



COVID-19 Impact on the Food Supply Chain

European Food Forum

Exchange of views

3 April 2020 – Video conference

These notes are summarizing the European Food Forum members' exchange of views on the impact of COVID-19 on the Food Supply Chain, held in a video conference on April 3rd, 2020 and further written contributions.

It is important to underline that the non-partisan, multidisciplinary and knowledge-based nature of the European Food Forum deliberations will make it worthwhile to share relevant outcomes with the outside world.

This document is not a position of EFF members, it only outlines ideas and proposed guidelines shared during the meeting. As per Chatham House rules this document will share the content of the meeting, but will not share who attended the meeting nor identify what a specific individual said.

In less than three months, the year 2020 has thrown us into a new world, full of unknowns, and to which we have to adapt rapidly.

We have suddenly regained consciousness of our fragile humankind and of the importance of vital products.

Without any doubt, health is a priority.

Nevertheless, there is another “vital” sector whose priority in European policies is sometimes less clear: Food.

Eating and drinking are vital needs that must be satisfied and access to sustainable food should not be a privilege for trendy citizens but a fundamental right for every European.

Some governments call for citizen's mobilization to encourage unemployed workers to join the agricultural army in order to deal with lack of specialized or simple labor force in agri-food sectors, which are essential to ensure that food supply covers consumers' needs.

This crisis is leading to workforce scarcity due to movement restrictions and quarantines within and outside EU borders. There is lack of coordination between Member States on the procedures ensuring transport of agri-food products. All sectors have experienced a sudden disappearance of important agricultural outlets following the closure of hotels and restaurants and other public places, and there are obstacles to ensure food solidarity towards disadvantaged people. Although day-to-day solutions are found, food waste has never been so high in Europe.

During the exchange of views EFF members raised the following ideas:

- * We should do whatever is needed to ensure that the food supply chain, including sub sectors in the food industry, are properly functioning;
- * We need to ensure that people have access to sustainable, safe and nutritious food;
- * We need to better understand the difficulties for workforce along the entire food chain (producers, transport, food industry, food retail etc.) and their risk/ health exposure;
- * We need to assure protective equipment for supply chain workers and transport personnel (this is important as soon as the medical workers are cared for);
- * We have to support farmers and make them feel secure and keep producing;
- * We need to safeguard the global trade and the free movement of food;
- * To overcome the situation, we need to understand that the change of the citizen's way of life is probable in the sense that the population will at first avoid gatherings and will then change their buying and consuming habits;
- * There is a need to preserve the functioning of the internal market and make this a priority once we get out of the crisis;
- * This includes also the need to resolve bottlenecks remaining at some borders in spite of the introduction of Green lanes which have considerably improved the situation;
- * The inclusion of feed and supply chain inputs into the essential goods definition by member states for the Green Lanes requires a lot more to keep food supply chain going than to let perishable food passing (grains, meals, seeds, vitamins and minerals, packaging, etc.);
- * If there is a positive side of the pandemic, it is the fact that people finally realize the importance of food security and start praising the work of farmers and agri-food workers, but also of workers in retail and wholesale as well as food processors and industry. All of them are working together along the supply chain to ensure the food supply of citizens;

- * The aquaculture and fisheries are important contributors to the local and global food supply but are usually not included in the debate as essential food suppliers. It is mainly the agriculture farmers that are highlighted, however also the primary producers in the marine sector are vulnerable in this situation and they are essential for our food supply (particularly healthy food supply). It is important that various food forums, regulatory authorities and policy makers include all food sectors in the debate to find the best solutions;
- * In order to prevent the difficulties derived from other future sanitary crisis, a possible proposal would be the introduction of an European Territorial Food Pact that would address food security and food safety on a comprehensive way by reinforcing the collaboration of all administrations and stakeholders at local, regional, national and EU level;
- * As recognized by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), there is no evidence that food is a vector for transmission of Coronavirus.[1] The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has confirmed, on the contrary, that the virus spreads from person to person.[2] EFSA continues to closely monitor the situation alongside the scientific community and authorities around the world.

At the end of the COVID-19 crisis, this renewed cooperation would allow us to mitigate the agricultural or food production losses linked to workforce or outlets shortages and to support the economic recovery and the benefit of the citizens and consumers.

Because Europe has always evolved after crises, we should take advantage of the current one to implement a stronger food system for all of us.



About the European Food Forum

European Food Forum is a newly independent, politically-led, non-partisan forum, created by elected Members of the European Parliament last November 2019 to drive policy debate on sustainable food system transformation among legislators, policymakers, food supply chain actors, civil society organizations and public institutions in line with the new EU Farm to Fork strategy for sustainable food.

The European Food Forum has 55 Members of which 27 MEPs who represent 5 European Parliament political groups and come from 14 Member States; all the stakeholders from the food supply chain, Consumer Organizations, Universities and National Research Agencies.

EFF's mission is to provide a forward-looking, multi-stakeholder platform that supports the development of EU policies that respond to the political, economic and social challenges that come with the need to transform our food systems in the EU and globally looking at all aspects such as agriculture, fisheries, food quality and safety, consumer protection, environment, sustainability, manufacturing, research and innovation and economic growth.

The European Food Forum does not itself take positions on specific policy issues. All the debates are in-camera in Chatham house rules.

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