



## Why not a Common Food and Nutrition Policy for Europe?

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Having been fortunate enough to have attended and participated in several international conferences and working groups over the spring and summer of this year, and had a chance to explore and discuss the current 'state of play' in what seems to be the increasingly dysfunctional global food system, I have recently begun to seriously reflect on European policy, and the question of radically changing the current EU CAP into a Common Food and Nutrition Policy. This was mentioned by Damien Canare, from Montpellier at a meeting of the FLEDGE research programme in Waterloo in September this year, and in my preparation and discussions for a presentation on the TRANSMANGO EU project at the Agriculture and Urbanising Society Conference in Rome thereafter.

Whilst in many ways the question is something of an 'old chestnut' for longstanding food scholars like myself, I have begun, however, to realise especially as a result of the emerging results and discussions in the TRANSMANGO project<sup>1</sup>, that it now holds considerable heuristic and indeed practical potential. For instance, asking the question informally to many of my colleagues it has been interesting to assess a range of views and responses. Some have perceived this as being something of a *naive* question, given the overall complexity and political inertia in the glacial process of CAP reform experienced over the past 25 years. Some now assume the question is *too late* given the regressive and more rooted nature of neo-liberalisation that has swept across the EU, especially since the combined food, financial and fiscal crises of 2007-8. This assumes that there is no national or international (EU) interest in developing new and innovative policy frameworks in this field, and that all that can be hoped for is a steady retrenchment in CAP funding post 2020. That is, 'business as usual', more neo-liberalisation and indeed declines in farm and related rural businesses in most EU states. Others say that the field is far too contested, with too many entrenched views and positions, such that to develop any coherent and consistent food policy would be *just too difficult*.

Personally, this is encouraging me to continue to ask this naive question; especially given the work in Transmango and related research which clearly shows: (i) the need for more integrated and systemic thinking about our food systems across the environmental, community, economy, social and health policy fields; (ii) the deepening of a range of interconnected vulnerabilities leading to widening gaps between food sustainability and food security at all levels (individual, household, social class, local, regional, national levels); and (iii) an expanding range of interested stakeholders and 'policy community' players who now regard the food question as central to their mission. This has been demonstrated by some of the results from TRANSMANGO, but also by our UK based *Food Research Consortium* (FRC) where only after a short period the Consortium has attracted over 100 civil society organisations to participate and share their research and policy needs with us the food researchers. The policy community around food, and what we might term *foodplus* concerns is exploding, at the same time that even the partially reformed post 2015 CAP looks increasingly marginal (and indeed exclusive) to the widening and deepening ecological, food security and sovereignty agenda which surrounds it. In addition, we are all aware, as Wayne Roberts from Toronto so eloquently demonstrates with his experiences of running the

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<sup>1</sup> TRANSMANGO is granted by the EU under 7th Framework Programme, theme KBBE.2013.2.5-01 (Assessment of the impact of global drivers of change on Europe's food security), Grant agreement no: 613532



Toronto Food Council, how the *power of food* provides a key leverage mechanism for developing wider social and sustainability outcomes.

Faced with this broader macro- policy concern for food, and its clear leverage power in potentially building the adaptive capacities needed in creating more ecological and social resilience, *why should we continue to hold on to the self- fulfilling prophecy that the CAP is sectorally sacrosanct?* The times are right in my view to seriously ask this question, and indeed for food scholars to propose ways of developing a more sustainable food paradigm which could be embodied in a radically reformed and common food and nutritional policy framework which linked sustainability goals with ecological public health.<sup>2</sup>

Europe needs to consider a '*new deal for food*'. One which links sustainable production systems to sustainable consumption enhancement. And it needs to do so across the DGs and policy fields of agriculture, environment, energy, regional development and consumer and foreign affairs, trade and international development. One that delivers on carbon targets whilst harnessing and promoting the post-carbon transition in our cities and in our countrysides. The parallels with the 1930s and 1940s are stark when food and energy insecurities promoted the need for innovative forms of state intervention and investments. Today the challenges of food sustainability and security are greater and more profound, yet the political timidity for reconstructing and developing innovative food and nutrition policy needs to be replaced by more effective and evidence-based debate, and an engagement with the widening community and public interest in *the new food question*. We need a policy rupture not incremental conservatism. Institutional and intellectual space thus needs to be found at both national and EU levels for the debate and policy innovations to be designed for current and future generations. Lets begin the debate.

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<sup>2</sup> See Marsden, TK and Morley, A (eds) Sustainable Food Systems: building a new paradigm. Routledge /Earthscan, 2014; Rayner, G and Lang, T (2012) Ecological Public Health. Routledge.