



Brussels, 3 October 2014

**Subject: Publication of the Communication on Building a Sustainable European Food System**

Dear President José Manuel Barroso,

Dear Secretary-General Catherine Day,

Dear Commissioners Janez Potočnik, Dacian Cioloș and Tonio Borg,

We are writing to you to request the publication of the Communication entitled "Building a Sustainable European Food System", which has again been delayed for the past few months. As you are aware, the European Commission announced that this valuable Communication would be published by the end of 2013 or early 2014.<sup>1</sup> The Commission has not only invested a lot of resources in creating this important document, it also held a very successful public consultation last year, and the final Communication was agreed by three Commissioners (DG AGRI, DG ENVI and DG SANCO) in April.

This Communication is a wake-up call to the European Union to address food waste, which is an economical, ecological, social and ethical insult to what the EU stands for. It is unrealistic to believe that addressing food waste and sustainable food systems would be a reason for citizens to shun the European Union. On the contrary it would create more trust that the right measures are being taken for the common good of European citizens and the environment.

Therefore, we are urgently requesting the publication of this important piece of work, which would serve to provide European policymakers and legislators with the necessary 'food for thought'. Scientific analyses cited by the European Commission, for example, the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) report,<sup>2</sup> produced by European experts, show that the Communication is not only relevant to address the issue of food waste. This is a particularly pertinent document because it looks at the whole food system, and the many aspects of sustainable food, that could guide the EU to move forward and secure the sustainable production and consumption of food in Europe in the coming years.

As the food sector is one of the major contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, it is crucial that the European Commission has a clear strategy on sustainable food production and consumption

in order to mitigate climate change. With recent reports citing that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have grown at its fastest rate in three decades,<sup>3</sup> it is clear that we must act now.

Agriculture and food consumption, particularly animal products, have been identified by United Nations agencies and numerous academic studies as one of the most important drivers of environmental pressures, especially habitat change, climate change, water use and air pollution.<sup>4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11</sup>

We hope that this Communication will be a first step towards tackling the many aspects of sustainable food and developing a truly holistic system, which also considers the growing body of evidence pointing to the damage to the environment and human health caused by current levels of meat and dairy consumption, as well as the need to reduce levels to meet future climate goals.<sup>12,13</sup> We believe it is crucial that the European Commission outlines coherent policy measures to tackle this issue, including information campaigns to guide the public on what constitutes a sustainable diet, which must include reducing consumption of animal-based foods and increasing that of plant-based foods. It should additionally include important social goals, such as higher animal welfare products.

As elected representatives of the citizens of the European Union, it is our duty to the electorate to seek the best policies to protect the health and environment of our citizens during our mandates in the European Parliament. Indeed, it is clear that unhealthy diets pose huge financial risks for public health systems in European Member States.<sup>14</sup>

The European Commission should not shy away from sustainable food policies, out of fear of a Eurosceptic backlash. Sustainable (food) policies are what the people want. An overwhelming majority of European citizens, 95 percent, recently said in a Eurobarometer poll that protecting the environment was personally important to them, over half of Europeans think the EU is not doing enough to protect the environment, and almost one quarter are particularly concerned by our consumption habits.<sup>15</sup> Along with the growing popularity of meat reduction campaigns with both the public and governments such as Meat Free Monday,<sup>16</sup> when a recent Guardian poll asked 'Would you reduce your meat consumption to help fight climate change?', a full 87 percent of people answered 'Yes.'<sup>17</sup> It is clear that the EU public is increasingly aware of how their consumption choices affect the environment.

The publication of the Communication on Building a Sustainable European Food System would represent a huge, forward-thinking step by the European Commission. We hope that it will not be delayed any further.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission. Sustainable Food. <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/food.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Freibauer A et al. 2011. Sustainable food consumption and production in a resource-constrained world. European Commission – Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) [http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/pdf/scar\\_feg3\\_final\\_report\\_01\\_02\\_2011.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/pdf/scar_feg3_final_report_01_02_2011.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> World Meteorological Organization: The State of Greenhouse Gases in the Atmosphere Based on Global Observations through 2013. [https://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/press\\_releases/documents/1002\\_GHG\\_Bulletin.pdf](https://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/press_releases/documents/1002_GHG_Bulletin.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> UNEP (2010) Assessing the Environmental Impacts of Consumption and Production: Priority Products and Materials, A Report of the Working Group on the Environmental Impacts of Products and Materials to the International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management. Hertwich, E., van der Voet, E., Suh, S., Tukker, A, Huijbregts M., Kazmierczyk, P., Lenzen, M., McNeely, J., Moriguchi, Y. [http://www.unep.org/resourcepanel/portals/24102/PDFs/PriorityProductsAndMaterials\\_Summary\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unep.org/resourcepanel/portals/24102/PDFs/PriorityProductsAndMaterials_Summary_EN.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Steinfeld H, Gerber P, Wassenaar T, Castel V, Rosales M, and de Haan C. 2006. Livestock’s long shadow: environmental issues and options. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/a0701e/a0701e.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Gerber, P.J., Steinfeld, H., Henderson, B., Mottet, A., Opio, C., Dijkman, J., Falcucci, A. & Tempio, G. 2013. Tackling climate change through livestock – A global assessment of emissions and mitigation opportunities. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3437e/i3437e.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Pelletier N and Tyedmers P. 2010. Forecasting potential global environmental costs of livestock production 2000–2050. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 107(43):18371–18374. <http://www.pnas.org/content/107/43/18371.full.pdf+html>

<sup>8</sup> Eshel G, Shepon A, Makov T, and Ron Milo. 2014. Land, irrigation water, greenhouse gas, and reactive nitrogen burdens of meat, eggs, and dairy production in the United States. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 111(33):11996–12001 <http://www.pnas.org/content/111/33/11996.full.pdf+html>

<sup>9</sup> Mekonnen M M and Hoekstra A Y. 2012. A Global Assessment of the Water Footprint of Farm Animal Products. Department of Water Engineering and Management. The Netherlands. <http://www.waterfootprint.org/Reports/Mekonnen-Hoekstra-2012-WaterFootprintFarmAnimalProducts.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Weiss F and Leip A. 2012. Greenhouse gas emissions from the EU livestock sector: A life cycle assessment carried out with the CAPRI model. Joint Research Centre, Institute for Environment and Sustainability (IES), Climate Change and Air Quality Unit. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167880911004415>

<sup>11</sup> Westhoek H, Lesschen B J P, Rooda T, Wagener S, De Marco A, Murphy-Bokernd D, Leip A, van Grinsvena H, Suttong M A, Oenema O. 2014. Food choices, health and environment: Effects of cutting Europe’s meat and dairy intake <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378014000338>

<sup>12</sup> Pelletier N and Tyedmers P. 2010. Forecasting potential global environmental costs of livestock production 2000–2050. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 107(43):18371–18374. <http://www.pnas.org/content/107/43/18371.full.pdf+html>

<sup>13</sup> Bajželj B et al. 2014. Importance of food-demand management for climate mitigation. Nature Climate Change. <http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nclimate2353.html>

<sup>14</sup> von Lengerke T and Krauth C. 2011. Economic costs of adult obesity: a review of recent European studies with a focus on subgroup-specific costs. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21592692>

<sup>15</sup> Special Eurobarometer 416. Attitudes of European Citizens towards the Environment [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_416\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_416_en.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Meat Free Mondays joint pledge with the UK’s Minister for Energy and Climate <http://pledge.meatfreemondays.com/>

<sup>17</sup> The Guardian. Poll: Would you reduce meat consumption to help fight climate change? <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/poll/2014/sep/01/reduce-meat-consumption-climate-change-poll>