

TOWARDS
**SUSTAINABLE
FOOD
CONSUMPTION**



For Europe to achieve its health and sustainability goals, the way we produce and consume food has to change.

Our diets need to shift towards more plant-based ingredients, rich in vegetables, fruits, wholegrains and pulses. Our diets should be limited in red meat, processed meat, salt, added sugar, and high-fat animal products, while fish and seafood should be sourced from sustainably managed stocks.

Until now, the main policy focus in the EU has been on providing consumers with more information. But this is not enough. People choose food not just through rational reflection, but also based on many other factors: food availability, habits and routines, emotional and impulsive reactions, and their financial and social situation. So we should consider ways to unburden the consumer and make sustainable, healthy food an easy and affordable choice.

Pricing: There is clear evidence that direct measures are effective. This includes sugar taxes, meat taxes, and pricing products according to their environmental impacts, as well as lower taxes on healthy and sustainable alternatives.

Availability and visibility: The advertising of foods which are unhealthy or unsustainable if consumed regularly should be restricted. Voluntary codes of conduct in this area have not been effective.

Composition: Reducing unhealthy fat, sugar and salt content, and adding more plant-based alternatives, can be helpful — but only if these measures are mandatory and comprehensive.

Labelling: Labelling foods to show their health impacts has a low to moderate effect. Since the effectiveness of labels depends on consumer trust, we need clear, coherent standards to underpin them.

Social environment: Peer and social influence has been shown to be effective in improving healthy eating. Digital technologies offer further possibilities, but also pose huge risks of stimulating unhealthy and unsustainable consumption.

It will be critical to create an environment that allows all stakeholders to work towards the goal of healthy and sustainable food, following fair rules. This approach may also help to overcome opposition from those who profit from the current system, including some large private sector organisations with powerful voices.

If we involve everyone, we can dramatically improve our diets and make the European food system more sustainable.

About the report

SAPEA provides independent, interdisciplinary, and evidence-based scientific advice to the European Commission as part of the Scientific Advice Mechanism.

The Evidence Review Report on sustainable food consumption comprehensively examines the best evidence from the natural and biomedical sciences, as well as social, political and behavioural sciences. It is informed by a detailed systematic review of the evidence.

The report is written by a group of world-leading experts nominated by academies across Europe. It informs the Scientific Opinion of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors.

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About SAPEA

SAPEA brings together outstanding expertise from natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical, health, agricultural and social sciences, and the humanities.

We are part of the European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism. Together with the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, we provide independent advice to European Commissioners to support their decision-making.



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