



Green Food Policy for Europe

Strengthening European food culture

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1. Healthy and tasty food is political

One of the most precious common goods we share in Europe is the diversity of our food cultures. Green food culture policies therefore sustain this heritage. We want to enable people in their regions to preserve and enjoy healthy, tasty, and local food. This important political goal needs concerted action of the green movement against further industrialisation of fishing, farming and food processing, against the massive market power of global food retailers and an alarming loss of food diversity, quality and quantity, for example through the over-fishing of many fish stocks."

Food scandals, like contamination with dioxin and salmonella, and diseases like BSE and bird flu were bred in factory farming and became dangerous for public health because animals and food travel ever more across Europe and the world. Food from the laboratory undermines farmers' and consumers' trust in our food system. The EU is under pressure from the US and multinational companies to accept food made from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and cloned animals. But if European farmers abandoned the diversity of their own traditional plant varieties and animal races, if fishermen so depleted local fish stocks that traditional species were no longer available, and if consumers lost interest in knowing what they eat, this would destroy the very basis of our food culture and food security.

European Greens fight for the freedom of European citizens to eat what they like, - not what the food industry would like to see them buy. Farmers and consumers have clearly expressed what they want. They have rejected the use of artificial hormones in meat production years ago and they do not want GMOs on their fields and plates in the future. European citizens prefer to know where their dishes come from, how animals are treated and what additives might have been mixed into their food. They want to know that their fish comes from well-managed fisheries that do not damage the environment. We wish to strengthen this attitude. Food is essential for our lives, health and well being. That is why good food is political.

2. Making markets work for people

Green farm, fish and food policies in Europe strive to create mutual responsibility between farmers, fishermen and consumers. We do not call on the state to manage food markets. We expect the EU and our member states to set strict rules for ecologically sound and socially fair competition and to make sure these rules are respected by all. We urge European decision makers to think global and to act European, strengthening sustainable production practices as well as reasonable consumption habits - inside and outside the EU. Better competition rules must put an end to the concentration of market power in the food sector and strengthen regional and local markets. Public support to farmers and the food industry must demand sustainable and energy saving practices throughout food production. Imports of food from third countries must in principle respect these premises, although temporarily exceptions are allowed for the least developed countries. Public support for consumers and taxing regulations should encourage

healthy food choices (e.g. fruits and vegetables) of consumers and make them affordable for all, regardless of education and social class.

Many farmers feel still forced into growing in order to stay competitive, but others have discovered new ways of local market ownership. Selling their products as raw materials to an anonymous food market has undermined their ability to understand what consumers wish and to adapt their production to their demands.. Developing local markets, decentralized processing and direct cooperation with consumers allows them to realise a higher amount of added value which flows back to their farms and strengthens the wider rural economies. This is important to preserve a living and attractive countryside. There is a fast-growing number of consumers showing preferences for organic and wholesome food and caring about geographical origins and health attributes . Green food culture policy enhances the discovery of this new market ownership and mutual responsibility. We make markets work for people.

3. Changing the rules for better food quality and ethical food production

Green EU food policy will change what is the rule and what the exception in true food quality. Instead of first subsidising factory farming and then having to cover the costs of polluted water and rising health care, the most advanced sustainable methods should become the yardstick for public support. These include organic farming and other sustainable practices which conserve biodiversity and water resources, enhance crop rotation and soil fertility; prevent flooding, droughts and fires and reduce greenhouse gases through integration of crop and animal production. Industrial farming and all processing practices which now cause public health costs (provoking allergies, digestive and chronic diseases) and costs to restore the environment should be phased out and transformed into sustainable production. Green food policy also includes legislation to improve animal welfare..

The Common Fisheries Policy should be further reformed so that subsidies are no longer available for over-fishing within and beyond the European waters and fishermen are helped with finding other means of income, for example through reschooling programmes. Destructive practices such as discarding huge quantities of perfectly good fish or the use of bottom trawling should be banned. Furthermore the market should no longer accept fish that were caught illegally, unreported and/ or unregulated.

Green food policy therefore demands the full integration of agricultural, environmental, public health and food quality policies. The rule of food production should be based on the most sustainable practices and locally-based diversification of food processing and marketing. While in the light of repeated food scares, the European Union has made considerable efforts in achieving better food safety in terms of absence of harmful diseases and substances in the food chain, these initiatives have often been diluted or delayed by the member states or undermined by international trade negotiations and free trade agreements in the WTO.

Greening the Common Agriculture Policy of the EU means focussing investments in the social and environmental infrastructure and in sustainable rural development. We stand for a true green revolution in awareness raising and training for farmers and consumers; more decentralized high quality processing of food; reduced transport of animals and short distance marketing; fair trade and true labelling of quality food.

Box 1 Changing the rules Green demands

- *phasing out subsidies for agro-industrial development- public support for farmers must be linked to strict respect of environmental and food safety laws (no use of dangerous pesticides, no use of antibiotics or growth promoters in animal husbandry, compliance with standards for environment and animal welfare)*
- *specific support for organic and extensive farming, including the infrastructure for local processing (small slaughter and processing facilities)*
- *support for those fishing methods that cause the least environmental destruction, and use of the precautionary approach to prevent over-exploitation*
- *taxation policies supporting the use of healthy foods (e.g. fruits and vegetables) and decreasing the use of unhealthy foods (e.g. those with high amounts of sugar, refined cereals or saturated fats)*
- *Discourage intensive and factory farming, including fish farming through strict enforcement of environmental, animal welfare and food safety legislation (the eco-conditional or cross compliance principle);*
- *specific support for non-market functions of agricultural practices like green and blue services*

4. Integrating policies - enforcing the precautionary principle

Green farm and food policies therefore require the reinforcement of the precautionary principle in public food and health policy - meaning that the risk for public health through unsafe food should be minimised and the quality of our diet should be enhanced through sustainable food production practices. The EU should not limit food policy to detecting harmful substances at the end of the pipeline. Verifiable standards guaranteeing healthy food products must be enforced all the way throughout the production process, from the cultivation of crops and fodder and the production of fish to the final processing, retailing and consumption of food. These so-called process-oriented standards are up until now only required by the EU regulation on organic farming. In order to increase food security and food quality, they should in the future also be applied to conventional food production, be it from agriculture, fishing or fish farming.

This process-oriented approach has been integrated in the EU rules on food hygiene. However, there is an important difference between hygiene and food quality. Strict hygiene rules must be followed in slaughterhouses, meat, fish, milk or food processing and on farms, but they must be differentiated and flexibly adapted to the risks involved, the distance between producer and consumer and the shelf life needed in relation to the time between processing and final consumption. Though the European hygiene rules provide for this flexibility, they are often interpreted to fit the needs of the big industry: -large-scale concentration of processing units closing down small slaughterhouses and driving small dairy farms out of business is often the hidden agenda behind food policy.

As Greens in the European Parliament we have achieved more flexible rules for small processing units, traditional products and direct marketing. But most member states do not apply these rules and need pressure from farmers and consumers to support local structures. Take the example of raw milk cheese: while the (natural) germ content in milk on an alpine pasture might be too high to allow the milk to be chilled for two days before being collected and transported a hundred kilometres to an industrial dairy, the milk might be better suited to direct traditional processing into raw milk cheese, needing more simple hygiene requirements.

Box 2 Standards for sustainability Green demands

- *apply the precautionary principle throughout the whole food chain and establish clear rules on liability (especially for chemical residues and GMO contamination);*
- *enforce standards which guarantee food safety, without limiting the necessary flexibility of implementation needed to maintain and diversify regional and local food production (specific hygiene rules for local markets and small processing enterprises);*
- *enlarge the definition of quality standards, in order to include the wide differences of food culture and taste (enhancement of practices preserving biodiversity and local food culture);*
- *When defining hygiene standards, clear margins of tolerance have to be given to the official authorities and the veterinarians controlling these standards, in order to extend the flexibility and to give orientation to the individual decision*
- *To a limited extent and as long as no direct health risks are at stake, the rules for locally marketed artisanal products should be negotiable among the official controlling body, the consumers and the producers.*

5. Challenging the power of the food industry

The power of the global food industry grows because farming is more and more specialised and produces components for food design rather than wholesome food. An ever increasing share of our diets is composed of processed food. While spending less and less time in preparing our food, we ingest more and more technical additives like conserving agents, emulsifiers, taste enhancers and aromas, substances which the food industry is dependent on. Several thousands of these ingredients are authorised, even though toxicological studies of their potentially complex interaction in our bodies are lacking. The multinational players in the food industry have major influence on decision making in European and international bodies deciding on food standards (the Codex Alimentarius- a body jointly controlled by the WHO and the FAO, Food Safety agencies). These “technical” or “advisory” bodies which are bound to be independent, but often gather expertise from industries, are not subject to full democratic control and their market power and political influence is ever increasing.

European Green food policies call for better control of the food industry and for an informed choice of the consumers. It is necessary to inform the consumers about companies which have repeatedly or seriously infringed food safety standards (“name and shame”), to limit the number of authorised additives, ensure full labelling of their use and to improve the control of undesired substances in food (pesticides, antibiotics, other residues). Green food policy demands transparency of the meetings of advisory committees in the EU commission, the Food Safety agency EFSA and in international bodies like the Codex Alimentarius or the WTO, including the publication of minority opinions. The EU should also make possible the right of non-governmental associations to depose legal challenges to the rulings of such bodies. Global food companies keep farmers, fishermen and consumers from receiving or paying fair food prices. They use their market power to increase consumer prices to an extent unjustified by average farm gate prices or the price received by the fishermen. In order to challenge trends of monopolisation of farm product markets, the EU must therefore take immediate action under its competition rules. The argument that global market liberalisation would favour more competition which allows farmers in North and South better income and consumers fairer prices is not true. There are only about 120 food buying companies controlling food markets worldwide and they use their position to decide about the market access of farmers.

6. Labelling for more transparency

In order not to further confuse but to enable consumers to make the right choice when buying their food and in order to build up markets for quality products, efficient inspections and controls and readable labelling are essential. Current control systems focus on food safety and exclude aspects of sustainability and wholesome quality of food. Green food policy would transform the defensive food safety approach of the EU into a proactive food quality approach. Consumers need simple and relevant information for their choice. In order to counter-act the current rise in obesity, nutritional labelling on processed food must be clear and understandable.

Geographical indications (GIs) which the EU has already established in a Regulation on food quality need to be amended in order to include more transparent information. The rules for protected indications of origin, which are linked to locally negotiated quality standards, should be tightened in order to prevent consumer disinformation (e.g. "regional" cheese made of imported milk). Indicating the place of origin should not be limited to fruit, vegetables, fish or beef.

The organic food sector is self-regulating, and sets high standards for the control and certification of organic products, as well as developing strict rules for labelling both domestic and imported products. This independence must be safeguarded against moves by industry or government to take over these functions.

The labelling of GM food should be done in a way that also eggs, meat and milk produced from GM feed can be identified by the consumers, including liability for contamination. Labels already indicate whether fish is caught in the sea or farmed, as well as the general area it comes from, but more details should be included, such as the environmental impact of fishing, the method of catching the fish and the status of the wild stocks of fish (depleted, abundant, etc.)

Box 3 Transparency and labelling

- *provide consumers with essential and relevant information about a product's origin and the way in which it was produced through a EU regulation on consumer information (better implementation of legislation on traceability and specific labelling);*
- *stimulate consumers' choice for a healthy diet (clear and understandable package labelling, food culture education in schools and high quality food in public canteens,);*

7. Balancing food and energy security

With globally growing populations and emerging economies in Brazil, India and China, demand for food and energy is rapidly increasing. At the same time cheap supplies of mineral oil are running out and soils, groundwater and biodiversity are depleted in many regions of the world. With climate change, the risks of poor harvests and famines become more likely. Fish can travel vast distances before it is consumed, sometimes being caught in Europe, sent to China for processing before returning to Europe for final sale. Europe also imports large amounts of fish from developing countries, affecting their local, regional and even national food security. This is an explosive mixture leading to economic crises and geopolitical conflicts.

The current EU targets for the use of agro-fuels for example - misleadingly called "biofuels" - provoke unsustainable use of land, water and energy and put global food security at a serious risk. In particular in many developing countries which are dependent on (imported) cheap food products, but are now threatened by higher land, water and energy costs to buy and produce enough food products at an affordable price. It is wrong to insist on compulsory targets for

adding agro-fuels to mineral fuels, before any broader environmental and social impact assessment of agro-fuel production and imports has been carried out. A recent study by the EU Commission's own Joint Research Centre indicates that agro-fuel production does not substantially reduce CO₂ emissions; on the contrary it might increase environmental costs by 60 billion Euros.

The ever growing pressure on natural resources for food, feed and fuel must be substantially reduced following the sufficiency principle. North America and Europe today consume 70 % of the world's mineral oil and 40% of the world's food, yet only represent 19 % of the world's population. The EU is the world's largest importer of agricultural products and fish in the world. In order to avoid future conflicts on access to energy sources, water and land, Green food and energy security policies must tackle wasteful production and consumption patterns and lifestyles and press for a more balanced access to food and energy for all.

Production of meat consumes more energy than production of crops fruit and vegetables. However, meat consumption has increased all over the world. Various European health institutes have acknowledged that Europeans today consume too much meat. This has affected and continues to affect the global availability of land, water and energy needs. For example in the Brazilian rainforest, which is still decreasing in size rapidly for the production of soya and maize for the European animal sector. Green food policy thrives towards reduced meat consumption. This is not only energy but also a public health issue.

Box 4 Concrete measures

- Discourage inefficient consumption to optimize the use of scarce natural resources like energy, water and land. This means that we Greens will also address the inefficient consumption of meat that is 7 times less efficient in land and energy use compared to cereal consumption.

8. Fair trade and qualified market access

The opening-up of agricultural markets has been the mantra of the European Commission for more than a decade now. The argument that development in the South would only take place if agricultural goods could flow freely across national borders has been effectively challenged by the general public. Fair trade standards have been developed from the bottom-up by farmers and development NGOs and consumers organisations, and are now making their way into larger markets. Given the continuing human rights violations, the destruction of rainforests and the depletion of water resources in some countries to generate exports into the EU, the Commission must acknowledge that the Green concept of qualified market access, meaning social and environmental conditions and standards for market access to the EU, is urgently needed and must actively be promoted in international trade negotiations.

The only way out of the deadlock in multilateral trade talks for Europe's food safety and the developing countries' food security is a "qualified protection of markets" against dumping. The anti-dumping criteria should include food safety, environmental, social, animal welfare and biodiversity aspects which are supposed to be applied to direct payments inside the EU. Non compliance with these standards should initiate tariffs or levies to be implemented at the EU and Developing country borders. Such "income from qualified protection" would be retransferred directly into developing countries and give support for projects introducing these agreed practices and standards.

Box 5

In order to achieve such a qualified external protection, the EU should

- *definitely stop all forms of export subsidies for agricultural products*
- *make alliances with the FAO and other UN agencies to create a multilateral agreement on this issue within or outside the WTO*
- *implement sufficiently effective border controls and process controls in the places of origin to guarantee food safety standards for imported products*
- *reduce the energy use that coincides with food and feed growth, harvesting, production and transport*
- *ensure that fishing by EU vessels in the waters of developing countries is sustainable and also contributes to the development of sustainable fisheries by and for the local communities.*

9. Investing in the future -improving food research

Agricultural research enables innovation and further development of the farming and food sector. To date, research has been driven by the doctrine of intensification and labour-saving rationalisation in all areas of production. Professional education at rural colleges has followed suit. It resulted in a concentration on skills for maximising profits in commodity production, which in turn led to the concentration of agricultural production in some favoured regions and to depopulation in others. Similarly, in fisheries, research has concentrated on catching ever larger quantities of fish, regardless of the environmental impact, resulting in the discarding of millions of tonnes of fish around the world every year.

The further development and innovation in fisheries and agriculture and the food business generally must face up to the changing demands of society. Research and education require new objectives and must be focussed on sustainable production on land and at sea as well as changing consumption patterns instead of biotechnological intensification. The wide varieties of services required by society, ranging from quality food to nature preservation and rural tourism, must be reflected in research and education.

Green food research policy therefore sets priorities for integrated social, environmental and economical research which looks into improvement of lifecycles in all levels of production and consumption and which uses synergies in nature and community farming which follow the principles of sufficiency.

Box 6

- *Instead of concentrating on gene technology and profit maximisation for large scale agro industrial enterprises, agricultural research should place its emphasis on diversification of employment and innovation in rural areas through renewable energies and adapted technologies*
- *Special emphasis should be given to modernising organic and low input farming through targeted research*
- *Fisheries research should shift from maximizing immediate output despite any environmental impact towards methods of fishing that catch only adult fish that can be used, while leaving all other fish and animals (sharks, birds, marine mammals, etc.) in the water.*
- *Training and information programmes should be focussed on methods of sustainable food production and marketing strategies for diversified food products of high quality.*

10. Food for thought - sustainable rural-urban relations

In order to bring healthy and fresh food back on the political agenda the EU needs to redefine sustainable relations between rural and urban regions. Rural regions cannot provide healthy and cheap food if the cities continue to pour growing amounts of waste and polluted water into their "hinterland" and structural policies systematically disadvantage rural citizens.

Food quality in the EU also suffers from a false ideology and implementation of the EU's Lisbon agenda on economic growth. Cohesion, competitiveness and sustainable development are three inseparable goals for the future rural and urban development policies

Cohesion is not an issue only of redistribution of wealth from richer to poorer regions of the Union. It is the commitment to contribute to reduce inter-regional disparities.

Competitiveness is not an issue only of the most efficient mode of production, lowest cost and price of services and goods. It is also about quality, origin and the employment effect. EU farm policies should therefore distinguish between those farms and enterprises which operate on a local or regional scale and those operating on a European or world scale.

Sustainability is not an issue only of conservation of natural resources. It is a matter of a careful use and treatment of soils, water, biodiversity and other common assets. It includes also the assurance of social continuity, and of long-term viability of local economies.

In order to make the new rural and urban food security policy a success, the European Union, national governments and civil society should work out a new social contract. Public-sector funds should be matched by the energy and resources of the private and voluntary sectors. People living in rural regions should be actively involved in the implementation of rural development programmes.

Box 7

In order to achieve added value in farming and to develop markets for quality produce,

- public funds must be re-oriented from market intervention to promotion of rural infrastructure which sustains local and regional quality products, investments into animal welfare, biodiversity conservation and food security;
- re-conversion to environmentally friendly farming with low contaminant residues and resource-saving production methods (energy, water, manure, chemicals,...)
- organic farming should be promoted with public aid for conversion of land and for marketing in, schools, hospitals and public canteens; organic baby food should become the norm.
- subsidies that lead to over-fishing must be redirected to promote more selective fishing gears and to reduce the tremendous excess capacity of the EU fleets, to bring them in balance with fish stocks.