The Finland FOODPathS Declaration on the Partnership for Sustainable Food Systems (P-SFS)

The FOODPathS project, funded by the European Commission, aims to offer a concrete pathway for the future European Partnership for Sustainable Food Systems (P-SFS) for People, Planet & Climate. FOODPathS develops a partnership prototype. FOODPathS' Advisory Board members, representing organizations, networks and projects, compiled this document at the FOODPathS mid-term meeting in Seinäjoki, Finland in June 2024 to evaluate and guide the project forward.

As Advisory Board Members of FOODPathS, we recognize the importance of sharing lessons learned, best practices, and valuable insights. Our goal is to contribute to shaping future partnerships and actions. Rather than reinventing the wheel, we believe in harnessing collective efforts to act swiftly. This declaration invites collaboration, avoiding duplication of efforts, and maximizing the impact of research, trials, network building, and transformative initiatives within our food systems.

Why a P-SFS? Food systems in Europe and across the world are currently unsustainable. Simultaneously, the global challenges are threatening our food systems' capacity to provide food security and freedom of choice for future generations. The obstacles such as climate change, biodiversity loss, soil quality and availability of renewable resources, and water continue to challenge the progress. In addition, food systems are highly complex and interwoven with societies, economies and cultures. Such interdependencies create barriers and resistance to change; hence, a strong signal towards accelerating change is clearly needed as the new EU legislature takes office and awareness of the tradeoffs. The proposed Partnership on Sustainable Food Systems in Horizon Europe addresses this transition.

What are the activities of the P-SFS? The sustainability transition in food systems beyond farm gate require action in four key areas: we need to change the way we eat, process and supply food, govern food systems and connect to food systems. This work demands creativity with new research and innovation pathways using food systems approaches. In addition, financial means, (virtual) infrastructures to experiment, observatories to monitor the impacts of our actions, as well as knowledge sharing and continuous learning are crucial to overcome the barriers and facilitate systemic changes to accelerate the transition towards sustainable food systems.

By Whom and Where? Sustainability challenges in the aqua-agri-food domain are global and multifactorial. This is why collective instead of individual actions of all food system actors are imperative. We need a P-SFS of all drivers; small, medium and big players from the public, private, philanthropic, academic and civil society sectors. These partners need to be locally embedded in activities where their input adds value and enriches local food heritage. At national level, localized activities are joint and united to commonly strive for sustainable outcomes. At European and global levels, activities are connected and topics commonly elaborated further to keep our planet viable, food-secure, fair, and just for all. All this contributes to meeting the SDGs as well as building peace.

How and When to act? The sustainability transition happens via a dual process, involving the rise and dissemination of innovative sustainable approaches (such as technologies, social practices, and business models), and the decline and gradual cessation of unsustainable means of production and consumption. To ensure food and nutrition security for future generations, the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability need to be integrally addressed from today onwards. Such a transition must be developed through a food system approach recognizing the interconnected nature of different dimensions influencing food systems and policy outcomes. Systemic approaches aim to address challenges within an entire food system acknowledging the variety of actors involved. Food policy can facilitate a systemic sustainability transition if the stakeholders are committed, listened to, and trust the process, from local to global scales. Inclusive governance is an active policy approach to involve all stakeholders in decision-making processes, including the under-represented groups. Transparency and equity are central in policy formulation, implementation, and operational activities. Collaborative efforts on local and national as well as European and international levels need indicators to follow the progress and ensure the participation of diverse stakeholders, e.g. via established mirror groups. Knowledge sharing and training are hereby fundamental.

The Advisory Board key recommendations to accelerate the sustainable food system transition are:

1. To advance the sustainability transition, all stakeholders must be involved. As food systems are highly complex and have strong interdependencies with societies, economies, cultures and landscapes, **inclusive governance** on local, national, European, and global levels is a prerequisite. The coexistence of multiple stakeholders creates diverse barriers and power imbalances leading to resistance to change. To foster inclusiveness, we remind:
    a. Policy fragmentation can be addressed through EU and global frameworks, such as the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDG) , European Green Deal with its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies and the One Health –approach.
    b. National policy alignment and integration of food policy can be strengthened with inter-ministerial committees, value chain supervisors and food policy councils, which all strengthen collaboration and support the development of networks.
    c. Local level resource management to improve sustainable economic and socio-cultural FS development of the territory can be managed in **Bio-districts or eco-regions** fostering the bottom-up involvement of local actors, and the collaboration among all actors along the innovation processes and activities of regions.

2. **A food systems approach** is needed for an effective sustainability transition:
    a. A food systems approach builds overall vision and helps to include environmental aspects such as climate change, biodiversity loss and water and land management into the food system transition. Food systems are highly dependent on planetary boundaries, but in addition to adaptation and mitigation, a fundamental transformation is needed. A good farm-level example, including well-defined principles, practices, regulations and certifications, is an organic food production system. Research on sea systems provides other well-established systemic approaches.
    b. An integrated food systems approach, rather than a single outcome or a product-based outcome, is required in policies to overcome the sustainability challenges. Circular aqua- and agri-food systems close the loops and prevent wasting resources.
    c. A food systems approach should be adopted in research programs and funding at national and EU level. The living-lab-model is acknowledged as effectively integrating science and research with real-world examples. Multi-stakeholder involvement should be considered when allocating funding.

3. **Food system progress monitoring and sustainability indicators** track food system performance. This is crucial for the efficient use of resources and strengthening citizen trust in institutions:
    a. Indicators and data for measuring the food system sustainability transition should cover policies and policy objective achievements, and to actors' trust in public institutions which impacts the policy efficiency.
    b. The 11 Food 2030 pathways for action, including the "Governance for food systems change", should be considered as well as the FAO Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems (SAFA) Guidelines. A key performance indicator of success is the empowerment of citizens to make healthy and sustainable choices. Food security is a key outcome of a sustainable food systems approach.
    c. The impacts of our food systems and the food system transition outside Europe must be acknowledged, including the role of trade, fair pricing, the true cost of food and the Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) –scores of food systems. In addition, a mapping of the heavy dependencies and connections to global food systems are urgently needed.

In this coherent way, all FS actors can contribute to the highly needed transition towards sustainable food systems. We sincerely ask policy makers and all FS actors at local, regional, Member States, EU, and global levels to include these key elements in their future policies and action plans.

FOODPathS' Advisory Board Members

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