

Statement

Youth Vision Summary - Eating City for EuVsVirus “Connecting Food dots - The future we want”



Eating City Position Paper
SP YEC 1

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Together to share a new vision of public food services

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Introduction

We are young advocates from a variety of countries and with different backgrounds, all with a connection to and genuine interest in food. The worldwide crisis we face today is a complex one, impacting on every aspect of life, including our food system. We believe that there is an immediate need for a paradigm shift and that everyone has a direct role to play in nursing our system back to health, acknowledging that food is at the centre of the problem and the solution. Food represents a transformative opportunity to affect positive change. In order to make our food cycle sustainable, we have identified three different and interconnected points of reflection: human labour, the role of technology and one of chefs.

Before the pandemic

The food we eat every day arrives on our plate through supply chains of which, too often, we do not know the nature. At the same time, millions of meals are daily served - and wasted - by the food supply chain, with a little conscience about the human labour that lies behind food, as well its seasonality and nutrition values. In fact, it is worthy to remember that we do not pay the real food price in relation to the labour value provided.

During the pandemic

At the European level, the problems that have always affected agricultural production and food transformation are even more severe this year due to the health crisis of the workforce.

The closure of the borders and companies has led to a shortage of seasonal laborers. Some of them come from Eastern Europe; others from the Southern Mediterranean basin, finding themselves to live in inhuman conditions of informal settlements in the European countryside. Every year, they work invisibly to produce and collect the food we eat. At this challenging time, they need regularization in order to be protected from the virus and from the abuse, exploitation, and harmful working conditions they experience in the fields. Consequently, the absence of this workforce needed to collect food is creating significant food loss before reaching the consumers' table.

As an immediate response to such a crisis within the food sector, a lot of raising awareness and solidarity actions have been put in place at several levels and from different actors. The European Union has taken urgent measures to help producers ensure the continuity of the supply of food. Some farms made themselves available in employing citizens to work in the fields, as well as chefs cooking delicious dishes for vulnerable people, hospitals and public food service. Last but not least, bottom-up campaigns have been raised to urge policy-makers to regularize the work status of seasonal workers - especially those coming from outside Europe - promoting the stipulation of seasonal employment contracts, which would guarantee hygienic-sanitary protection for the workers involved.

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Steps forwards

High readiness and prevention levels for next possible emergencies or pandemic are truly vital. Humankind has a great history of answering all of these unseen circumstances. This is the time to make our food system resilient to stand against any kind of shock.

This document is in fact a call to action. There is no doubt the response of governments and policy-makers is meant to face the rapid overcoming of the emergency phase in the short term. At the same time, nowadays we have the huge opportunity to introduce a vision of the future we want, trying to provide ideas and show concrete examples inspired by a mixture of old traditions and new solutions, endorsed by science, research and a sound use of disruptive technologies.

To this regard, technology has a key role to play, as an instrument able to help building the resilience of food system and support farmers in making new real and human synergies, over and above the quest for profit. Let's think, for instance, to how many online platforms can be created under the current emergency to relate demand to supply and put the digital devices at the service of the community. This would allow, on the one hand, to connect producers with people in need of work and, on the other, propose to eaters an alternative to reliance on supermarkets, by multiplying safer and shorter food supply chains and supporting small businesses that otherwise would risk to be overwhelmed by the burden of large retailers.

Or again, the role of chefs, who benefit from technology to be a crucial connection between farmers and consumers. As drivers of food systems change across all sectors, chefs and cooks are innovative activists by creating a culture of care in their kitchens and taking action to influence the decisions of policy-makers.

Thus, we deeply believe the combination between all these issues lays the foundation not only to forecast the circumstances before the time and behind the time, but also reframe the policy environment around a more holistic approach to integrated policies and mitigate the impact the pandemic has and will be having on our food system in the long term. For this reason, critical collaborations among all the stakeholders acting in the food sector are needed to connect the single dots combining the food system and re-evaluate the food chain as a whole.

To conclude, food systems are dynamic and evolving. With the current crisis, we are increasingly seeing how they are unsustainable on all counts. In this situation, no stakeholder can drive change alone. We need to act with the strength of synergy, adopting a holistic approach to sustainable food systems. We thus declare that all eaters must take full responsibility to consume, procure, produce, trade, and legislate to heal and sustain our food systems.

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