

Farm-to-Fork – helpful step on the road to sustainable supply chains after COVID

Speaking today on the launch of the European Farm-to-Fork Strategy, EuroCommerce Director-General Christian Verschueren said:

“Over the months of the COVID crisis, food retailers and wholesalers have proved their essential role in delivering daily essentials to 500 million Europeans. The crisis has also shown how important cooperation between all actors of the chain was in achieving this. May this cooperation across the supply chain continue in executing this ambitious Farm-to-Fork Strategy. Europe has the richest and most diverse agri-food sector in the world. All actors need to build on this, with the support of a vibrant single market to ensure that consumers have the choice of food they want, produced in a sustainable way.”

The retail and wholesale sector has for many years sought cooperation in the supply chain to create a more sustainable food system, so that consumers can find the right products in the shops, and farmers can benefit from selling sustainable, high quality produce. The Commission rightly identifies consumers, and their choices, as the starting point for the strategy. The current health crisis has accelerated the demand for healthy and sustainable food, and we expect this to continue in the future.

The Farm-to-Fork strategy will create an important framework for the many voluntary initiatives taken forward by our sector. Retailers and wholesalers can help sustainable products move away from niche to mainstream markets. They are engaging strongly in creating transparency, promoting healthy diets through consumer information, reformulation, the promotion of organic products and addressing food waste. In response to already strong customer demand, many are also directly supporting local farmers undertaking these changes.

To reinforce the EU single market and provide clarity and simplicity to all food business actors, we expect the strategy to deliver a more harmonised and science-based approach that is currently lacking in areas such as front-of-pack labelling, origin labelling, waste management, food donations, to name just a few. Done right, and with close dialogue with the main EU stakeholders in work on legislative initiatives, Europe will be able to champion sustainability standards in the food chain internationally.

To facilitate the take up of sustainability commitments, we look forward to further and more precise competition law guidance on cooperation, currently being revised. We see better cooperation between farmers, already allowed under competition rules, as a means of helping strengthen their position in the chain, and encourage them to make more use of these arrangements for setting up producer organisations. We further see the need for support to help accelerate the sustainability transition across the whole supply chain as an important part of the EU recovery strategy.

In conclusion, Verschueren added:

“We face a difficult future for everyone, and need the same solidarity and cooperation in the supply chain we have seen during the COVID crisis. We want the farm to fork strategy to equip the whole supply chain to reap the opportunities of the sustainability transition.”

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small businesses. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.