from the ability and willingness of all members to recognise that also counter-positions can be based on reasonable grounds. It builds on the insight that none of the individual positions represented is completely free of contradictions or can promise a solution to all problems on its own. It is easy to predict that further endeavors will be necessary to consolidate trust between the members of the Strategic Dialogue into a better mutual understanding between the organized interest groups that the members mostly represent.

It will be important for the European Commission in its various portfolios, the European Parliament, the Member States of the Union, and the organized interest groups of the agri-food system to adopt the shared considerations and recommendations presented here. They must develop and concretize them further and translate them into bold and swift decisions for the benefit of the EU farming community, food system, and rural areas and ultimately for the benefit of the European society.

ANNEX



1. Mandate

STRATEGIC DIALOGUE ON AGRICULTURE

In her [2023 State of the Union](#), European Commission President von der Leyen said:

“We must work together with the men and women in farming to tackle these new challenges. That is the only way to secure the supply of food for the future.

We need more dialogue and less polarisation. That is why we want to launch a strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the EU.

I am and remain convinced that agriculture and protection of the natural world can go hand in hand. We need both.”

Further details on the scope of the European Commission’s Strategic Dialogue were set out in President von der Leyen’s [opening speech of the EU Agri-Food Days](#) on 6 December.

Based on contacts with stakeholders in previous months, the following questions require particular attention:

1. How can our farmers, and the rural communities they live in, be given a better perspective, including a fair standard of living?

For example: attracting young farmers and other new entrants into farming, supporting diversified farm types, rural economies and new (bio-based) business models to enhance income security and making rural areas more attractive.

2. How can agriculture be supported within the boundaries of our planet and its ecosystem?

For example: adaptation of agriculture to climate change (e.g. droughts, floods), carbon sequestration in agriculture and agroforestry systems, mitigation of GHG emissions in agriculture, sustainable use of natural resources such as water, soil, air, biodiversity, One Health, and animal welfare within productive agricultural systems.

3. How can better use be made of the immense opportunities offered by knowledge and technological innovation?

For example: supporting, scaling-up and rolling-out innovation on farms (farm advice, agricultural knowledge and innovation systems), ranging from agroecological practices, to new genomic techniques, biotechnology, circular sourcing or digital technologies (e.g. precision farming).

4. How can a bright and thriving future for Europe’s food system be promoted in a competitive world?

For example: ensuring food safety, food availability, food affordability, as well as sustainability and resilience of the food value chain, from input provision and primary production (be it big or small farms), to food processing, trade, retailing, marketing, consumption and food waste; changing consumer preferences. International competitiveness of EU agri-food sector.

The Strategic Dialogue group, comprising the Chair and a group of appointed participants, is mandated to reply to these and other related questions, in plenary and in working groups, in view of a balanced and representative discussion. in view of identifying recommendations. The Chair will submit a report to the President of the Commission by August 2024.

2. Members of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture

Members		Function
Peter	Strohschneider	Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission, Chair
Leo	Alders	President, Fertilizers Europe
Lili	Balogh	President, Agroecology Europe
Faustine	Bas-Defossez	Director, European Environmental Bureau
Kristjan	Bragason	General Secretary, European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions
Ariel	Brunner	Regional Director, Bird Life Europe & Central Asia
Marco	Contiero	Policy Director, Greenpeace Europe
Christel	Delberghe	Director General, Eurocommerce
Thierry	de L'Escaille	Executive President, European Landowners' Organization
Michael	Gohn	President, Euroseeds
Monique	Goyens	Director General, BEUC The European Consumer Organisation
Thibaut	Guignard	President, European LEADER Association for Rural Development
Nelli	Hajdu	General Secretary, European Liaison Committee for Agricultural and Agri-Food Trade
Sjoukje	Heimovaara	President of the Executive Board, Wageningen University and Research
Dirk	Jacobs	Director General, FoodDrinkEurope

Members		Function
Christiane	Lambert	President, COPA Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations
Joseph	Lechner	President, Geopa-COPA Employers' Group of Professional Agricultural Organisations
Philip	Lymbery	President, Eurogroup for Animals
Peter	Meedendorp	President, CEJA European Council of Young Farmers
Marta	Messa	General Secretary, Slow Food
Lennart	Nilsson	President, OGECA General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives
Spyros	Papadatos	General Secretary, Rural Youth Europe
Jan	Plagge	President, IFOAM Organics Europe
Rocco	Renaldi	General Secretary, FoodServiceEurope
Claire	Skentelbery	Director General, EuropaBio
Geneviève	Savigny	European Coordination Via Campensina
Nina	Schindler	Chief Executive Officer of the European Association of Cooperative Banks
Uno	Svedin	President, EURAGRI
Jacques	Vandenschrik	Honorary President, European Food Banks Federation
Gelsomina	Vigliotti	Vice-President, European Investment Bank

3. Rules of Procedure

1. Objectives

- (1) The Strategic dialogue aims at bringing together in a group a selection of stakeholders that is balanced and representative of different interests, reflecting the richness and diversity of all segments of the agri-food chain and rural areas and to work on results as set out in the Mandate.

2. Participants

- (2) The group is composed of a Chair and 29 members.
- (3) The Strategic Dialogue is chaired by Prof. Dr. Peter Strohschneider.
- (4) Membership of the group is a personal, non-transferable honorary office. In duly justified exceptional cases, a member may be represented by a substitute with the prior consent of the Chair.
- (5) The Chair may invite other individuals, organisations and public entities with specific expertise with respect to a subject matter on the agenda to take part in the work of the group or working groups on an ad hoc basis, not as regular members.
- (6) Members may declare their resignation in writing to the Chair at any time.

3. Tasks

- (1) The group will discuss the topics identified in the Mandate and other relevant questions in view of proposing recommendations on the future of agriculture in the EU.
- (2) The group will be taking into account views and inputs received via a targeted consultation and ad hoc debates on questions relevant to the Dialogue organised within the Commission's Expert Groups.
- (3) The Chair will keep the Council and European Parliament regularly informed on the work and the discussions within the group.
- (4) The Chair will prepare a final report with recommendations and submit it to the President of the Commission.

4. Operations

- (1) The Chair coordinates the work internally, determines the time and place of meetings and sets the agenda.
- (2) The agenda and any consultation documents are to be sent to members no later than one week before the date of a meeting. Requests for amendments to the agenda shall be submitted to the Chair at least three days before the date of a meeting.

- (3) At the proposal of the Chair, the group may establish working groups that shall report every time to the plenary. The meeting of working groups can also take place in an online format. Members of the group may decide on a voluntary basis to join working groups, taking into account the need for balanced discussions and to represent different perspectives/opinions in each working group. Each working group will nominate a moderator.
- (4) For organisational support, a supporting team consisting of Commission officials will be appointed by the Chair.
- (5) The staff of the Commission services will attend the meetings with the status of observers. They may be permitted by the Chair to take part in the discussions and provide expertise. They shall not participate in the formulation of recommendations or advice.
- (6) Minutes on the discussion in plenary shall be drafted by the support team under the responsibility of the Chair and distributed to the participants in advance of the next meeting.

5. Professional secrecy and handling of information

The deliberations of the dialogue are confidential. Only the chair will communicate about its deliberations before the final report is made public.

The members of the group, as well as invited experts and observers, are subject to the obligation of professional secrecy, which by virtue of the Treaties and the rules implementing them applies to all members of the institutions and their staff, as well as to the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of Union classified information, laid down in Commission Decisions (EU, Euratom) 2015/4434 and 2015/4445. Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission in agreement with the Chair may take all appropriate measures.

6. Meeting expenses

Participants in the activities of the group shall not be remunerated for the services they offer, nor for travel and subsistence expenses incurred by participants in the activities of the group.

5. European Investment Bank Group⁰¹ contribution to the final report

The EIB Group is committed to helping make the entire agricultural and bioeconomy⁰² value chain more resistant to the multiple challenges it faces. Through its lending and advisory activity, it supports global and EU food security, but also climate action, the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, both upstream and downstream activities including processing industries and retail, as well as innovation.

The EIB has a significant track record and project portfolio in the sector ([consult EIB recent lending and advising activity](#)).⁰³ During the past decade, EIB's annual financing to the sector stood approximately at EUR 5bn, with about EUR 4bn of this amount inside the EU. Over two thirds of this financing have been directed to SMEs through intermediated financing products, with the remainder provided directly to larger private and public borrowers. In addition, the EIB provided advisory services in support to the European Commission, Member States and promoters on the designing and using of financial instruments

to increase available financing and support the development and the scaling up of innovative companies or technologies. The Climate Action and Environmental Sustainability content of the EIB financing has steadily increased over the past few years, reaching more than 60% of direct lending in 2023.

The EIF has supported the agri-food sectors through (i) guarantee products, primarily leveraging on EAFRD, national or regional funding, in amount of EUR 3.5 bn of total leveraged lending to final recipients over the last 7 years; additional financing capacity is also available under the InvestEU programme and (ii) equity investments through its venture capital activities supporting specialised agrifood tech VC funds with committed capital of EUR 420 million to mobilise total of EUR 1.6 billion.

Proposed way forward

Recognising the importance of the sector and criticality of an EU-level response, the EIB Group has identified the support to Agriculture and Bioeconomy as one of its key priorities under its 2024-2027 Strategic Roadmap.

Leveraging its expertise in the sector and its wide range of financing and advisory instruments the EIB Group aims to step up its support for the agricultural value chain to help meet its diverse

01 The European Investments Bank Group (EIB Group) includes the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Investment Fund (EIF).

02 The bio-economy, as per EC definition, comprises those parts of the economy that use renewable biological resources (biomass) from land and sea – such as crops, forests, fish, animals and micro-organisms – to produce food, materials and energy. The bio-economy also encompasses related RDI as key enabler, with circular economy and related public goods (including biodiversity and ecosystems) as cross-cutting aspects.

03 www.eib.org/en/projects/index

6. Synthesis of the targeted consultation

In the context of the Strategic Dialogue, with the aim to enrich the ongoing work of the members, the Chair of the Dialogue invited additional stakeholders to submit their views via a targeted consultation. The invitation to participate was addressed to a large variety of EU-level umbrella organisations based on their sectoral and thematic expertise in the EU agri-food system and a presence in relevant EU-level policy fora. The Chair asked their views on the four specific questions which guided the work of the Strategic Dialogue:

- How can farmers, and the rural communities they live in, be given a better perspective, including a fair standard of living?
- How can agriculture be supported within the boundaries of our planet and its ecosystem?
- How can better use be made of the immense opportunities offered by knowledge and technological innovation?
- How can a bright and thriving future for Europe's food system be promoted in a competitive world?

The following factual summary and synthesis report were presented to the members of the Dialogue for their consideration.

Factual summary

The below table gives an overview of the number of submissions received, clustered by stakeholder category.

CATEGORY	
Farming organisations	12
Agricultural trade organisations	3
Agricultural input organisations	13
Food processing and manufacturing	12
Retail and wholesale	2
NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations)	12
Multi-stakeholder coalitions	6
Other (textiles, services, infrastructure, logistics, innovation)	12
Total submissions	72

Synthesis report

Question 1: How can farmers, and the rural communities they live in, be given a better perspective, including a fair standard of living?

Participants to the targeted consultation welcome the launch of the Strategic Dialogue and recognise the need to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between institutions and stakeholders and between stakeholders. The nature of the consultation participants and their demands (across a large variety of sectors and farming models) also show the high diversity and heterogeneity that characterises European agriculture.

There is a wide recognition about certain economic challenges which put pressure on the economic viability of the farming sector: global competition to the farmers is seen by many stakeholders as a key challenge which affects their income and standard of living; at the same time, regulatory pressure and high administrative burden is seen as a factor that not only affects the competitiveness of the holdings but even puts into question their longterm subsistence. A large share of the stakeholders also put the focus on the unbalanced power within the food value chain and the weak position of the farming community vis-a-vis the other players. Furthermore, general messages are shared concerning the growing risks and uncertainties in a context where primary producers are facing increasing costs.

The policy responses raised cover a large scope of areas, from ideas related to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to more market-based solutions.

Regarding the CAP, there are many calls for a higher budget (adapted to inflation) and for

better ways to distribute the support in a more targeted way, in particular with a focus to the small farmers. At the same time, there are also calls to preserve Common Market Organisation (CMO) measures, including for more active actions to better manage the markets. In that context, many stakeholders ask for better targeted crisis management tools adapted to the current economic context.

The participants also call for measures to rebalance the power within the food chain and, in particular, there are demands for more action to fight Unfair Trading Practices (UTPs). At the same time, while some stakeholders insist on the importance to guarantee the functioning of the markets, others call for more regulatory action to guarantee better prices for primary producers.

Other solutions proposed put the focus of attention on the excessive administrative burden and the need to reduce the regulatory and administrative costs to the farming community. There are also calls for better exploring additional income sources, promote diversification, increase added value (i.e. quality products), and foster new business models such as carbon farming.

Many stakeholders insist on the key role of cooperation, as a solution to optimise costs and better manage supply. In that context, there are many calls to increase the role of producers' organizations and their operational programmes as well as exploring new emerging business models and private-public partnerships to facilitate the access to new technologies.

Last but not least, there is a wide recognition of farming as a backbone of the rural communities and a strong need to support the development of rural areas. According to some participants, these territories require specific action regarding infrastructures, basic services and the promotion

of the diversification of the economic activity. Some stakeholders also highlight the key role that specific products (i.e. geographical indicators) and business models (short-supply chains) can play in guaranteeing the economic dynamism in these territories.

Question 2: How can agriculture be supported within the boundaries of our planet and its ecosystem?

There is broad recognition among stakeholders that the agri-food sector needs to become more sustainable. Several of them underline the importance of improved environmental sustainability to ensure food security and economic profitability.

Regarding the governance of the sustainability transition, stakeholders emphasise the need for holistic, coherent, whole-of-food-system approaches that also take into account local and sectoral specificities. The benefits of enabling regulatory frameworks are highlighted repeatedly, just as the desire to strengthen cooperation and dialogue among stakeholders and with policy institutions. In addition, the need for more and better data on the sector's sustainability, to be integrated with consistent metrics and clear indicators, as well as for close monitoring and regular evaluations of agri-food actors' sustainability performance is underlined.

In general, stakeholders call to promote the shift to more sustainable farming practices and systems. The most frequently referenced examples are organic, agroecology, agroforestry, and regenerative agriculture. Many stakeholders point out that farmers should be adequately rewarded for more sustainable practices. Special emphasis is placed on the livestock sector that many stakeholders identify as the area where emissions and pollution reduction are most

urgent. In that regard, the need for better animal welfare and the importance of the One Health approach are underlined.

Three sustainability outcomes are specifically mentioned by consultation participants. This includes improved water resilience through better infrastructure and water use and retention management. It also includes bolstering circularity by reducing food loss and waste and using byproducts for the bioeconomy. Lastly, the need to protect and restore soil health is frequently referred to.

In terms of concrete instruments, some stakeholders refer to promoting short supply chains, redirecting harmful subsidies, or using price mechanisms such as an Emissions Trading System (ETS). Leveraging the potential of technological innovation, including plant breeding, biological pest control, green fertilisers, and alternative proteins, is frequently mentioned by the consultation participants. Many call for more investment in research and innovation.

Beyond the farm level, some consultation participants emphasise that energy and emissions efficiency in the logistics of the rest of the supply chain should be improved. Several stakeholders also refer to the importance of demand side policies, notably a dietary shift to more plant-based products by diversifying protein production and consumption and incentivising sustainable consumer choices.

Lastly, many stakeholders underline that agri-food actors and farmers need to be supported in the sustainability transition, both administratively and financially. Attention ought to be paid to the potential costs and administrative burdens of strict regulations.

Question 3: How can better use be made of the immense opportunities offered by knowledge and technological innovation?

The contributions can be thematically clustered around three central aspects: research and development (R&D) of innovation; uptake of and access to technologies; societal acceptance of innovation.

Concerning R&D, several stakeholders stress the need for an enabling regulatory framework to encourage innovation, including a clear, longterm vision and more efficient authorisation processes. At the same time, some stakeholders also warn that any technology entering the market must be safe and that risks need to be thoroughly assessed in advance. In addition, increased funding for R&D, from both public and private sources, is frequently mentioned by stakeholders. Lastly, some stakeholders call for more strategic public-private partnerships to accelerate and more efficiently target innovation processes.

Regarding the uptake of innovation and technology, the need for derisking investments in innovation is emphasised, including through risk-sharing mechanisms and financial incentives. Several stakeholders also point out the need for capacity and skill building to enable the use of technologies. Frequently mentioned tools are knowledge sharing through peer networks and high-quality advisory structures. The importance of applied innovation, co-developed with the end users, is underlined. Stakeholders frequently stress the need to make innovation accessible, especially to small-scale producers, and draw attention to the significant role of improved digital infrastructure in rural areas to enable this.

Societal acceptance of innovation is a further mentioned issue. Some stakeholders call for information and education programmes to raise

awareness of the potential benefits of innovation among consumers.

When it comes to concrete (technological) innovations, the most frequently mentioned tools are digital tools, including artificial intelligence, and biotechnology, including biocontrol, alternative proteins (precision fermentation, cultivated, plant-based), and new genomic techniques (NGTs). Stakeholders' positions on these vary from calls for faster approval to more hesitant reminders of the potential safety risks of these technologies, including dependencies, and objections to certain specific technologies. Lastly, some stakeholders point out that not only innovation, but also existing, traditional knowledge, needs to be mobilised.

Regarding the overall approach to technology and innovation, some stakeholders stress that it should not be regarded as a "silver bullet" solution but be treated as complementary to more systemic transformations of agriculture and the food system. Some also underline that innovation need not always be technical, and that the role of social innovation needs to be considered.

Question 4: How can a bright and thriving future for Europe's food system be promoted in a competitive world?

Consulted stakeholders express their views on the agri-food sector's competitiveness, as well as the EU's global trade policy.

Many stakeholders underline the strategic role of sustainability in both domestic agri-food production and trade relations. They underline that the EU's leadership role in product quality, culinary heritage, and sustainability should be further promoted as an important competitive advantage. However, several participants also point out that the sector will require sufficient

support for the sustainability transition to ensure that transition costs do not become a competitive disadvantage. Some call for more flexible environmental regulation in that regard.

Stakeholders also identify perceived threats to the EU's competitiveness. Frequently mentioned factors include higher production costs in Europe, especially energy; the fear of falling behind in the innovation race and the need to streamline authorisation processes and invest more in research and development; insufficient funding in new and resilient infrastructure; the fragmentation of the Single Market; and comparatively high bureaucratic requirements that create additional costs.

Regarding the EU's global trade policy, stakeholders express a diversity of views: these range from eager trade openness (underlining the importance of free trade and better market access for EU producers and warning of protectionist tendencies), over more prudent approaches (emphasising the need to protect agri-food production from trade disputes, preventing production relocation and reducing import dependencies), to protective perspectives (calling for excluding agri-food from free trade agreements and focusing on local and regional production). However, most consultation participants underline the importance of a global level playing field and demand more action to ensure the equivalent standards for agri-food imports, including on labour, sustainability, and animal welfare conditions. Several stakeholders emphasise the role of the EU to promote the global harmonisation of production and marketing standards. A few consultation participants urge the EU to also consider and avoid the potential negative impacts that EU domestic production and trade can have on third countries and their agri-food sectors.

7. Abbreviations

AgETS	Agriculture Emission Trading System
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AJTF	Agri-food Just Transition Fund
AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems
AMR	Antimicrobial resistance
APO	Association of Producer Organisations
AWL	Animal Welfare Labelling Scheme
CAP	Common Agriculture Policy
CBAM	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CDG	Civil Dialogue Group
CDRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
CER	Critical Entities Resilience
CMO	Common Market Organisation
CO2	Carbon dioxide
CRC	Carbon Removals Certification
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
CSDD	Corporate sustainability and due diligence
DIGITAL	Digital Europe Programme
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EAGF	European Agricultural Guarantee Fund
EBAF	European Board on Agri-food
EFSA	European Food Safety Authority
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIBG	European Investment Bank Group

ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ESRS	European Sustainability Reporting Standards
ETS	Emissions Trading System
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FADN	Farm Accountancy Data Network
FBDG	Food-based Dietary Guidelines
FSDN	Farm Sustainability Data Network
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GAEC	Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GHG	Greenhouse gas
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and plus
LIFE	Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (L'instrument financier pour l'environnement)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NGTs	New Genomic Techniques
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIE	World Organisation for Animal Health (Office International des Epizooties)
PGS	Participatory Guarantee Systems
POs	Producer Organisations

PPP	Plant protection products
PRM	Plant reproductive material
SAPEA	Science Advice for Policy by European Academies
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UTPs	Unfair Trade Practices
VAT	Value Added Tax
WTO	World Trade Organisation

