# Healthy, fair and resilient food systems

## A joint call for EU agricultural and food systems research and innovation that delivers societal value

**23 September 2026**

## Why this call?

We, the undersigned organisations working across public health, food systems, nutrition, food waste, animal welfare, environmental health, sustainability and social equity, welcome the EU AgRI 2040 Conference as an opportunity to help inform the implementation of AgRI 2040 and Food 2040, and the next generation of European research and innovation investments.

Drawing on evidence and practical experience from Horizon Europe projects, public institutions, universities, civil society, cities and food-system practitioners, this Joint Call seeks to ensure that public health, equity, wider societal value and the One Health approach are fully reflected in the implementation of EU AgRI 2040 and Food 2040, and embedded in the design, funding and evaluation of Europe's future agricultural and food-systems research and innovation programmes. This is a constructive contribution to the debate. It identifies gaps in current European food systems and calls for solutions that enable people, communities, ecosystems and biodiversity to thrive in the decades ahead. Decisions on FP10, the next Multiannual Financial Framework, the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Cohesion Policy and the European Competitiveness Fund, the EU Safe Hearts Plan, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the EU Livestock Strategy, provide a critical opportunity to align European investment around these shared outcomes. With AgRI 2040 and Food 2040 now providing a strategic direction of travel for future research and innovation activities, the focus must turn to implementation, investment priorities and governance arrangements capable of delivering these ambitions in practice.

## Public investment in research and innovation must deliver societal value

**Sustainable food systems underpin the wellbeing of people across Europe and are essential to resilience, competitiveness, strategic autonomy, ecosystem integrity and environmental sustainability**. They must deliver food security and food sovereignty; healthy, affordable and sustainable diets; animal welfare; fair and resilient livelihoods; reduced inequalities and food insecurity; healthy environments, biodiversity and ecosystems; and long-term prosperity.

Europe's future food and agriculture strategy cannot be built only from the farm upwards; it must also be designed from people and communities outwards, through community-led approaches. Research and innovation must therefore address the whole food system—from production and working conditions to food environments, consumption and waste—and translate knowledge into policies and practical solutions that improve lives while promoting food sovereignty. As Europe shapes its next generation of these programmes, maximising the societal

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return on public investment is both a strategic opportunity and a public responsibility. Publicly funded research and innovation must be assessed not only by the technologies, productivity gains or markets it generates, but also by the value and impact it delivers for people, communities and the environment**. For food systems, this means that health, wellbeing and equity -for people, animals and the environment- must be explicit objectives of Europe's future food-systems research and innovation agenda. These are not competing priorities, nor should they be viewed primarily through the lens of productivity.** They are core dimensions of the long-term public return that research and innovation investment must deliver.

## Europe has built a strong evidence base — now it must accelerate implementation

**European research and innovation initiatives have generated extensive evidence**, tested solutions and developed new approaches to healthier, fairer and more sustainable, agroecological food systems across the food value chain from production to consumption and waste. Projects and initiatives showcased through the FOOD 2030 Networks provide great examples of these efforts and of the contribution of EU-funded research and innovation to transforming and improving food systems so they become fairer, more resilient and more sustainable. Further research remains important, but greater priority must now be given to implementation, policy experimentation and governance reform, scale-up, knowledge co-creation and exchange, and cross-country learning and capacity building. In this context, there is a need for more systematic monitoring and assessment procedures to be anchored in EU institutions, such as the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Environment Agency (EEA), improved coordination procedures between Directorates (DGs) relevant to food systems like DG AGRI, DG SANTE and DG RTD, and a **dedicated European Topic Centre (ETC) on Food System Transition.** This should contribute to closing important gaps in evidence generation, by acting upon those communities most in need and tailoring solutions to local problems.

The adoption of AgRI 2040 and Food 2040 reinforces the need to move from evidence generation towards implementation, scaling and long-term impact.

## Our call: six priorities for Europe's future food-systems research and innovation agenda

### Priority 1: Societal value at the heart of research and innovation

EU research and investment programmes should make One Health (human health, animal welfare, environmental sustainability, biodiversity restoration), climate mitigation and adaptation, resilience and community well-being, and equity explicit criteria in priority-setting, project selection and evaluation. **Innovation should be assessed not only by what it produces, its profitability and commercial potential, but by the long-term value it creates for individuals and communities.** Future FP10, the MFF, the CAP, Cohesion Policy, and the ECF should reinforce one another in advancing healthier, fairer and more sustainable food systems, while supporting delivery of the ambitions outlined in AgRI 2040 and Food 2040.

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## Priority 2: Food security and the right to food

Food is fundamental to health, human dignity, well-being and social participation. **The right to adequate food must be a guiding principle for EU food-systems policy, research and investment. Future research and innovation must therefore advance all six FAO dimensions of food security** (availability, access, utilisation, stability, agency and sustainability). Also, it should support territorial food systems that make healthy, safe, affordable, sustainable and culturally appropriate diets easily accessible to everyone, particularly people at risk of food insecurity, who may be least able to prepare for or withstand a crisis. The dimensions of utilisation and sustainability require minimising exposure to chemicals and practices that harm people, animals or the environment across food production and consumption.

## Priority 3: Health and equity across the food system

Health, health equity, One Health and the transition to healthy and sustainable dietary behaviours must be explicit objectives of food system research and innovation**. Investments must contribute to preventing food system-related disease, including health impacts linked to dietary and non-dietary exposure** for producers (e.g. farmers and farm labourers) and consumers to hazardous chemicals present in food systems such as pesticides, PFAS, bisphenols and phthalates, reducing health inequalities, supporting healthy ageing, and improving children's health – **while recognising that health is an outcome in its own right, not only a precondition for competitiveness and economic productivity**.

**An equity lens must extend to people facing barriers to healthy and affordable diets** – including children, people on low incomes and communities experiencing food insecurity – as well as workers and producers facing insecure livelihoods, poor working conditions, occupational health risk like exposure to pesticides or zoonotic diseases, or unequal power relations within food supply chains.

**Major funding decisions must be informed by equity-sensitive impact assessments and disaggregated data showing who benefits, who bears the risks and which groups remain unreached.**

## Priority 4: Embrace a whole food systems perspective

As reflected throughout this statement, **future research agendas should extend beyond agricultural production to address the drivers, actors, and outcomes of the whole food system**. This includes the ecosystems and other resources that underpin production; food supply chains from production through processing, distribution, retail, marketing, consumption and waste; working conditions and animal health and welfare across the food system; food environments and the social, commercial, political, economic and environmental factors that shape these areas and their outcomes.

Coherent action across the system is needed to deliver food security, healthy and sustainable diets, fair livelihoods, social inclusion, environmental sustainability and ecosystem integrity, and resilient communities, within planetary boundaries. The EU's 2020 Farm to Fork Strategy established an important precedent for a holistic and integrated approach, now overtaken by the EU's 2025 Vision for Agriculture and Food. While some measures and objectives in the Farm to Fork Strategy continue through sectoral legislation and CAP instruments, its original integrated and target driven approach to food-systems transformation has substantially weakened. **Future research, innovation**

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**and investment programmes must carry this ambition forward, learn from implementation gaps and strengthen the conditions for delivery.**

Projects funded under the Horizon Europe topic "Transition to healthy and sustainable dietary behaviour"—including FEAST, PLAN'EAT and SWITCH—demonstrate how multi-actor research, Living Labs and social innovation can engage communities, policymakers and food-system actors in identifying barriers and co-creating practical solutions while accelerating societal value of European research.

## Priority 5. Strengthen governance and safeguard the public interest

**Food-systems transformation requires more than technological innovation. It requires coherent and democratic processes underpinning policymaking, mechanisms for meaningful participation such as food councils, cross-sector collaboration and transparent, accountable decision-making that safeguards the public interest.** Research and innovation must identify and support governance arrangements that enable implementation across sectors and levels of government.

**EU programmes must address market concentration, conflicts of interest and the disproportionate influence of commercial actors over food environments, policy and research priorities.** Without appropriate safeguards, research and innovation risk reinforcing existing power asymmetries that often result in corporate/regulatory capture by a small number of powerful actors. Safeguards must apply when research priorities and work programmes are set—not only during proposal evaluation—and include the transparent disclosure of interests, protection of independent public-interest agenda-setting and closer scrutiny of market concentration across the food value chain.

Future research must help identify and support the governance arrangements that enable successful implementation and long-term systems change.

## Priority 6. Measure and account for societal impact

**Future programmes must use a common set of measurable, equity-sensitive indicators covering both inputs and results in a systemic approach**, on core topics such as health, animal health and welfare, affordability and access, fair livelihoods, resilience and environmental sustainability. Monitoring must build on existing European and international frameworks, including Eurostat, EFSA and WHO, and report transparently on the distribution of benefits and risks across population groups and places. Where appropriate, evaluation must include distributional and cost–benefit analysis to reveal trade-offs and prioritisation processes that can more transparently demonstrate who benefits, externalities (both positive and negative) and the wider societal return on investment.

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## A shared opportunity

Europe can lead globally in developing food systems that strengthen competitiveness and resilience while improving health, reducing inequalities and protecting the environment. These are not mutually exclusive, competing agendas: fairer and healthier food systems support productive economies, social cohesion, strategic autonomy and long-term prosperity.

We call on the European Commission, European Parliament, Member States and research and funding bodies to use the six priorities set out in this Joint Call to inform the implementation of AgRI 2040 and Food 2040, and to embed them in the design of future European research and investment programmes, including call topics, partnerships, evaluation criteria and expected outcomes. We invite research organisations, civil society, cities, businesses, food-system workers and communities to help turn this agenda into action.

As a community of research, policy and practice organisations, we stand ready to contribute our evidence, expertise, stakeholder networks and practical experience. Together, Europe can build food systems that nourish people, sustain fair livelihoods, strengthen communities, protect the planet all while contributing to improving economic opportunities —now and for future generations.

### Background

Led by the FEAST Project and EuroHealthNet, supported by the organisations listed below.

The FEAST Project aims to support a just transition to healthier and more sustainable diets by co-designing practical solutions with stakeholders across the food system, including people in vulnerable situations. The ultimate aim is to ensure that all people in Europe can easily eat delicious, healthier and more sustainable food.

EuroHealthNet is the Partnership of public health bodies building a healthier future for all by addressing the determinants of health and reducing inequalities. Its focus is on preventing disease and promoting good health by looking within and beyond the health care system.

## This statement is supported and endorsed by:

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