



ETP LT ‘Food for Life’: Achieving more Sustainable Food Systems through Research and innovation - Priorities for 2022 and beyond

This document summarises the discussions held at the ETP ‘Food for Life’ event that took place in Brussels on 2 December 2021.

In this event we reflected with relevant stakeholders on the future of Research and Innovation towards Sustainable Food Systems and the role of the European Commission, European Technology Platforms (ETPs), and national initiatives such as National Food Technology Platforms (NFTPs) in the integration of R&I strategies in Europe. We discussed the execution of the ETP strategies from 2022 and beyond and reflected on how to shape the food systems research within the EU and national funding opportunities.

The main questions we wanted to address were the following:

- What are the challenges for sustainable food systems?
- What is the role of the ETPs?
- What have the key actors been doing in 2021?
- What is the R&I needed towards sustainable food systems?
- How to shape the food systems R&I funding in Europe?

The event was opened by Prof. Dr Gert Meijer (Chair of the ETP ‘Food for Life’ and Deputy Head of Corporate Regulatory and Scientific Affairs at Nestlé), who summarised the activities of the ETP in recent years (see slide deck in Annex). The [Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda](#) and the [Implementation Action Plan](#) were updated in 2021 and these strategic documents were compared with the EU Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022.

The aim of this exercise was to identify research gaps not yet covered and suggest new or expanded lines of research relevant for the Horizon Europe priorities to be reflected in the work programme 2023-2024. The result of this exercise was summed up in a letter to the European Commission ([link](#)), where the ETP ‘Food for Life’ suggested as underfunded areas: Improving Insights into Consumers; Modular Food Production and Distribution; Appreciation of Diversity in Food and Eating; Understanding Food Digestion; The Food Matrix; Food Processing Technologies; and Food Packaging 4.0. Investing in R&I in all those areas can help achieve other broad EU strategies such as the Green Deal, Farm to Fork, the Industrial strategy. In addition to Horizon Europe, there are other opportunities to align the EU policy developments with the precompetitive R&I needed in food systems. Some examples are the planned EU R&I partnerships, especially on ‘Safe and Sustainable Food Systems’ but also the co-funded ‘Risk management’ partnership or the institutionalized partnerships Circular Biobased Europe and EIT-Food, and the Missions. Nevertheless, the ETP ‘Food for Life’

wonders whether these instruments will be sufficient, or whether we need other encompassing R&I funding instruments where pre-competitive R&I in the food sector could be facilitated by a more formal public-private collaboration.

Cindy Schoumacher (Policy Officer, Unit B2 Bioeconomy & Food Systems, DG Research & Innovation, Healthy Planet Directorate, European Commission), Andy Zynga (CEO of EIT Food), and Eduardo Cotillas (Co-chair of the NFTP's and R&D+I Director at Spanish Food and Drink Industry Federation (FIAB)) also presented on the R&I priorities for the food sector for 2022 and beyond. Their slides are available as Annexes to this report.

The European Commission highlighted the opportunities arising from the Horizon Europe programme 2021-2027 Cluster 6 on Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment. The second working programme 2023-2024 is currently under preparation. In addition, the Sustainable Food Systems Partnership, should provide a tool for further engagement with the food sector. Much of the current priorities for the European Commission are defined in the [Food2030 Pathways for Action](#). The ETPs are seen by the Commission as, amongst other things, platforms to update and provide insights on the existing R&I gaps that can be identified in the Commission's own instruments as soon as those are aligned with the EU strategies (Green Deal, Farm to Fork, Food2030, Industrial strategy).

EIT Food presented its [Strategic Agenda 2021-2027](#) with a clear vision, mission and impact goals. Quantifiable KPIs were presented, such as 800+ companies securing over €350m investment funding and 210,000+ consumers engaged to define healthier, sustainable behaviour. EIT Food highlighted its role as providing near-to-market, commercially viable innovative solutions, which can deliver societal impact while responding to specific business opportunities.

The National Food Technology Platforms (NFTP's) showed the strength of collecting national and regional platform needs to set priorities for R&I through a bottom-up approach. NFTP's have the capacity of reaching Small and Medium Enterprises most importantly through food industry clusters and Research and Innovation Centres with strong links to industry. The NFTP's have a similar role to ETPs at regional and national level, allowing a different engagement with another layer of stakeholders. The need for a good coordination at EU level was highlighted in order to avoid fragmentation and replication of activities – the activities at Member State level will tend to be aligned with the priorities set at EU level in a coordinated effort. This provides a valuable two-way channel of collaboration and communication, making the overall prioritisation more representative and ensuring that the global message is clearly heard in the Member states.

In a session with the audience, kindly moderated by Hugo de Vries (Research Director, Science Direction Food and Bioeconomy of INRAE and President of EFFoST), the relevance of dialogue and coordination among EU actors was highlighted for a better prioritisation exercise. Participants also mentioned the difficulties of setting EU priorities while considering at the same time the interests at national level. Nevertheless, the ETPs, NFTP's and EIT Food were seen as platforms to address the existing gaps in the current R&I landscape, and to achieve R&I policies that raise the appropriate funding for the priorities needed in the food

sector. For this objective, other bioeconomy-related ETPs and the Federation of Food Science and Technology (EFFoST) are also seen as key platforms.

The relevance of the impact of R&I projects and the monitoring of national and EU funding was also highlighted, in particular how to measure the return of the investment in R&I, but also how to communicate to all the stakeholders on the existing opportunities and good practices. Communication in different languages and country specific materials was seen as key actions for a better outreach of EU R&I priorities.

To close the event, Tim Hogg (Co-chair of the ETP 'Food for Life', Professor at the Universidade Catolica Portuguesa) kindly moderated a session where the European Technology Platforms (ETPs) Plants for the Future (Amrit Nanda), TP Organics (Maria Gernert), EATIP (David Basset) and FABRE TP / ATF (Ana Granados) presented their current activities and R&I priorities for 2022 and beyond. Collective thinking was gathered on how to maximise the impact of the work of the ETPs on setting their Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas and the relevance of highlighting common priorities while keeping visibility of the topics that were of specific importance for the given sub-sectors (such as R&I to tackle concrete issues on agriculture, the organic sector, aquaculture and animal livestock).

The role of the ETPs in the current European Commission R&I panorama was also discussed. Certainly [Cluster 6 partnerships](#) in Horizon Europe are of high relevance to the agri-food sector and the ETPs, but how the ETPs can convey a strategy to the partnerships that can be meaningful and with high impact requires improvement and a clearer framework. All the partnerships set in the bioeconomy sector are co-funded, which means a Member State funding and prioritisation of topics - in comparison with other sectors (such as Clusters 4 or 5), where several partnerships are co-programmed and have a very direct industry involvement. This approach gives the ETPs dedicated to 'food and bioeconomy' an indirect opportunity to participate in the co-creation of Horizon Europe Partnerships. Several ETPs were consulted during the development of the Food Systems Partnership template which was submitted in December 2021 for internal review of the European Commission. Further opportunities are following with the development of the Partnership Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas (SRIAs) in 2022 and its final implementation from 2023 onwards.

Collective joint activities and continuous dialogue with the European Commission are seen as the steps ahead to maximise the work of the ETPs.

Conclusions

Research and innovation gaps in food systems EC programmes: Exploring the gaps in the current pre-competitive Research & Innovation (R&I) calls is a good approach to let the ETP 'Food for Life' reiterate the (not yet addressed) R&I priorities in dialogue with the European Commission and the implementation of programmes.

Collaboration with the National Food Technology Platforms (NFTPs): It is key to achieve a consistent message towards the European Commission and Member States. Some tentative actions could be developing joint statements or more extensive joint documents, to achieve a higher impact (e.g., SMEs chapter) at EU, national and regional level.

Collaboration between ETPs: There should be a continuous dialogue and collaboration between the ETPs related to 'food and bioeconomy'. The ETPs should take a food system approach. There should be collaboration between the current ETPs brought to the meeting (Plants for the Future, TP Organics, EATIC and FABRE TP) but also other relevant actors in the food systems such as the SusCHEM and Manufuture TPs.

Collaboration with the EIT Food: Cooperation with EIT Food, on topics such as the improvement of data collection, communication on R&I activities, or specific research themes, could help maximise the impact of the ETP activities.

This report has been written by the ETP 'Food for Life' Secretariat. For further information on the ETP activities please contact us via this [link](#).