

eurocoop

European Community of Consumer Cooperatives

EU ELECTIONS

2024

# MANIFESTO

Consumer Co-ops for Fair and Resilient EU  
Food Systems



# Introduction

## EU Prepares for Future Challenges

We anticipate new challenges within the next five years which will require the EU to demonstrate decisive action and visionary leadership to strengthen our Union's resilience in a turbulent global context.

The European movement of consumer co-operatives is proud of its **180 years** of heritage characterised by unwavering commitment to consumer protection and societal and environmental sustainable development. Euro Coop members operate **94,000 points of sale** and their **e-commerce** daily, motivated to make a difference for their **30 million** consumer-members. Consumer co-operatives have demonstrated their **resilience** and **resolve**, especially in times of crisis and particularly in the last four turbulent years.

The vision and objectives of consumer co-operatives cannot be limited only to a succession of strategic responses to a changing world. The main reason for their resilience lies in their *raison d'être* which is to create a better world based on the **efficiency** of market laws, underpinned by the clear **responsibility** of every player – from consumer through producer to distributor. This is in line with the dual and balanced vision that for generations we have contributed to building a world where social progress, solidarity, and democracy are reconciled with **growth** and **prosperity**.

We ask that the EU takes into account at the highest level of its founding texts, that of the Treaties, the fourth paragraph of the Preamble of the 2004 Draft European Constitution, rejected in the Lisbon Treaty:

*“Europe offers the best chances of pursuing, with respect for the rights of each individual and with awareness of their responsibility towards future generations and the planet, the great adventure that makes it a privileged space of human hope”.*

It is high time for the EU to recognize that the rule of the **free market** and the lowest **price** cannot be the only forces to dictate its conditions. The facts and realities of our economic world, over many years and just as much through the most current challenges (economic sovereignty, autonomy, geo-political risks, etc.) show every day that consideration for our responsibilities must go hand in hand with the concern for market efficiency. **Consumer co-operatives are here to show that it works.**

We anticipate new challenges within the next five years which will require the EU to demonstrate decisive action and visionary leadership to strengthen our Union's resilience in a turbulent global context.

In this process, we are ready to support the European Parliament in safeguarding EU's citizens and local communities and the sustainability of the EU economy.

Our Manifesto presents **key policy recommendations** we deem essential to realise these objectives.

## The Context: A Cascade of Challenges

Our members are doing their utmost to protect consumers' purchasing power despite the increasing costs of food and energy. Sadly, more action by businesses and policymakers is warranted as **food poverty** has increased to affect 20% of Europe's citizens since the pandemic.

Food production, too, requires urgent attention. In the past 15 years, we have lost 37% of family-owned farms which has accelerated the concentration of ownership by a few large industrial groups. With its **intensive farming practices, industrial agriculture** is the main driver for biodiversity and habitat loss, chemical pollution and GHG emissions throughout the food system.

This exacerbates **climate change**, which evidence proves increases the costs of living and exposes the most vulnerable countries and groups in society. With other factors further shrinking family income and purchasing power, **urgent** socio-economic measures are necessary. Those are some of the reasons making it **imperative** that the EU embrace a sustainable and fair food system and ensure bold and urgent actions.



## The Risk: Sustainability Is Delayed

The increasing socio-economic challenges since 2019 have daunted EU's sustainability ambitions. These forces are likely to amplify in the next mandate, thereby delaying even further the process of ensuring the greening of the food system. Currently, half of EU Member-States' governments have questioned sustainability developments at EU level. Should this carry over to the next EU Parliament, it is unlikely that the **urgently** needed legislative actions would be taken.

Moreover, any restructuring of the European Parliament Committees **risks** relinquishing ENVI Committee's lead on food sustainability aspects thereby **compromising** efforts towards greening the food systems, habitat and biodiversity restoration, or tackling climate change.

**Consumer co-ops take the lead in sustainability, going above and beyond legal obligations to drive forward the transition towards a greener economy.**



## Supporting Frontrunners

Consumer co-operatives are among the economic operators who advance their sustainability operations beyond legal requirements, assuming a **frontrunner** position and leading the **transition**. However, if the regulatory and policy framework does not discourage inaction, unsustainable business would retain a competitive advantage due to their lower costs, cheaper prices and savings from investments never made. Whilst sustainability is laudable, it must be rewarded economically and morally. Otherwise, those willing to change are penalized on the market having spent money to anticipate the economic environment which is never established, thereby weakening the overall ambition to shift to greener economies.

The **policy recommendations** below are developed with the aim of facilitating a legislative and regulatory environment for greening the food system, protecting consumers and supporting responsible businesses in maximising their contribution to a **stronger Europe**.

# Our Policy Recommendations

## AGRI-FOOD

We deem it of paramount importance to maintain the sustainability commitment by:

### 01. Applying

a systemic approach with a **legislative framework for a sustainable food system** implementing the three pillars of sustainability.

### 02. Preserving

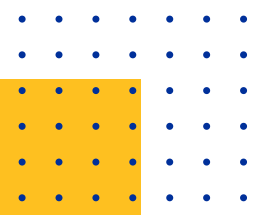
**consumer choice** and **protecting organic farming/products** by ensuring appropriate traceability and labelling of food products, including all products derived from GM technology.

### 03. Achieving

the highest level of **animal welfare standards** by adapting legislation to the latest scientific evidence.



# RETAIL



**Retailers are contributing to the green and digital transition where possible, so to maximise their contribution, we call for enabling policy, which would:**

## 01. Acknowledge

the **plurality of business models** when developing supporting measures, especially with regard to funding opportunities, taking into account that private investments are not a suitable option for co-operative and independent retailers.

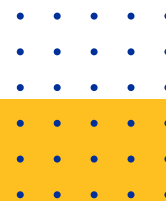
## 02. Ensure

channel neutrality, thereby enforcing equal responsibility between **offline** and **online**, especially trade platforms operating within the EU.

## 03. Safeguard

EU's competitiveness by maintaining *EU acquis* on **responsibilities** of economic operators along the value chain, thereby avoid holding retailers accountable for undertakings outside their authority.

# CONSUMERS



**We are businesses owned by our consumers, whose engagement is a fundamental requirement for the shift towards a fairer and more sustainable food system, therefore we appeal to the future EU Parliament to:**

## 01. Call on

the EU Commission to ensure Member-States reinforce control and compliance of food safety at production level in order to guarantee **consumer protection**.

## 02. Increase

consumer awareness by funding EU-wide public **campaigns** to support actions taken by the retail sector.

## 03. Ensure

that **data regulation** is uniform for all operators and across Member-States and uphold maximum enforcement of the security and protection rules.

# CO-OPS



**Co-operatives are vehicles for prosperity through sustainable development, inclusion, innovation and citizens' empowerment.**

**There are**

**3 million**

co-operatives on earth contributing to sustainable economic growth and stable, quality employment

Yet, they face additional barriers compared to traditional businesses, which is why we call for:

## **01. Establishing**

as a minimum, a level playing field that takes into account co-op specificities as regards access to capital and a distinct audit and reporting mechanism, among others.

## **02. Promoting**

co-operatives as sustainable enterprises by supporting the implementation of the [United Nations Resolution A/C.3/78/L.11](#).

## **03. Dedicating**

a space for co-operatives within the EU Parliament Social Economy Intergroup and the EU Commission Social Economy and Social Enterprises Sector.





## We shall continue working

towards achieving these objectives and in the process, stand ready to collaborate with the future Members of the European Parliament and the other EU Institutions.

We deem the following market mechanisms and policy principles fundamental in underpinning the above recommendations.

### Market Mechanisms

- **Guarantee** products' **true price** by internalising the negative social and environmental externalities, thereby creating a **level playing field** between sustainable and unsustainable food products, as advised by the EU Group of Chief Scientific Advisors (GCSA) in its paper "Towards Sustainable Food Consumption".
- **Establish EU rules to levy VAT** to incentivise the sustainability transition applied to domestic and imported goods, e.g. a border tax.
- **Reform State Aid** rules to allow Member-States to support sustainable production and consumption, particularly on local level and in line with the **Long-Term Vision for EU's Rural Areas**.

### Better Regulation

- **Strengthen policy coherence** to avoid contradictory consequences as recommended by GCSA, whilst ensuring thorough transparent **impact** and **scientific assessments**.
- **Co-design** future policy based on greater **accountability** and **transparency** of the input gathered during the public and stakeholder consultation processes.
- **Reconcile** new policy with the **EU Rural Action Plan** and **Rural Pact** to revitalise Europe's rural areas, whilst adhering to the principle of less **bureaucratic burden** for economic operators.



## We are the voice of consumer co-operatives in Europe

**20**

national members

**30 million**

consumer-members

**7.000**

co-op enterprises

**72 billion**

turnover (€)

We advocate for consumer co-operatives at the EU level, championing the interests and rights of consumers. We empower our members with comprehensive knowledge of EU affairs, facilitating internal collaboration and exchange, and creating a cohesive network.

As part of the global co-operative movement, we partner the International Co-operative Alliance and Cooperatives Europe to represent co-operatives within the EU policy process and at global level. We are devoted to supporting members in engaging youth and nurturing them into tomorrow's leaders, fostering a sustainable and inclusive future.



**eurocoop**

European Community of Consumer Cooperatives



Website

[eurocoop.coop](http://eurocoop.coop)



Email Address

[info@eurocoop.coop](mailto:info@eurocoop.coop)



Office Address

Rue du Trône 4, 1000 Bruxelles

