



## WORKSHOP SYNOPSIS

### **The European Commission's Strategic Dialogue and Vision for Agriculture and Food**

#### ***Stakeholder Perspectives on Achieving the Vision***

Following the publication of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasised that the report provides a strong foundation for shaping a new vision for food and farming in Europe. These recommendations have directly influenced the European Commission's work, guiding its Vision for Agriculture and Food, published on February 19, 2025. However, translating this vision into reality requires navigating complex trade-offs.

The workshop planned and implemented by Euragri collaborating with the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management explored these critical issues. Speakers provided key insights into the Strategic Dialogue's recommendations and the Commission's vision for the sector. Research, policy, and farming experts shared their perspectives on turning ambition into action.

**Peter Strohschneider** highlighted the promising outcomes of the Strategic Dialogue. In particular, the degree of consensus achieved and the critical challenges that were identified. His insights underscored the importance of the Commission's integrated vision for agri-food as a strong foundation for future action. A key theme that emerged was moving away from "lose-lose" dynamics, where all parties experience adverse outcomes, towards a "win-win" paradigm. Achieving this vision calls for a renewed approach to sustainability that equally considers economic, environmental, and social factors, with particular attention to the fair allocation of transition-related burdens across the value chain.

There is a need for urgency and openness to the complexities involved. Achieving our shared objectives will demand a systemic approach, the immediate development of a common language, and enhanced knowledge-sharing across farmers, policymakers, researchers, and the broader European community, moving discussions beyond existing tension lines.

**Catherine Geslain-Laneelle**, outlined the Strategic Dialogue's unique and innovative approach to driving change in Europe. She emphasised that the Dialogue's high-level stakeholder engagement marks the beginning of a cultural shift that moves beyond the previously polarised, business-as-usual mindset toward meaningful, transformational change. A key aspect of this transformation is the new culture of dialogue and communication between all value chain stakeholders introduced in the strategic dialogue process. For the first time, stakeholders from across the entire value chain are actively and equally involved in shaping strategic priorities. The spirit of dialogue is continued through stakeholder representation in the European Agriculture and Food Council, The newly agreed Commission Vision for Agriculture and Food, developed and supported by over 20 Commission Directorates, embodies the core recommendations of the Dialogue. Key priorities include a bottom-up approach, improved food chain functioning, defining livestock's future role, and shaping the new CAP programme. Although work on the CAP is progressing, its full implementation is awaiting clarity on the availability of financial resources. The process will preserve the Dialogue's collaborative spirit, fostering continued communication within and among the various groups, including the Commission, policymakers, farmers, and broader stakeholder groups. Catherine acknowledged that implementation will be challenging, balancing the urgency of needed reform with the complexities of a rapidly evolving global ecosystem and society.

**Marianne Penker** described how the complexities of the EU agriculture and food systems have increased since the 1950s, when the post-war focus was on affordable food for all, to the more complex and interrelated challenges of delivering on the visions and targets of EU policy documents, including Farm to Fork, Vision 2024, and the EU Green Deal. Approaches were identified to address the rising tensions associated with the inability to feed the populations with a healthy diet, produce equal and equitable benefits, and protect the climate and the planet's natural capital. „Managing the balance“ instead of „choosing the better“ was underlined as a promising approach to managing paradoxical tensions in the agri-food system.

**Thomas Neudorfer** spoke about the Austrian CAP Strategic Plan that has successfully addressed the current CAP objectives, focusing on increasing added value and an integrated rural community approach with over 100 interventions. The benefits to the country's natural capital and society were emphasised. The steps in translating the vision to practice were built on integrated community ownership, evidence-based data, and a step-by-step approach in an adequately funded, fully integrated programme.

**Thomas Duffy** emphasised that farmers' responses to the transformational changes required will happen in decades rather than years. The speed of policy changes in the last decade has contributed to uncertainty for farmers and has not been helped by the crisis of a rapidly ageing farming population. The transformational changes required of farmers cannot be delivered without the immediate implementation of strategies to address this critical obstruction. A stable CAP is needed to support the delivery of win-win scenarios, particularly compensating those who lose out in required tradeoffs.

## Discussion

Finding solutions that everyone benefits from is critical as the starting point for discussions. However, this is not always possible due to the complexity of the issues. Instead, a shared understanding and ownership of the challenges and necessary changes to achieve the transition to the new vision. There was agreement on the need to start making changes **now**, with the Strategic Dialogue paving the way.

The rules governing our food systems are crucial for driving change. While there are growing calls for simplification, the question remains: will less regulation truly deliver the desired outcomes? How can a long-established support system be restructured to align with the overarching goals of sustainability, fairness, competitiveness, and simplicity? And what scenarios will ensure everyone wins?

A transition to sustainable and fair food systems requires a paradigm shift from the traditional economic model to a more sustainable, circular one. A new approach will also be needed to address the uncertainty of scientific disagreement on contentious issues. Science has often been a brake rather than a catalyst for the required transitions.

Trends like excessive consumption, which contribute to obesity and waste, must shift to more sustainable approaches where sufficiency is the norm. The sector's existing business model requires a transformation in its focus on customers, competition and market infrastructure. Some of the essential components for transformation are / were seen in:

- Gathering more evidence, improving the science-policy relationship, and finding consensus based on facts.
- Using inclusive communication and negotiation with all stakeholders involved.
- Rebuilding common values to update the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



- Effective public policies and targeted spending must focus on specific goals required to achieve the Commission's vision for the agri-food sector.

Some additional reflections included:

- A persistent structural challenge remains as the shift toward a sustainable and equitable food system continues to be framed and structurally embedded as the primary responsibility of the agricultural sector, rather than being approached as a collective responsibility across the entire value chain.
- Country-level and farmer perspectives are crucial in the step-by-step implementation required with long-term engagement and budget stability to make the vision practical and sustainable.