The SAPEA report on a sustainable, just and healthy food system for the EU

Professor Peter Jackson

Presentation to the NNR2022 Committee webinar on ‘Diet and Sustainability’
• Part of the European Commission’s Scientific Advice Mechanism, funded by a Horizon 2020 programme.

• Brings together scientific expertise in engineering, humanities, medicine, natural and social sciences from over 100 academies and learned societies across Europe.

• Together with the EC’s Group of Chief Scientific Advisors (GCSA), SAPEA provides independent scientific advice to European Commissioners to support their decision-making.

• SAPEA also works to stimulate debate in Europe about the role of evidence in policy-making.
The SAPEA working group sought to answer the following question:

What are workable paths to deliver an inclusive, ‘just’ and timely transition to an EU sustainable food system, considering ‘co-benefits’ for health, the environment, and socio-economic aspects, including the socio-economic situation of the farming sector, and addressing territorial imbalances, the rural-urban divide, food waste as well as responsible consumer behaviour (from a social sciences perspective)?
The review process

• Working group of independent academic experts appointed by SAPEA as part of the EU’s Scientific Advice Mechanism
• Undertook a Rapid Evidence Review and wrote an independent report
• Draft report discussed at Expert Workshop and subject to external peer review
• The GCSA produced a Scientific Opinion that informed the European Commission’s ‘Farm to Fork‘ strategy
• Members of the SAPEA working group also wrote a Comment in Nature Food (2021).
Working group members

- Professor Peter Jackson, University of Sheffield (Chair, UK)
- Dr Jeroen Candel, Wageningen University (The Netherlands)
- Professor Anna Davies, Trinity College Dublin (Ireland)
- Dr Hugo de Vries, INRAE (France)
- Professor Cristiane Derani, University of Santa Catarina (Brazil)
- Professor Verica Dragović-Uzelac, University of Zagreb (Croatia)
- Professor Alf Håkon Hoel, University of Tromsø (Norway)
- Professor Lotte Holm, University of Copenhagen (Denmark)
- Professor Piergiuseppe Morone, University of Rome (Italy)
- Professor Marianne Penker, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (Austria)
- Dr Marta Guadalupe Rivera-Ferre, University of Catalonia (Spain)
- Dr Ruta Śpiewak, Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development (Poland)
- Professor Katrien Termeer, Wageningen University (The Netherlands)
- Professor John Thøgersen, Aarhus University (Denmark)
- Professor Erik Mathijs (invited contributor), KU Leuven (Belgium).
Structure of the SAPEA Report

1. Executive summary
2. Introduction: a global challenge
3. Critical challenges facing the food system
4. Theoretical perspectives and alternatives framings of food
5. Understanding sustainable food systems
6. Current and recent policy initiatives
7. Non-governmental agents of change
8. Good practice and lessons learned
9. Summary and conclusions
10. References.
Key findings

• Radical transformation is needed for more sustainable food systems
• Different framings of food imply different types of interventions
• Taxation, financial incentives, and legal change more effective than voluntary certification and awareness raising
• To meet growing global demand for food, it is not enough simply to increase productivity (‘sustainable intensification’)
• We also need to change from a linear (mass consumption) system to a more circular economy with reduced waste — which will mean changing our norms, habits and routines.
• Evidence suggests that this kind of behaviour change needs to happen collectively (social practices, not just individual ‘consumer choice’)
• Need joined-up governance at local, national and international levels.
From food as a commodity to food as more of a common good?
Farm to Fork: for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system

1st Integrated EU Food Policy, with several goals:

• neutral or positive environmental impact (climate change mitigation, biodiversity loss)
• everyone should have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, sustainable food
• affordability of food while generating fairer economic returns, competitiveness of the EU supply sector and fair trade

Food still mostly framed as commodity, however:

• ambitious targets for pesticide, fertiliser and antibiotic reduction
• support for organic farming (25% market share by 2030)
• new animal welfare regulation, front-of-pack nutrition labelling etc.
Key messages for NNR2020:

• Be bold (urgent need for radical change, ‘business as usual’ not an option)
• Address the twin themes of environmental sustainability and healthy eating
• Provide clear guidance to consumers but don’t rely on individual choice
• Scientific consensus on the need for reduced meat and dairy consumption (EAT-Lancet report)
• SAPEA report published prior to COVID-19 pandemic – highlighted the vulnerability of the food system to short-term disruption (temporary shortages, impact on food and hospitality businesses, increased food insecurity, long-term economic impact)
• Opportunity to build back better/fairer?
Contacts:

• **Dr Céline Tschirhart** (Science Policy Officer): celine.tschirhart@sapea.info

• **Professor Peter Jackson** (working group chair): p.a.jackson@sheffield.ac.uk