



AFFORDABLE SUSTAINABLE FOOD AT THE HEART OF OUR FUTURE

*The Importance of Making
Sustainable Food Accessible to
Youth*



Picture 1. Retrieved from [U.S. News Health](#)

INTRODUCTION

As young citizens, we are confronted with a number of alarming realities that threaten our future. Climate change and biodiversity loss represent growing threats to human health and to the planet. Our current diets are partly responsible: Our food systems account for one third of greenhouse gas emissions, are leading to the depletion of natural resources, and are detrimental to people's health ([Crippa et al, 2021](#)). Despite this, ongoing discussions at policy level result in little or no change, perpetuating the status quo.

Accessibility of Sustainable Food

As European consumers and young citizens, we wish to highlight the importance of making sustainable and healthy food accessible to all. The [European Consumer Organisation](#) reported that the higher price of sustainable food represents the main barrier for European consumers. Furthermore, in the [Special Eurobarometer 505](#), almost 50% of European respondents replied that increased availability of affordable sustainable food would help them adopt a healthier and more sustainable diet. We have made precisely the same observation in our questionnaires undertaken with young people between 18-30 residing in the European Union (see below for the summary of results). Most of them considered price as a barrier to adopt a sustainable diet.

Actions taken to radically change diets/ consumption and European food systems are insufficient. We need to transform food systems and diets to protect biodiversity, foster healthy consumption and restore natural resources. This manifesto aims to highlight the importance of making sustainable food more accessible through the upcoming EU Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) Law, scheduled by the end of 2023. As young activists advocating for better food systems, we aim to represent youth voices from across Europe. This is why, this manifesto includes a combination of recommendations based on scientific evidence and testimonies from young people residing in the European Union.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Between May 2nd and May 21st, we interviewed 87 young people living in the European Union. The results show that young people in Europe want the SFS Law to lead to increased affordability of, accessibility to, as well as awareness about, healthy and sustainable food.

Increased affordability

The young people interviewed often reported being unable to afford sustainable food due to their limited budget. The difference in prices between sustainable and unsustainable food often pushed young people to buy the cheapest food available, resulting in unsustainable food consumption.

Several participants expressed that high prices represented one of the main barriers to adopting sustainable eating patterns. The respondents made various suggestions for making sustainable food more affordable. First, they suggested lowering taxes on sustainable food, compared to animal products, which should be taxed more, reflecting accordingly their impact on the environment. The [European Consumer Organisation](#) and the [Food Policy Coalition](#) have highlighted the need to decrease or eliminate value-added tax (VAT) on healthy and sustainable food while increasing VAT for unsustainable and unhealthy foods. Furthermore, [research](#) has shown that monetary incentives have been proven to motivate the adoption and maintenance of sustainable behaviours. Also, they suggested creating sustainable food vouchers or youth cards with discounts on sustainable food which would allow young people to easily purchase sustainable food.

The current food system encourages the consumption of low cost, unsustainable food whereas sustainable products remain financially inaccessible.

“ I sometimes make unsustainable choices because of the price and my limited budget.
Emeline David, Austria ”

“ Once we were invited to a camp to talk about sustainable diets to teenagers until 14 years old. They are so anxious about not being able to buy affordable and healthy food in their schools.
Eleni Kontou, Greece ”

“ It's impossible to buy a variety of organic food products without running up a huge bill, so I only buy raw produce. In practical terms, this means eating lentils in tomato sauce every day, which is tiring and hard to keep up in the long term.
Cécile, France ”

Increased accessibility



The respondents also mentioned that one of the challenges to having a sustainable diet is accessibility. The main problem is the lack of transparency in the supply chain and the necessity to import some products that are commonly consumed in the EU. These two problems perpetuate unsustainable food systems and constitute barriers to sustainable consumption. Although some markets can offer organic food and schools and universities sometimes offer a limited range of sustainable food, accessibility to sustainable food remains a big problem faced by young people living in Europe.

In order to change this, the respondents proposed some ways to enhance the change, such as improving the offer of local and organic food; enhancing the availability of sustainable food in public institutions including schools and universities; and provide more food choices. This could be achieved by offering sustainable food in more places, selling nearly-expired food at a lower price to tackle food waste, and encouraging and rewarding farmers to produce in a more sustainable way. These actions were also highlighted in other youth spaces, such as at the World Food Forum and the communications of G7/G20 youth. Solutions could be designed with public procurement between the sectors in order to facilitate the accessibility of sustainable food throughout the EU, and enhanced with the incentive of seasonal and local food.

“ While in Portugal we do have options, it's easier for someone with a car to access them and buy them regularly, since going to the other side of the city just for a weekly supermarket chore is not doable for me at the moment.
Isabella Alves Barros, Portugal ”

“ To make sustainable food more accessible, issues such as cost, access to information, and infrastructure should be addressed. For example, reducing the cost of sustainable food production and distribution, educating consumers about the benefits of sustainable food, and promoting sustainable land use and water conservation.
Mona Khatib, The Netherlands ”

“ An association at my school has an agreement with local farmers to provide us with organic baskets at €10/15 a week, which are very well supplied for the price. It's a great initiative!
Clémence, France ”

Increased awareness

Many young people feel they lack the information and education on the topic of sustainable diets and food systems. Preconceived ideas, associations, and myths continue to impede a shift towards sustainable diets. A higher level of awareness among EU citizens about the importance and benefits of a healthy and sustainable diet compared to the detrimental impact of the current EU food system is vital, as it may contribute to the rising demand for sustainable food choices.

Two types of public measures need to be designed and implemented. First, the Sustainable Food Systems law should focus on raising awareness about the impact of individual food choices on the climate and biodiversity crisis. The other type should emphasize the importance of healthy and sustainable diets, promoting increased consumption of plant-based products and reduced consumption of animal-based products. Interventions should also emphasize the financial and environmental benefits of limiting food waste at the household level.

Such measures could include making citizens more aware of the functioning of the supply chain by visiting production sites or developing a more transparent and comprehensive labeling of foods and software that enables consumers to inform themselves.

“What I really needed to learn is what sustainable food is and where to get it. And also get a feeling for the prices of food. Food became something very convenient, there is always a supermarket next door. We are not used to plan our food purchase, but if you start doing it, there are so many sources of affordable food.”
Valentin Lechner, Austria

“We need to raise awareness of sustainable eating among young people in all social categories. we must reduce the number of meat products in schools and raise awareness among parents, who are often afraid that their children won't grow up because of a lack of protein. We must make vegetarian meals more appetizing, so they end up being more in demand and contribute to a change in mentality (reducing the association between meat and richness, goodness, 'real meals' and indulgence) and, ultimately, consumption practices.”
Alexis Ettori, France

“Our unsustainable food system is not only affecting young people in Europe: the current situation of food consumption and food price volatility can only be understood within globalized markets and supply chains. Future EU decisions must prioritize fair trade practices and social equity within environmental and climate limits, in addition to the food sovereignty of local communities.”
Sanaa Bari & Simon Guérin-Sanz, Belgium

CONCLUSION

Overall, the majority of young people highlighted that the increased prices of sustainable food, together with low accessibility and awareness, represented a main barrier to the adoption of healthy and sustainable diets.



The Need for a Radical and Holistic Food System Change

With this manifesto, we want to emphasise the need for a radical and holistic food system change to make sustainable food the most accessible option. Studies have shown that the **higher price of sustainable food represents a significant barrier** for European consumers. Consequently, making sustainable food more accessible and raising awareness about it represent great opportunities for switching to more sustainable diets.

We are united in the **vision of a secure and sustainable future** which is not possible without radically changing our food system. This is why we ask the European Commission to present an **ambitious proposal for a strong SFS Law** by September and the Parliament and the EU Member States to support the process for the transformation of our food systems.



SIGNATORIES



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