



PRESS RELEASE

Hungarian Presidency risks agricultural sustainability and competitiveness by going against plant-based foods

Brussels, 11/07/2024

The European Vegetarian Union (EVU) has expressed concern at recent developments regarding the agenda put forward by the Hungarian Presidency of the EU for the Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting on 15/07/2024. In particular, the tabled discussion on the supposed impact of plant-based foods on “Europe’s culinary traditions”.

The EVU urges ministers to consider the critical importance the production and consumption of plant-based foods have on various levels, including food security, job creation, healthier lifestyles, and environmental sustainability. Plant-based foods contribute significantly to reducing the environmental footprint of our food systems, as stated by the Scientific Advisors to the Commission (SAPEA)¹, the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change², the European Environmental Agency³ and the IPCC⁴. They require fewer resources, generate lower greenhouse gas emissions, and can play a pivotal role in ensuring a sustainable future for agriculture and farmers. Moreover, the growth of the plant-based food sector is generating new economic opportunities, opening up new modes of innovation and competition, and creating jobs across Europe, including in the farming sector.

¹ SAPEA, Towards Sustainable Food Consumption, 2023.

<https://scientificadvice.eu/advice/towards-sustainable-food-consumption/>

² European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change, Towards EU climate neutrality: progress, policy gaps and opportunities, 2023.

<https://climate-advisory-board.europa.eu/reports-and-publications/towards-eu-climate-neutrality-progress-policy-gaps-and-opportunities>

³ EEA, Europe's sustainability transitions outlook, 2024.

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/europes-sustainability-transitions-outlook>

⁴ IPCC, Climate and Land, 2019.

<https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/chapter-5/5-5-mitigation-options-challenges-and-opportunities/5-5-2-demand-side-mitigation-options/5-5-2-1-mitigation-potential-of-different-diets/figure-5-12/>

Plant-based alternatives have seen a significant rise in consumption across Europe over the years, a trend that reflects a broad shift towards more sustainable and health-conscious eating habits. According to the 2023 climate change Eurobarometer, 31% of Europeans are reducing their animal protein intake⁵. This highlights the fact that consumers are aware of the benefits of plant-based diets and are making informed choices on what they consume. Research also consistently shows that consumers are not confused by plant-based alternatives and are instead looking to continue consuming what are considered traditional dishes through their more sustainable alternatives.

The argument put forward that European culinary tradition is threatened is regularly used to polarise discussions and fails to recognise that tradition and innovation have always worked hand-in-hand. *“Traditional food production and consumption is an integral part of European culture, but using the claim to protect traditions while stifling innovation or the adoption of more sustainable food practices goes in the wrong direction and fails to understand the very real and needed impact of dietary shifts”* stated Rafael Pinto, Policy Manager at the EVU. He adds that *“The new products that European producers are bringing to the market can effectively contribute to a world in which many of our favourite traditional foods can continue to be consumed in a way that does not harm our environment. Purposefully pulling the brakes on plant-based food innovation would moreover harm EU competitiveness on the world stage.”*

The EVU calls on EU agriculture ministers to consider the broader implication of these discussions and to support the continued development and integration of plant-based foods into the European food system, from increased pulse production to other alternatives. *“It is only by doing so that European food security and resilience can truly be boosted and that we can ensure a future for our farmers and planet”*, concludes Rafael Pinto.

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Agriculture and Fisheries Council Agenda [available here](#).
More information available on this [Euractiv article](#).

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About the European Vegetarian Union:

⁵ Climate Change Eurobarometer, 2023. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2954>

The European Vegetarian Union (EVU) is the umbrella association of 46 civil society organisations in 28 countries. The EVU represents the voice of the growing number of European consumers shifting towards a more plant-based diet. As such, we advocate for a favourable food environment that makes it easier to choose more plant-based foods and dishes. www.euroveg.eu