

Mr Christophe Hansen
Commissioner for Agriculture and
Food
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200

B-1049 Brussels

BEUC-X-2024-104

Brussels, 01/12/2024

Subject: The Consumer Mission Letter

Dear Commissioner Hansen,

On behalf of BEUC, The European Consumer Organisation, I wish to congratulate you on your recent appointment as European Commissioner for Agriculture and Food. Created in 1962, we represent 44 national consumer groups from 31 European countries. Thanks to our members' markets watchdog role, their product testing and daily contacts with consumers from across Europe, we can support you with evidence-based recommendations to ensure the European economy delivers to consumers.

We fully support your mission to develop a Vision for Agriculture and Food building on the recommendations from the Strategic Dialogue. We welcome that proposing a fit-for-purpose Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will be among your priorities, alongside promoting sustainability in agriculture, strengthening food sovereignty, and ensuring greater reciprocity in trade. We regret that presenting the Sustainable Food Systems law will not be part of your plans, yet were pleased to read in your written answers ahead of your European Parliament hearing that you intend to work on promoting the shift to more balanced diets. We believe healthier diets can improve Europeans' well-being, reduce diet-related diseases and associated healthcare costs, strengthen the EU protein autonomy and food security while contributing to meeting our climate objectives at the same time.

Consumer organisations can, and must be, part of this process. For you to be a true consumer champion, we believe that the below proposals should be part of your mission.

The current shortcomings

The EU food system is facing multiple interconnected challenges. It both suffers from and drives climate change, pollution and waste, loss of biodiversity, and diet-related non-

communicable diseases – amongst others. While [consumers are willing to change their food habits](#), many struggle to do so because the unhealthy, unsustainable choice is the [most available and advertised, and often the cheapest one too](#).

Even though inflation has fallen, food prices are at an all-time high. Affordability of food is a key concern for many households – and climate change is set to drive food prices further up. EU trade policy lacks sufficient alignment with sustainability goals, diverging from the expectations of farmers and consumers who believe food imports should meet EU standards, including those for animal welfare.

Consumers' proposals for your mission

Ensure the Vision for Agriculture & Food addresses food consumption

Working with the Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare, we urge you to ensure that the **Vision for Agriculture and Food** takes a food systems approach and spells out how the EU and Member States will make healthy and sustainable diets – where consumption of animal vs plant protein is rebalanced – the easy and affordable choice for all consumers, as recommended by the Strategic Dialogue. An EU-wide mandatory front-of-pack nutritional label should be part of the tools to facilitate healthier choices.

Promote a fair food supply chain

We call on you to take necessary action based on the forthcoming evidence on costs, margins, and prices from the EU Agri-Food Chain Observatory to ensure **a fair and well-functioning food supply chain for all**, from farmers to consumers. On the other hand, we recommend against extending provisions exempting sustainability agreements in the food chain from competition rules, as it risks harming consumers and creating space for greenwashing.

Ensure the CAP better serves farmers and consumers

Building upon the Strategic Dialogue's recommendations, we call on you to make the CAP more targeted, in line with a 'Public Money for Public Goods' approach. Moving away from the current ineffective model of area-based direct payments, the CAP must support farmers who need it most, and reward farmers who demonstrably engage in sustainable practices and respond to societal expectations about food and how it is produced.

Preserve food affordability and ensure the costs of the green transition are shared equitably

Market-based tools such as certification schemes can bring new opportunities to reward farmers for sustainability. Attention should be paid to the **risk of greenwashing**, though. As recommended by the Strategic Dialogue, it should be guaranteed that **European citizens are not paying twice for the transition**, a first time as taxpayers through the CAP and then again

as consumers through certified products with a price premium. If carbon pricing is considered for agriculture, compensation mechanisms should be in place for lower-income households.

Improve animal welfare

Almost [9 in 10 consumers support new laws](#) to improve the welfare of farmed animals in the EU. Working with the Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare, we call on you to **publish the proposals for a revision of the EU animal welfare legislation**, including a phasing out of cage systems, the introduction of a method of production labelling for animal source foods (modelled on the eggs label), and a requirement that EU rules should also apply to imported products.

Promote greater coherence between the EU trade policy and sustainability goals

Working with the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, we urge you to push for a **greater alignment of imports on EU food and farming standards**, as put forward by the Strategic Dialogue. New import requirements should be introduced in relevant EU legislation, such as on animal welfare, while existing ones, such as on the use of veterinary antimicrobials, should be effectively enforced.

The way forward

We are aware that you have a busy agenda but hope nonetheless that you will find the time to meet with us. We would be keen to discuss our proposals with you and would like to elaborate more on the expectations of European consumers towards European decision-makers.

Please count on our support if you need information about the consumer perspective in your policy area.

Please find enclosed our priorities for this new Commission.

I wish you a most successful mandate.

Yours sincerely,

Agustín Reyna
Director General

Encl.: *Europe, Consumers Count on You – BEUC priorities for the next European Commission (2024-2029)*