



**European Committee
of the Regions**

NAT-VI/026

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OPINION

Local and regional incentives to promote healthy and sustainable diets

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- considers it necessary to use public governance tools to promote healthy eating habits. These tools should be understood in the broad sense – they may include taxes, subsidies and legislation, but also spatial planning and infrastructure, labelling and reformulation;
- calls on the European Commission to propose, after examining existing food labelling systems, a mandatory, single European colour labelling system, in which colours would be applied on a basis of 100 g units, on the front of food packaging throughout the EU, providing consumers with clear information on the sugar, salt and fat content, encouraging healthier eating patterns. The CoR proposes that the nutritional labelling also be available online, in keeping with modern technological requirements;
- calls for specific standards to be introduced for products bearing nutritional and health claims on their labels regarding their sugar, salt and fat content. These specifications should be a prerequisite for any product to be able to make such a claim;
- points out to local authorities that they should prioritise, through public procurement in the food sector for all public bodies (including hospitals, nursing homes, retirement homes, kindergartens, schools, prisons and their canteens), to serve as role models by selling and providing healthy, local and seasonal foodstuffs that ensure sustainability and to make their contribution to Goal 12.7 – sustainable public procurement – of the 2030 Agenda. To achieve this goal, recommends favouring local producers in public procurement procedures in order to promote healthy diets and the development of the local economy;

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Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions - Local and regional incentives to promote healthy and sustainable diets

I. THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General comments

1. emphasises the importance of promoting a healthy and active lifestyle at EU level in order to complement national policies and to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Local and regional authorities must adopt and implement appropriate measures – where relevant with the support of common European programmes – that consistently reflect the population's needs;
2. recognises, in line with Articles 168 and 169 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the key role of the EU in health and consumer protection, by supporting Member States' policies and coordinating them in promoting healthy and sustainable food choices and tackling unfair commercial practices such as providing untruthful information to consumers, as enshrined in Goal 2 of the 2030 Agenda;
3. notes that poor health related to unhealthy eating habits and a lack of physical activity is a widespread problem and is costly for society. It is more cost-effective to promote healthy and sustainable dietary patterns, such as the Mediterranean diet, than to treat illnesses. The Committee attaches the utmost importance to seeking incentives to promote healthy and at the same time sustainable choices in line with the WHO recommendations¹, given that according to recent data, there has been a growing consumption over the last decades of foodstuffs rich in calories and saturated fat, together with processed foods with high levels of sugar, trans-fats and salt²;
4. highlights the increasing differences between social groups in terms of health. The incidence of health problems such as obesity is higher among low-skilled people, but ill health can be prevented, and the socio-economic dimension is crucial when developing measures on the basis of the needs and circumstances of different groups. Systematic, long-term measures in which a number of stakeholders work together in a coordinated way will establish the conditions for healthy and sustainable diets across the whole population;
5. considers it necessary to use public governance tools to promote healthy eating habits. These tools should be understood in the broad sense – they may include taxes, subsidies and legislation, but also spatial planning and infrastructure, labelling and reformulation;
6. points out that the objective of sustainable production and consumption is an integral and indivisible part of the Agenda 2030 process, which balances human health and wellbeing for all and the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental;

¹ [Healthy diet, Fact sheet No 394, updated September 2015](#)

² <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7694616/3-14102016-BP-EN.pdf>

7. points out that particular attention should be given to the quality of food products and services at all stages, from production to consumption (for example, agricultural production, fisheries, livestock farming, the processing industry, trade and a policy of promoting products to end-users – consumers), promoting sustainable production methods and healthy patterns of consumption, entirely in line with Goal 12 – sustainable consumption and production patterns – of the 2030 Agenda;
8. recognises that local and regional authorities provide a link between all the stakeholders (national, regional and local producers, retailers, consumers, businesses and educational institutions, e.g. schools, universities, etc.), and at the same time are situated closest to citizens, who frequently seek information from them on their rights as consumers;
9. notes that the Council has repeatedly called on the Commission to take action in the field of health, physical activity and nutrition;
10. calls on the Commission, in keeping with Goal 2 of the 2030 Agenda, to propose standards that have been applied by regions in order to reduce food waste, recognising that a large proportion of food produced in Europe is not used, and highlighting the importance of research programmes that set out to assess food policy in studies published on the subject³;
11. underlines that local food production can contribute to regional economic and social development, preventing rural depopulation and excessive demographic pressure on urban centres. Local and regional authorities can play a significant role in boosting sustainability by promoting short supply chains, planning effective food waste prevention schemes, conducting targeted public information campaigns to raise awareness, also involving the large-scale retail sector;
12. calls on local and regional authorities to coordinate local and regional measures aimed at promoting healthy and sustainable diets by introducing effective action plans on nutrition and physical activity, building on partnerships between the relevant levels of government and stakeholders;
13. considers that strategies can only be effective if they are supported by local measures and initiatives on their part, and therefore considers it desirable for regional and local bodies to be involved in EU activities, as they are closest to EU citizens;

Dietary education for children and meals in schools and nurseries

14. urges the promotion of local training and skills development for those in contact with children (nursery and school teachers, school meal inspectors, paediatricians and also bodies that play a significant role in dietary education for children) in order to promote healthy eating from the introduction of complementary foods onwards whilst enabling school environment and procurement measures which are conducive to health, in order to safeguard Goals 4.7 and 12.8 of the 2030 Agenda;

³

<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/public-procurement-food-health-technical-report.pdf>

15. considers it essential to include compulsory dietary education programmes in schools, at all levels, with a particular focus on nursery and primary schools, where the bases of dietary behaviour are formed. It is suggested that the programmes should include classes on theory, educational workshops and information visits on a range of subjects (e.g. cookery and food management workshops, and visits to places where food is produced, processed and packaged). The aim of the programmes will be to promote healthy eating habits, and, at the same time, guide the younger generation towards more sustainable dietary choices in the form of unprocessed fresh, local and seasonal products of plant origin;
16. considers it crucial to provide high-quality products in nurseries and schools (school menus, self-service meals, canteens, cafeterias and vending machines) – certified according to quality standards –, so that healthy, nutritious choices are available;
17. notes that local and regional authorities, which have direct control over educational institutions, can influence dietary practice in these institutions, thus improving the health of Europe’s youngest citizens;
18. welcomes the publication of *Public Procurement of Food for Health - technical report on the school setting*, and urges the Commission to translate it into the other official languages of the EU so that all local and regional authorities who purchase food and food-related services for schools use this support document to ensure compliance with public food procurement specifications;
19. welcomes the action taken by the Commission for children through schemes to provide EU-subsidised milk, fruit and vegetables in nurseries and schools;
20. the relevant public authorities in the different EU Member States should recognise and treat food and healthy and sustainable diets as part of the education mission;
21. supports amending the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) to tighten the rules on marketing and advertising of foods and soft drink products high in fat, salt or sugar that will be seen by children and young people, and not only during programmes for which they are the target audience, in order to reduce the exposure of future adult citizens to these types of marketing, in keeping with the call made by the WHO⁴;

Adult information and education

22. believes that it is important to carry out regular public information campaigns– in order to reach Goal 12.8 of the 2030 Agenda – on the positive health impact of fresh fruit and vegetables produced with sustainable methods and of reducing the consumption of foods rich in saturated and trans-fats, salt and sugar, especially processed products that are high in these ingredients. Such campaigns promote a healthy diet, prevent disease and contribute to better public health;

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<http://www.hse.ie/eng/about/Who/healthwellbeing/Our-Priority-Programmes/HEAL/HEAL-docs/tackling-food-marketing-to-children-in-a-digital-world-trans-disciplinary-perspectives-WHO-2016.pdf>

in addition, calls in this regard on the European Commission to propose legislation for the introduction of a compulsory traffic light rating or other colour labelling system on fat, saturated fats, sugar and salt, and for local and regional authorities to then provide information to the public in order to make it clear how consumers are to use the food label

23. notes that because the work environment is well suited to promoting healthy and sustainable dietary patterns, it is extremely important that only products of excellent quality and high nutritional value are supplied (in restaurant meals, canteens, cafeterias and vending machines), at least in public services where local and regional authority staff work, but also where possible in any public or private enterprise, to ensure healthier and more nutritious choices for employees;
24. considers it of great importance to protect consumers from misleading advertising messages. To this end, local and regional authorities should organise information campaigns on food labelling and dietary and nutritional claims, educating consumers to make more sustainable choices by promoting healthy dietary patterns, such as, for example, the Mediterranean diet;
25. urges the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission to make use of the opportunity to amend the AVMSD to strengthen the rules on the marketing and advertising of foods high in fat, salt or sugar, and of alcoholic beverages, and points to the urgent need to address the new challenges of marketing and advertising through on-line platforms and digital media, where messages are more difficult to monitor;

Initiatives to build local authority capacity

26. considers that cooperation with the WHO is necessary in order to ensure that the monitoring system is up-to-date where nutrition is concerned, with a view to the adoption of the next programme of action in the field of health.
27. notes that some subsidised measures such as identifying alternative sources of protein⁵ can be effective in terms of modifying dietary behaviour, but their cost-effectiveness and impact on changing consumer choices over the long-term require further studying;
28. calls on the European Commission to issue, by the end of 2018, the report on the impact of innovative systems for food labelling, analysing examples of existing food labelling systems;
29. calls on the European Commission to propose, after examining existing food labelling systems, a mandatory, single European colour labelling system, in which colours would be applied on a basis of 100 g units, on the front of food packaging throughout the EU, providing consumers with clear information on the sugar, salt and fat content, encouraging healthier eating patterns. The CoR proposes that the nutritional labelling also be available online, in keeping with modern technological requirements;

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http://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2014/424/oj

30. calls for specific standards to be introduced for products bearing nutritional and health claims on their labels regarding their sugar, salt and fat content. These specifications should be a pre-requisite for any product to be able to make such a claim;
31. attaches importance to defining specific substantial and effective objectives for reducing sugar, trans-fats and salt for many categories of food and drinks, accompanied by national strategies to meet these objectives;
32. points out to local authorities that they should prioritise, through public procurement in the food sector for all public bodies (including hospitals, nursing homes, retirement homes, kindergartens, schools, prisons and their canteens), to serve as role models by selling and providing healthy, local and seasonal foodstuffs that ensure sustainability and to make their contribution to Goal 12.7 – sustainable public procurement – of the 2030 Agenda. To achieve this goal, recommends favouring local producers in public procurement procedures in order to promote healthy diets and the development of the local economy;
33. underlines the need to introduce guidelines, reflecting examples of effective strategies in some countries for healthier eating patterns. Progress should be made with regard to free access to drinking water. For example, Andalusia is working on legislation that includes a measure in this area: "businesses responsible for setting up or maintaining vending machines selling packaged food and drink, if any, in educational establishments and public recreational spaces for children, shall install and maintain an operational source of drinking water that is free to access, either integrated into the distributor or located at a distance of up to two metres from it". A further such example is Greece, where in order to provide, at a competitive price, a basic good such as water, together with some other staples, rather than other beverages and foodstuffs, maximum prices are set – for example, half a euro for half a litre of bottled water – for standing customers at certain sales points (canteens, snack bars, bars, restaurants and other establishments serving food and drinks, vending machines, etc.), where competition is not feasible (such as airports, sports centres, passenger ships, hospitals, educational establishments, railway stations, museums, recreational areas, etc.);
34. calls on the Commission to establish specific nutritional profiles and the conditions, including exemptions, that must be respected in order to make nutritional or health claims on foods and/or categories of foods;
35. once again calls on the EU institutions regarding the need to make it obligatory for alcoholic products to indicate ingredients and nutritional information, including the calories they contain. One should also include health warnings on alcohol products and energy drinks. More in particular, calls upon the European Commission, Council and European Parliament to lift the exemption granted to alcohol beverages within the EU regulation 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, thus enabling consumers to make informed choices;
36. considers that there should be cooperation between the European institutions and European and national associations involved in nutrition and food issues, together with national public bodies, with a view to stepping up private initiatives to promote healthy and sustainable diets;

During the production process

37. recognises the importance of ensuring healthy and fertile soil as key factor for ensuring food security and therefore advocates organic farming practices and the use of organic fertilisers and soil improvers to boost organic soil content, enhancing its structure and water infiltration capacity;
38. reiterates the need for local actors to support young farmers so that it is viable to develop farming, keep rural areas alive, and introduce schemes such as community supported agriculture (CSA);
39. calls for measures to promote the acquisition of technical and managerial skills and know-how, and the extension of innovation into a range of business sectors, in order to improve the sustainable management of production and subsequent processing, with the aim of providing authentic products with traceable production chains;
40. recommends that support be provided through the relevant EU policies to stimulate the development and promotion of healthy food production;
41. calls for consultancy services to be fostered, with the aim of enhancing business competitiveness through sustainable and quality-oriented management;
42. calls for cooperation between local authorities, training centres and national universities to boost research into sustainable food choices at every stage of production, leading to products that are recognisable in terms of quality geared to healthy eating: in particular, protocols should be used that indicate the use of fewer chemical fertilisers, antibiotics and pesticides;
43. underlines the need to stimulate and sustain the development of a food production system that respects the environment, reduces packaging and food waste to achieve elimination, limits CO₂ emissions and supports sustainable production practices;
44. calls for support for farmers that work with high-quality farm products and foodstuffs, and for information and promotion campaigns for these products, in cooperation with the relevant local authorities;
45. highlights the need to invest in innovation using eco-friendly and product-oriented technologies;
46. proposes exploring local opportunities for promoting voluntary engagement in ensuring healthy eating habits, e.g. by participating on a voluntary basis in producing food in allotments, etc.;
47. urges farms to diversify by developing tourism and social activities, helping them to widen the supply of local products, strengthen the territorial presence of short-chain production, and extend the consumption of authentic, locally-linked products;

During the food processing stage

48. calls on the food industry to invest in redeveloping existing foods that are rich in saturated fat, sugar and salt, as well as in research and development of innovative, healthy and tasty food and speciality products (such as gluten-free and lactose-free products, among others), produced with modern technologies, at affordable prices, encouraging health and sustainable choices;
49. encourages companies to introduce sustainable practices and include this in their reporting, in line with Goal 12.6 of the 2030 Agenda;
50. supports packaging of fresh produce for preservation and short chains to protect the marketing of local, healthy produce;
51. calls for investment in agricultural transformation. Such investment must ensure a reduced impact on the product and rationalise the use of packaging, with a view to producing less refuse and waste while safeguarding products;
52. attaches importance to the cooperation of all stakeholders in setting up a comprehensive, compulsory, easily recognisable European food labelling system for all products, including products currently exempted by law, with an increase in the content of nutritional information, so that consumers can make informed choices about what they consume;
53. suggests marking mountain products with a specific graphic symbol to highlight their particular features, such as soil, air or water quality and production volume;
54. is strongly in favour of the introduction of a single European system for determining the size of portions, to allow comparison between countries' respective products;
55. urges industry to work with local and regional authorities with a view to taking steps at national, community and local level to promote healthy diets as part of their corporate social responsibility commitment;

Local producers, farmers' markets and street vendors

56. welcomes the efforts of local authorities to support alternative food networks such as organic farmers' markets that offer healthy and sustainable food choices;
57. welcomes the efforts of local and regional authorities helping to establish study groups in which producers and processors exchange practical experiences concerning organic farming. The work of such study groups can complement traditional agriculture programmes offered by training centres, schools and universities;
58. calls for measures to support the introduction of basic local services and networks to consolidate the market for local products, agri-tourism and the protection and revitalisation of rural areas to foster exchange of healthy, traditional foods;

59. welcomes private initiatives by local NGOs that guide consumers towards making healthy lifestyle choices, complementing government policies and legislative initiatives at European and national level;
60. calls on local media (television, radio, internet, the press and social media) to take part in food education campaigns and to comply with the regulatory restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy food and beverages, in line with the call issued by the World Health Organisation;
61. advocates the development of food networks, including farmers' markets, where local producers offer healthy, high-quality food directly to consumers at reasonable prices. In addition, they preserve the food culture of the local community and help protect biodiversity;
62. draws attention to the fact that strategic planning and cooperation at all levels of governance, with the involvement of relevant players, are crucial to promoting healthy and sustainable choices;
63. supports the shared conviction that if sustainable solutions are to be found, robust partnerships with local authorities are a prerequisite.

Brussels, 4 July 2018

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

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II. PROCEDURE

Title	Local and regional incentives to promote healthy and sustainable diets
Reference document	
Legal basis	Article 307(1) TFEU
Procedural basis	Own-initiative opinion
Date of Council referral/Commission letter	1/2/2018
Commission responsible	Commission for Natural Resources
Rapporteur	Nikolaos Chiotakis (EPP/EL)
Analysis	26 January 2018
Discussed in commission	9 March 2018
Date adopted by commission	24 May 2018
Result of the vote in commission	Majority
Adopted at plenary	4-5 July 2018
Previous Committee opinions	