
PARTNERS FOR PLANT-BASED: A DECLARATION TO STRENGTHEN EUROPE'S VALUE CHAIN

We, the undersigned organisations and stakeholders across Europe's plant-based foods value chain, present this declaration as a call to action to strengthen the EU's competitiveness and agri-food resilience.

Europe has a major opportunity to strengthen its competitiveness, create quality jobs and build a resilient food system by developing a thriving plant-based foods value chain. From field to consumer, the plant-based foods value chain already supports tens of thousands of European jobs, opens new markets for farmers and processors, and showcases Europe's capacity for food innovation rooted in safety, quality, and sustainability. Inaction would forgo economic opportunity, prolong environmental pressure on our food systems, and allow other regions to dictate the rules of this growing market.

European protein supply is vital for the development of plant-based foods, raw materials for the livestock sector, and the diversification of supply sources. It is also an important element in the transition towards a more sustainable food system. Unlocking the full potential of plant-based foods will deliver wide-ranging benefits: accelerating progress toward the EU's 2040 climate targets, strengthening the bioeconomy, improving public health, and reinforcing Europe's strategic autonomy in food and feed. A system-wide shift can also foster new technologies and business models, attract young talent to agriculture, and support generational renewal. With a dedicated Plant-Based Foods Value Chain Action Plan and an enabling regulatory framework – including an ambitious EU Protein Strategy – Europe can build a future-fit food system aligned with the competitiveness agenda and a stronger Single Market.

Our Declaration calls on EU institutions and Member States to:

1. Put the competitiveness of the plant-based foods value chain at the core of EU and national policies

Elevate plant-based foods in Europe's strategic agenda. We urge the EU and its Member States to integrate plant-based foods into core economic, innovation, and trade strategies for 2024–2029, and to ensure policy coherence so the sector can scale. This means cutting red tape that limits market access, removing fragmented rules within the Single Market, and ensuring regulatory coherence in food law so that the European plant-based foods value chain can scale up and continue to drive innovation.

Unless Europe seizes this moment, other regions already investing heavily will capture the lion's share of market growth. Europe should match—and even surpass—that momentum. By ensuring equality of opportunity between plant- and animal-based products, and by showcasing the high quality and safety of EU plant-based foods, Europe can enhance its competitiveness, increase open strategic autonomy, and become a global leader in sustainable plant-based food production.

2. Empower farmers and diversify rural economies

Make farmers key partners in the plant-based transition. A thriving plant-based foods value chain will open more and higher-value markets for European farmers and primary producers, including food-grade protein crops and other plant ingredients. We call for a holistic approach, stimulating demand on one hand, and providing incentives to confidently invest in and diversify into plant-based food crop production on the other.

Farmers should be better supported in optimising production and income sustainably, notably through incentives for adopting future-proof agricultural practices. A more holistic policy approach could stimulate demand and send clear market signals, encouraging diversification into crops such as cereals and protein-rich varieties such as peas, lupins and fava beans. This has multiple benefits: improved soil health, lower input costs, reduced fertiliser use, and increased

biodiversity – all essential for securing the long-term viability of European farms. In addition, increasing the share of EU-grown crops used for food, while maximising the value of all crop outputs through efficient processing into food ingredients and valuable co-products, would strengthen farm profitability and resource efficiency. The plant-based foods value chain is a crucial contributor to the EU Bioeconomy, as all parts of the crops are valorised through parallel streams, resulting in zero-waste processing.

Farmers should be supported through knowledge-sharing hubs, risk-sharing tools and capacity-building programmes to ease any transition. A thriving plant-based supply chain, from field to consumer, can contribute to the renewal of rural communities, help create agri-food jobs, and help bring a long-term vision to the sector as a whole.

3. Unlock innovation, support scaling up existing solutions, and mobilise investment in plant-based foods for a circular food system

Support an innovation ecosystem through industry co-investment. Europe's plant-based food industry stands ready to invest in research, product development, and manufacturing scale-up, provided the right policy framework is in place for long-term predictability. We encourage

the EU to support and fund research aimed at improving crop yields, nutrient bioavailability, and consumer insights. Beyond research, the EU should create conditions that de-risk and reward innovation. This includes speeding up food-tech R&D, streamlining approvals for novel food

ingredients, and supporting processing capacity and infrastructure – recognising the crucial role of processors in the food value chain. The EU should foster research and innovation in plant-derived ingredients that improve taste, texture, nutritional composition, affordability, and shelf-life, thereby expanding the availability, variety, and consumer acceptance of plant-based foods. Equally important is supporting the scale-up of existing plant-based solutions to bridge the gap from niche to mass market. This also includes

simplifying the approval process for bringing innovations to the EU market.

By fostering a predictable, innovation-friendly regulatory environment, the EU will attract major private investment and build resilient supply chains across Europe. This will accelerate the availability of affordable, diverse, and high-quality plant-based products, strengthen a circular food economy, and boost EU competitiveness and trade while meeting growing consumer demand.

4. Strengthen the Single Market for plant-based foods

Ensure fair and consistent market rules across the EU. A coherent Single Market is essential for the growth and competitiveness of the plant-based value chain. Currently, Member States have varied approaches to national food strategies and dietary guidelines. The EU would benefit from greater policy consistency to support farmers, value chain actors, and consumers. The EU should revise the VAT Directive to allow Member States to apply reduced VAT rates on plant-based foods on par with those often granted to meat and dairy. This should be framed as a way to encourage healthy, sustainable diets, rather than a “us-versus-them” approach. Equalising VAT across product categories will eliminate an unfair cost disadvantage for consumers choosing plant-

based options. This would make such choices more affordable, accelerate market growth, and increase adoption of sustainable diets.

We urge policymakers to provide clear EU guidance on labelling and marketing, without introducing restrictive product standards that could stifle innovation. Removing regulatory inconsistencies will allow plant-based producers to compete on a level playing field. Rather than focusing resources on setting restrictive measures, policymakers should focus on product quality, enabling innovative food businesses to expand across the EU. A strong Single Market that treats plant-based foods fairly will spur cross-border trade, efficiency, availability, and consumer trust.

5. Create a healthy, affordable, accessible, and sustainable food environment for consumers

Make plant-based options accessible to all Europeans. The EU should deploy a comprehensive range of policy instruments with the goal of making healthy, sustainable eating the norm. This requires a multi-sectoral approach that includes partnerships with retailers, food processors, and other value chain actors. Public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and cafeterias should be encouraged to offer plant-based options, creating inclusive food environments that nudge citizens towards balanced diets.

By making it easier and more affordable for citizens to choose plant-based options, Europe can improve dietary diversity and population health. Plant-rich meals are linked to significant health

benefits, including lower risks of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and premature death. They also improve blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood glucose levels. These gains support the EU's Global Health Strategy and the Beating Cancer and Cardiovascular Action Plans. National dietary guidelines should highlight plant-based options, and nutrition education – for example, through the EU School Scheme – should encourage healthy, sustainable eating from an early age. Moreover, a wide range of plant-derived ingredients are essential for developing appealing, safe, functional, and varied food products. These contribute to balanced, enjoyable, and accessible diets for all Europeans.

6. Promote nutrition as a pillar of competitiveness and population resiliency

Over time, better nutrition and the prevention of diet-related diseases will save significant healthcare costs for Member States. The benefits of diverse plant-forward diets, which are made possible by a wide range of plant-based ingredients providing essential functionality, extend beyond health into economics by fostering food innovation, enhancing consumer choice, and supporting a resilient European food industry. The hidden cost of diet-related diseases in the EU has been estimated at nearly €900 billion annually, including healthcare spending, lost productivity,

and impacts on well-being. Conversely, promoting plant-based foods is an investment in public health that delivers immense returns.

Beyond immediate health and economic impacts, promoting healthy eating also contributes to building resilient populations that are better prepared to face crises and security challenges. Few policy interventions offer such powerful multiple benefits: improving citizens' quality of life, reducing public expenditure, boosting market competitiveness, advancing sustainability goals, and strengthening societal resilience.



CONCLUSION

To realise the vision outlined above, we call for an ambitious, holistic Plant-Based Foods Value Chain Action Plan. We urge the European Commission, in close collaboration with the European Parliament and Member States, to develop and adopt a comprehensive Action Plan within this EU institutional cycle. The Action Plan should integrate the priorities of agricultural production, competitiveness, innovation, market development, and health promotion coherently, optimally aligning production and consumption.

This Declaration and its call to action are supported by a broad, cross-sectoral coalition of European value chain stakeholders spanning the plant-based sector and beyond. Europe can send a powerful message that it intends to lead by example in paving the way to a more competitive, resilient, healthy, and sustainable food system.

We, the undersigned, are ready to partner on this journey. The opportunity to act is now, for a more resilient and competitive EU. Let us embrace a plant-forward future.

Initiative by:

European Alliance for Plant-based Foods (EAPF), Starch Europe, Plant-based Foods Europe (PBF), European Vegetable Protein Association (EUVEPRO)



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