



# BRAVE NEW FOOD WORLD

MANIFESTO REPORT | OCTOBER 2019  
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At the dawn of a new legislative term, Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen seems determined to increase the ambition on a new integrated food strategy that will involve the entire food supply chain, from farm soils to supermarket shelves.

Much has been achieved so far to make the whole EU food system more sustainable, not only on the side of food producers but also taking into account processors, distributors and retailers.

Launching a holistic new food strategy could be a chance to finally address some longstanding issues such as improving food traceability to prevent food frauds or a wider application of the circular economy concept to the production, processing and purchase of foodstuffs.



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# Co-ops show that other side of the food chain can be 'greened' too

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By Gerardo Fortuna | EURACTIV.com



Containers for raw food and liquids can help reduce waste and plastic packaging in the retailing sector. [SHUTTERSTOCK]

Focusing the debate over the new EU food policy only on greening agricultural production may detract from the other side of the food chain which has the potential to become more sustainable, as the experience of retailing co-operatives shows.

The new Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy for sustainable food announced by President-elect Ursula von der

Leyen will cover every step in the food supply chain, from production to consumption, feeding into the EU circular economy objectives.

In a truly integrated common food policy, no component across the entire food chain should be ignored or left out, as it won't involve only low-carbon food production but also food safety, animal and plant health and consumer information.

This is not entirely new and certain

sectors are already developing best practices in this regard, sometimes anticipating topics now high on the EU policy agenda.

It is the case for consumer co-operatives or co-ops, whose economic model has its roots in the British Co-operative movement of the 19th century but which can give us a taste of what the retailing sector will look

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like in the future.

The consumer co-operative model is not an old-fashioned concept, as such retailers are widespread throughout Europe with a variety of store networks that ranges from hypermarkets to local outlets.

Despite the fact the model dates from long ago, it has recently tended to be confused with the newer concept of the sharing economy.

"But it is fundamentally different," explained Juhani Ilmola, director of consumer co-op S-Group with a market presence of 46% in Finland food retail and a turnover of €11.5 billion in 2018.

"Whilst in a co-operative enterprise its users are also its owners, in sharing platforms a few founders receive all added-value," he told EURACTIV, adding that in a co-operative, members have direct control over the processes and the goals of the enterprise.

## PIONEERING THE CHANGE

Traceability and the implementation of the circular economy's main principles in food supply are where co-ops already started working in line with EU ambition.

EURACTIV spoke with Maura Latini, Director-General of Coop Italia which counts 8 million members and have a 20% market share in the Italian retailing market, about these best practices.

She mentioned that, in the early 2000s, Coop Italy was the first Italian retailer to certify the origin and traceability of some supply chains considered at food fraud risk, like oil, tomato sauce, eggs and milk.

"Since October 2013, considering the greater importance of online services, Coop has launched a website where consumers can verify, for each product, the origin of the main ingredients of products," Latini added

But the potential of innovation does not stop at digital traceability. "Coop Italy has not only pioneered organic and fairtrade products but also reduced the use of chemicals and the consumption of natural resources thanks to the application of new technologies," she added.

In Wojciechowski's mission letter, von der Leyen explicitly asked the incoming Agriculture Commissioner to pay particular attention to boosting EU organic production, while the request to Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides was to reduce of pesticide use.

New challenges for retailers also come from the rising threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which was listed by John F. Ryan, Director of the Unit Public Health at DG Sante, as a top priority in Kyriakides' mandate together with the EU cancer plan.

"We are strongly involved in raising animal welfare standards in all its meat supply chains, which is also a crucial step to foster a reduced and responsible use of antimicrobials which is urgently needed in the fight against AMR," she concluded.

## LACK OF EU FRAMEWORK

In September, Polish MEP Leszek Miller filed a written question to the Commission asking to pay particular attention to the development of cooperatives and other forms of social enterprise in the member states.

Contacted by EURACTIV, he said that within the EU there is a huge variety of national laws on cooperatives. "This significantly hinders the smooth functioning of social enterprises within the EU Single Market," he said.

According to him, the Commission should take "bold and more far-reaching legislative measures" that would help to harmonise national rules both in terms of definition and understanding of the broad concept of social enterprise.

In 2013 a Working Group of Cooperatives was set out by the Commission to assess the specific needs of cooperative enterprises, while discussions with cooperative continue in the frame of the expert group on social economy and social enterprises (GECEs).

Upon the recommendations of the Working Group, two pilot projects are being implemented and a new call for proposal for a second wave of projects has been launched and is currently under evaluation, the European Commission informed EURACTIV.

"Another important aspect, that in my opinion that EU legislation would help to achieve is the improvement of the social enterprises access to finance and EU funding, as well strengthening the social economy's financial ecosystem," Miller added.

According to Russel Gill, head of Co-operative & Local Engagement at the UK Co-operative Group, co-ops don't have or have limited access to venture capital on the capital markets, as they primarily depend on their own member capital as well as a member and bank loan finance, in order to satisfy the specific member needs.

"Also, they are often confronted with poor knowledge about their business model by private investors," he added.

Their structural difference, combined with strict governance rules, make them less attractive to financial investors, resulting in greater difficulties to access capital. "An educational, legislative and financial change needs in order for co-operatives to thrive," Gill said.

# MEPs have high hopes for the EU's new food policy

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By Gerardo Fortuna | EURACTIV.com reporting from Strasbourg



Plenary session - Votes

**M**EPs expect an ambitious Commission proposal on the new EU long-term and integrated food policy that ensures safe, quality and affordable foodstuffs to all European citizens but without harming actors in the food supply chain.

There is much curiosity among European Parliament lawmakers over the Farm to Fork (F2F) policy, described in incoming Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's mission letters as a strategy for sustainable food that will cover every step in the food chain from production to consumption.

The strategy will be coordinated by the Commission's top vice-president, Frans Timmermans, and will involve Commissioner-designate Stella Kyriakides for health and food safety aspects, as well as Poland's Janusz Wojciechowski and Lithuania's youthful Virginijus Sinkevičius for agriculture and seafood products.

However, none of the four Commissioners offered up many details during their Parliament hearings. In Strasbourg, EURACTIV asked MEPs which aspect they would like to focus on during the legislative procedure.

Socialist MEP Isabel Carvalhais,

who had the chance to grill Wojciechowski earlier this month, said she would have appreciated knowing more about his long term vision for rural areas and how this vision will be integrated into the F2F strategy.

"Quite frankly, I still hope he may actually come out with more information on this," the Portuguese lawmaker said, adding that contents of the policy should be on a par with the ambition the catchy definition of the policy entails.

Christian-democrat MEP Daniel Buda, a vice-president

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of the Parliament's Agriculture (AGRI) committee, also expects the Commissioner candidates involved to come up with a certain vision about the way to implement the strategy and on the impact for farmers and the food-producing sectors.

He also recalled that Stella Kyriakides underlined several times in her hearing that the new strategy will be embedded in the EU Green Deal, which is supposed to be the flagship policy of von der Leyen's Commission.

The other vice-president of the AGRI Committee, Finnish liberal Elsi Katainen, said she was more pleased that the idea of a long-term food strategy was raised rather than she was disappointed by the lack of details at the current stage.

## SAFE AND HEALTHY FOOD

Despite being a newcomer, French MEP Pierre Karleskind had a lightning start in the Parliament, being appointed as vice-chair at the Internal Market Committee and becoming Renew Europe's coordinator at the Fisheries Committee.

"Ensuring good quality food for Europeans has been neglected by the European Commission for too long. We wait for it to be again at the top of the agenda," he told EURACTIV.

As regards seafood, he said the F2F strategy should aim at improving tractability on imported fisheries and aquaculture products to make sure they comply with environmental, social and sanitary EU standards.

Karleskind, who's an oceanographer with a strong background in maritime affairs, added that the new food policy must ensure that European fisheries and aquaculture products are properly valorised with a clear and efficient labelling.

"Consumer protection must be our primary focus and improving traceability and labelling is key to achieve that," he concluded.

Green MEP Sarah Wiener might be a fresh face in Strasbourg, but she is a famous TV chef in Austria.

Speaking on the sidelines of October's plenary, she pointed out that the nutritional aspect is quite important, as the F2F should promote healthy and sustainable diets for all.

She expects the strategy will ensure access to land for sustainable food production, but also rebuild climate-resilient and healthy agroecosystems based on agroecology.

A comprehensive EU-strategy which supports the transition to sustainable food systems should also build fairer, shorter and transparent supply chains and put trade in the service of sustainable development, she said.

## KEEP AN EYE ON FARMERS

The focus on the environmental sustainability of the food chain was overall welcomed by MEPs. "But we cannot have the farmers as the weak link of this integrated strategy," said socialist Carvalhais.

According to her, farmers and particularly smallholders must be actively acknowledged for their important role, and the public good they provide needs to be a strong pillar of this strategy.

The experienced lawmaker Buda was on the same page, pointing out that reaching the new strategy's objectives should not be detrimental for any of the actors involved.

"As a member in AGRI committee, my priority will focus on defending farmers' position in the strategy," he said, adding that he had already proposed an own-initiative report on this matter.

In order to fine-tune the EU's ambitious sustainable objectives, it is necessary to start from the bottom, ensuring that farmers receive guidelines and support to produce food at high standards with less impact on the environment, he concluded.

Renew Europe's Katainen put the focus on building a sustainable – and profitable – food system as a whole, including forestry and bio-circular economy.

"Food production and food security must be at the core of all this, which is possible only if production is profitable," she said.



## INFOGRAPHIC / PROMOTED CONTENT

# Consumer co-operatives: A retail force for a prosper & sustainable Europe

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By Euro Coop



For 175 years, co-operatives have successfully used commercial efforts to generate social value. Yet, their model is not sufficiently promoted. The Single Market & local communities will benefit if this changes.

Established in 1957, Euro Coop is the first EU-level co-operative representation. In the last 60 years, they have become a trusted partner of the European Institutions. Today, they represent 20 national consumer co-operative organisations engaged in retail.

For more information, please visit:  
[www.eurocoop.coop](http://www.eurocoop.coop)





## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



### IMPLEMENT A TRULY CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Consumer Co-operatives were pioneers in fostering sustainability. We have always taken concrete actions to counter and transform waste, while rethinking current production & consumption patterns. In order to truly achieve a circular economy, we deem the following essential:

- ✓ Championing bold & urgent action to tackle climate change;
- ✓ Implementing plastics optimisation & recycling;
- ✓ Continuously improving the fight against food waste;
- ✓ Acting on hazardous chemicals;
- ✓ Promoting & defending the need for sustainable food production & consumption;
- ✓ Tackling human rights issues along the food supply chain.



## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



### FOSTER A FAIR RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

The retail sector is very diverse & specificities need to be acknowledged. Consumer co-ops pride themselves with placing the consumer, not profit maximisation, at the heart of their business. The success of the Single Market depends on policy-makers' efforts of:

- ✓ Guaranteeing a level-playing field for all business models;
- ✓ Advocating for balanced & fair supply chain relations & ensuring the UTP Directive does not harm consumers;
- ✓ Addressing the limitations caused by ongoing territorial supply constraints;
- ✓ Eliminating the unjust tax advantages of online retail over offline;
- ✓ Awarding businesses for SDGs commitments.







## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



### ATTAIN COOP-FRIENDLY POLICIES

*For 175 years, co-operatives have successfully used commercial efforts to generate social value. Yet, our model is not sufficiently promoted. The Single Market & local communities will benefit if this changes. We wish to advocate future MEPs for:*

- ✓ Maximising co-op's potential & contribution to Europe through appropriate policies;
- ✓ Working towards the inclusion of the co-operative model in national academic curricula;
- ✓ Establishing a co-operative policy space within the existing EU infrastructure;
- ✓ Reviving the Co-operative Roadmap;
- ✓ Making gender equality a reality through all EU policies.



Co-operative retailers  
engaging consumers  
for sustainable growth.



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