

## Letter of response to: 'Invitation to collaborate in the study of disruptions and possible solutions on the European AgriFood Ecosystem'

April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

The pan-European agrifood values chains have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the multifaceted crisis leading it. Labor shortages for crop harvesting, disruptions in the food supply chains and uncertainties and fluctuations in demand have combined to create a challenging and – to some extent – unpredictable landscape for European food systems. Yet the sector managed to secure safe and adequate food production and supply for European citizens during unprecedented curfews and quarantine measures.

Technology and innovation played and will continue to play an instrumental role in increasing the capacity, resilience and sustainability of the sector. Timely responses to short-term challenges and disruptions amidst the crisis include:

- Mobilising agricultural workforce for harvesting;
- Educating individuals from other sectors to be able to support agri-food businesses during the crisis;
- Regional matching of offers and demands for fresh produce supply in decentralised settings;
- Making surplus food available, especially to the poor, vulnerable and people in need;
- Managing food transportation along national and international supply chains to avoid food waste;
- Identifying anormal situations in food supply/logistics as baselines to enable early reactions;
- Re-routing and re-organizing transports to avoid food waste;
- Forecasting of regional food supplies, deviations and/or potential shortages;
- Strategies to apply social distancing along food supply chains, from farm to fork;
- Ensuring the safety of fresh food along the supply chain;
- Optimising food storage and shelf-life to reduce food loss.

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At the same time the COVID-19 crisis accelerated major shifts that are already taking place in our sector regarding digital transformation and sustainability. In the mid-term, the agrifood sector will actively participate in the implementation of the Green Deal strategy, aiming to be an “Agent of Change” towards resilient EU food systems within a sustainable, circular bioeconomy. While we consider existing topics and priorities of the “Farm to Fork” Action Plan relevant and balanced we would also like to highlight that the (much needed) **technology-enabled transition to sustainability** requires a holistic approach. Therefore, we would like to propose a concrete initiative for transition plans. The traditional structures of our sector and the crucial role of the human factor at both ends of the food supply chain (from small farmers to end-consumers) requires a tailor-made approach to ensure that made changes will achieve maximum results without leaving anyone behind.

**Technology-enabled transition to sustainability** should be a series of interventions for systemic innovation that pave the way towards fundamental changes in European food systems. Core components of such interventions should be:

- Demonstrations of novel digital transformation experiments across supply chains;
- Demonstrations of circular and bioeconomy experiments across supply chains;
- Workforce adaptations with new skills and competencies relevant to changing conditions;
- Co-creation of innovative approaches and solutions together with farmers, producers, consumers and citizens;
- Engagement of the European investment community with an emphasis on Impact Funds.

All plans should have solid measures in place to assess the impact of the transition in terms of:

- The three dimensions of sustainability (social/health, climate/environmental and economic);
- The resilience of food systems to foreseen or unpredictable shocks and stresses;
- The objective of providing sufficient, safe, nutritious, and affordable food for all.

#### Organizations supporting the letter:



[www.agrifood.lt](http://www.agrifood.lt)



[www.smartfoodcluster.com](http://www.smartfoodcluster.com)

#### Experts contributing and supporting the letter:

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