Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council

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Helsinki-Uusimaa Region's non-paper on EU's Vision for Agriculture and Food

The European Commission, led by President Ursula von der Leyen, has published their **Vision for Agriculture and Food**, seeking to boost the agri-food sector's competitiveness and attractiveness. Published on 19 February, the roadmap, together with a new advisory board, will steer the direction of the European agriculture over the coming five-year term and beyond.

The EU Vision for Agriculture and Food aims to secure the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the EU's farming and food sector. The Vision for Agriculture and Food is composed of several priority areas with simplifications of EU rules, research, innovation and digitalisation as cross-cutting drivers.

The Helsinki-Uusimaa Region is the second most innovative region in the EU (EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2023) and one of the fastest growing regions in Europe. Although covering only three percent of our national land area, our Region is home to a third of the country's total population, around 1.8 million inhabitants. With 26 municipalities, including the capital city, Helsinki-Uusimaa is home to agriculture and primary food production as well as the hub of Finland's international competitiveness, research and development. Maintaining sustainable food production in the region is a matter of regional, national and European level resilience and security of supply.

In addition to primary food production, our Region is home to novel food innovations with international potential. The Helsinki-Uusimaa Region wants to participate actively in the discussions on the guiding principles of the future policies regarding agriculture and food.

Recommendations from Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

Helsinki-Uusimaa offers the following recommendations to ensure the success and impact of the EU Vision for Agriculture and Food:

- **Ensure security of food supply in the EU**
- **Enhance crisis resilience in European food production**
- **Prioritise the simplification of EU rules and regulation**
- **Focus on streamlining the approval procedures**
- **Invest in RDI to remain a world leader in food innovation**
- **Enable sufficient public support to farmers**
- **Provide the conditions for a future-proof sector**
- **Improve energy self-sufficiency and fertiliser availability**
- **Pay attention to cybersecurity and digital resilience in agriculture**

Ensuring security of food supply in the EU

Ensuring the European security of food supply and food safety are key issues in the current global context. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine as well as the already visible challenges to farming and food production caused by climate change (e.g. extreme heat, wildfires, draught and flooding), pose significant threats to Europe's food security. The self-sufficiency in the food production of the European countries must be supported and preserved in order to ensure their level of security in food supply.

Crisis resilience in European food production

The EU food chain must be resilient and able to withstand disruptions in production, logistics or access to raw materials. EU citizens should at all times have access to a sufficient and varied supply of safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainable food. As recognised in the **recommendations on ways to mitigate risks and vulnerabilities** published by the expert group on the **European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism** (EFSCM) as well as the **report on Europe's civilian and defence preparedness and readiness** prepared by former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö, the crisis resilience of the European food supply must be monitored and preventive actions taken in order to mitigate the risks and vulnerabilities of the European food production.

Simplification of EU rules and regulation

Helsinki-Uusimaa supports the Commission's goal to lighten the regulatory load for people, businesses and administrations in the EU. The '**Simpler and Faster Europe**' Communication sets out a new course towards simplifying EU rules to make European economy more competitive and more prosperous. Increasing transparency and simplification in regulatory processes is needed and it should particularly benefit SMEs, which often face disproportionate regulatory burdens. Deregulation must not, however, mean a reduction in corporate responsibility and it should not compromise on environmental protection.

Streamlining of approval procedures

The Regulation of Novel Food innovations (**Regulation (EU) 2015/2283**) is designed to facilitate the market access of innovative food products such as plant-based and alternative proteins, as highlighted in the EIT Food Protein Diversification Think Tank 2023 Policy Brief on "**Accelerating Protein Diversification for Europe**". However, the high level of bureaucracy currently remains a barrier to the growth and scaling-up of new food innovations. The authorisation processes are too slow and complex, which hinders innovation in areas such as cell-cultured proteins and other biotechnological food innovations. To speed up food innovation, the EU food policy should take into account the potential of new technologies and streamline its approval procedures, for example by setting deadlines for assessment processes and supporting research and regional pilot projects that help new food innovations to develop and stay in the EU. Simplified approval procedures can also help reduce costs associated with bringing new food innovations to market, making it easier for startups and smaller companies to compete.

Remaining world leader in food innovation

Uptake of research, innovation and digitalisation, together with the required skillset, are key requirements to make the agriculture and food sector in Europe more competitive. To reach this goal, sufficient funding for research, development and innovation must be secured in the future of EU's multiannual financial

framework (MFF). In addition to ensuring sustainable primary production and farming practices, more emphasis and value needs to be addressed to food innovation, such as novel foods and diversified protein production.

Public support to farmers

The EU Vision for Agriculture and Food provides a long-term policy perspective on EU agriculture and food that is in line with ongoing reflections on the future MFF. To ensure the continuation of farming and sustainable farming practises that attract future generations of farmers across the EU, public support through the common agricultural policy (CAP) remains essential to support farmers' income. New business models and incentives for farmers to adopt sustainable practices and technologies are needed to support the profitability of primary production.

Providing conditions for future-proof sector

The agricultural sector of Europe plays an important role in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Helsinki-Uusimaa supports this goal and emphasizes the need to adopt innovative practices ensuring the protection and restoration of the EU's biodiversity, protect natural resources for healthy soils, clean water and air and reduce emissions to preserve nature for future generations. Educating farmers on the principles of regenerative agriculture, enhancing the traceability and transparency of food products and developing new business models that prioritize farmers and promote diversified protein production are essential. Incentives for decarbonisation must also secure competitiveness of the agri-food sector in Europe.

Energy self-sufficiency and fertiliser availability

The agriculture in Europe is currently very dependent on energy-intensive production processes and imported fertilisers. The EU must ensure its self-sufficiency on sustainable energy supply and actively seek European alternatives for imported fertilisers widely used in agriculture. The manufacturing and application of fertilisers are also a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. The EU must take an active role in decreasing the use of human-made fertilisers, such as ammonia. Ammonia takes a lot of energy to manufacture and most of that energy comes from burning fossil fuels like coal and methane gas. Currently, ammonia manufacturing contributes between 1 and 2% of worldwide carbon dioxide emissions. Further, much of the applied fertiliser runs off into waterways, or gets broken down by microbes in the soil, releasing the potent greenhouse gas nitrous oxide into the atmosphere. This is relevant, as studies show that nitrous oxide warms the planet 300 times as much as carbon dioxide. To ensure a sustainable and future-proof food sector, the EU must actively invest in renewable energy production and seek solutions to decrease the use of fertilisers.

Cybersecurity and digital resilience in agriculture

Digitalisation and data security are key enablers for creating a resilient food system, but they also expose our food supply to new vulnerabilities. Data is the key ingredient for the European farming sector to become more productive, sustainable and remain competitive in a global environment. Huge amounts of data are already available in agriculture, and it is crucial to ensure safeguards for data sharing, data sovereignty, and data security. The EU **Data Ac**t as well as the EU **Code of Conduct on agricultural data sharing** provide guidance on the use of agricultural data, particularly the rights to access and use it, but the security and cybersecurity of digital systems in the food chain need to be strengthened. Practical examples of how digital innovations can enhance cybersecurity and resilience in agriculture have been gathered in the **Digital Agriculture for Sustainable Food Systems** publication by EIT Food.