Direction for Sustainability of Food Systems according to ECVC

As reflected in our reply to the questionnaire of the Public consultation on the Sustainable Food Systems framework initiative (SFS Law), ECVC promotes the setting up of a myriad of diverse territorialised food systems across Europe. Food systems – which include the environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, activities and actors involving the production, processing, handling, preparation, storage, distribution, retailing, marketing, consumption and ultimately waste of food— must be agroecological, and promote what is small scale, local and traditional.

Food systems should be embedded in the reality of a defined territory, not based only on spatial limits, but also based on organic coherence, the carrying capacity of the land for biodiversity and ecosystems to be in an excellent state, and restored, when needed; based on the production and consumption of food that is accessible, nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; based on resilience, especially in the context of crisis; based on cultural coherence and accessibility; based on economic viability and finally; based on the realization of human rights overall, given their indivisibility and interrelatedness. In coherent food systems, people work with nature and not against. In order to reach these positive outcomes, changes in governance are needed within and across food systems, and their constituent elements, namely food supply chains, food environments, consumer behaviours1.

In the global and European context transition out of current unsustainable, unjust industrialized food systems are needed and the approach of agroecology to food systems is the best suited to achieve such transition.2 Peasant Agroecology is inherently not only a way of producing food but constitutes a movement for change, encompassing both socio-economic and socio-political dimensions, and is a socially and environmentally sustainable way to feed the world.3 Peasant agroecology is not restricted to agriculture but consists on a transition for our society that is built upon collective rights, customs and laws acknowledging farmers and communities rights to self-determination and autonomy4.

Given the current challenges that the EU is facing right now, the reterritorialization of livestock breeding across the EU is one of the crucial part of the sustainable agroecological food systems, considering a protein transition as a stumbling block of the future of the EU food system.

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1 HLPE 2017; Nutrition and food systems. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security.
4 In depth information and example in: https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Agroecology_EN.pdf
Complementarily to our answer to the questionnaire and our accompanying Policy Brief, ECVC wishes to also share some elements that would be paths towards the sustainability of EU food systems through the Sustainable Food System law initiative. We wish to define sustainability as an organic system of which criteria may need to change through periods of time. At farms level, the more sustainable an exploitation is, the better resilience it has, which obliges the EU to move in this direction. Sustainability in reality is extremely diverse and that the aspects mentioned here below do not reflect a given reality but rather a direction to take. It is an objective.

Given our experience in food systems and especially with a peasant agroecological approach, we believe that we are uniquely predisposed to share from experiences on the ground. Please see hereafter some elements that could be taken as directions for food systems sustainability criteria. They are separated in three traditional blocs of the sustainability reading grid: the environmental, social and economic aspects.

I – Environmental aspects

- **Agroecological agronomic systems:**
  - Generalisation of agroecological systems
    - Surface area under organic and agroecological agronomic technics
    - Numerous peer trainings and trainings on agroecological agronomic methods
  - Diverse landscapes
    - The presence of both animal production and plant productions
    - Diversity of production on a territory (according to what is relevant on the given territory)
  - Territorialisation of livestock
    - Animal production is adequate to the carrying capacity of the land, that is to say animal feed: fodder, grassland, cereals, etc.
    - Slaughtering on farms is promoted
  - Soil health and sustainability
    - The soil organic matter increased, desertification and land degradation are halted by farming practices, not impoverished

- **Not polluting and autonomous farms:**
  - No external chemical inputs
    - Minimal expenditures related to purchasing chemical pesticides or fertilisers
    - Bonus of the use of local organic fertilisers on the farm or locally
  - Low fuel requirements, low inputs
    - Minimal costs related to fuel
  - No need for heavy investments on infrastructures
    - Sobriety in terms of materials
    - Use of local materials

- **Thriving biodiversity**
• Enabling biodiversity and agro-biodiversity on-farms and rural areas
  ▪ Presence of diverse crop species cultivated on the territory, notably coming from local and peasant seed systems
  ▪ Absence of GMOs and any kind of new-breeding technics
  ▪ Presence of diverse wild and bred animal species on the territory
  ▪ Presence of diverse wild plants on the territory
  ▪ Presence of diverse habitats and quantity of natural edges, trees, etc.
  ▪ The agricultural species are adaptive to climate change and significantly contribute to its mitigation

- Climate change mitigation
  • Sobriety in water use
    ▪ Adequate use of water according to the resources
    ▪ Adequate choice of crops and productions
  • Greenhouse gas emissions
    ▪ Very limited fossil fuel use
    ▪ Avoid methanisation

II – Social aspects

- Democratic process
  • Democratic set-up and governance
    ▪ Food and agricultural councils are functioning at adequate territorial scale
    ▪ Full participation of farmers on the changes on their farms and the territory
  • Democratic assessment
    ▪ Food and agricultural councils are functioning at adequate territorial scale
    ▪ Farmers are provided the means to do their social, environmental and economic assessment on their farms and the territory

- Respect for human rights
  • Right to food
    ▪ Ensure access to adequate, affordable, nutritious, local and healthy food to all citizens, with a special focus to the most vulnerable ones
    ▪ No food aid is necessary in a given territory as the population should be ensured the means to afford the food they need and not depend on humanitarian aid.
  • Implementation of the UNDROP in laws 5
    ▪ Protection and promotion of peasants’ and agricultural and migrant workers’ rights and dignity
    ▪ Visible efforts to rebalance power relations in rural areas,
    ▪ Guarantees that States respect, protect and fulfil the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas

- Food and agriculture policy support local farmers and rural areas

5 UN (2018); United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
Food systems that enhance the liveliness of rural areas

- Cultural landscape values are integrated in a functional way in food systems and are well preserved
- Territories, especially rural areas, are provided with sufficient and accessible public services: health, education, transportation, social security, technical assistance, roads, postal and digital communications, civilian security forces

Generational turn-over at the farms is enabled

- Implementation and enforcement of land-related legal tools limiting speculation and facilitating the installation of young people
- Access to agricultural land for agroecological production is favorised for young people
- Access to means of production such as water, peasant seeds and peasant knowledge is guaranteed for youth
- Access to financial support is guaranteed for youth
- Low debt level of farmers and stakeholders of the food supply chain on the territory

Enabling short supply chains

- Presence of infrastructure and equipment enabling short supply chains across the territory
- Public procurement favorising local production

III – Economic aspects

- Regulation of the global market
  - Production adapted to territorial food needs
    - No incentive are provided to overproduction of dumping
    - Control of waste production
    - Control of the social and environmental quality of imported products
    - Planification of a way out of free trade agreements
    - Presence of food stock at different scales
  - One of the starting point is financial justice
    - A coherent system of taxation of the largest agri-food industries according to their economic size is implemented at national scales

- Profitability and autonomy of farms and supply chains are ensured
  - Decent remuneration along the supply chain, no unfair trading practices
    - Farmers sell above their cost of production
    - No excessive competition among EU regions, as well as between EU and third countries
  - Policies to encourage for financial and technological autonomy of farms
    - No excessive debt process
    - Production of stable and long-term employment

- Enabling local and resilient food market
  - Creation of local markets
- no local market desert
- regular supply points
- Regulation of competition between different territories (geographical indications)
  - Geographical labelling is specified

- **Contribution to consumption sobriety**
  - Consumers are not forced to choose less nutritious and less safe foods
    - Healthy, local and seasonal food is affordable to all
    - no incentives to the production of highly transformed products
    - Aggressive marketing, especially to youngest, are avoided
  - Attention to the value of food
    - Promotion and education on the consumption of local and healthy food