



Food

Introduction

The EU agri-food system is a dynamic and diverse ecosystem, integral to the continent's economy, resilience and social fabric. It evolves continuously and adapts to meet the challenges of the future while ensuring all 447 million EU citizens have daily access to food. Retail and wholesale, as part of this ecosystem, supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, employing almost 30 million people and accounting for 11.5% of EU added value added.¹

Food retailers and wholesalers are a central actor in the food supply chain. They are in weekly contact with millions of European consumers and business customers and play a key role in transmitting customer demand to primary producers and manufacturers. It is in their DNA to offer consumers a wide and easy choice of quality, innovation and price for a healthy and sustainable diet. To achieve this, companies work continuously with their suppliers, including primary producers.

Retailers and Wholesalers operate sophisticated and efficient systems, ensuring reliable and safe sourcing and distribution of foods. The sector's resilience was rigorously tested and demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when, despite the challenges, it continued to provide food to consumers and tackled the disruptions in the food supply chain. Furthermore, the sector has reacted and adapted quickly to changes in consumer choices and behaviour, such as the growing interest in plant-based or regional products. They recognise their role in driving change including through the creation

of initiatives, aimed at making a positive impact on consumers' dietary habits, including product reformulation to reduce sugar, salt or fat content.

The sector also seeks products which meet customers' sustainability expectations, including through decarbonisation, to respond to climate challenges. As such, it is instrumental in the development of the market for sustainably produced food, developing dedicated product ranges and introducing local specialities in store. This ability to innovate and adapt to new trends and demands is crucial to drive the transformation toward sustainable food systems.

While retailers and wholesalers account for the smallest proportion of food waste,² they remain committed to implementing different measures to avoid this throughout the supply chain: before delivery, in stores and beyond. These efforts include collaboration with suppliers and food banks, as well as investment in innovative technologies for better demand forecasting and supply management.

Our sector is keen to continue to play a proactive role in driving the transition, including through sustainable food consumption, together with other partners in the agri-food chain, in a cooperative manner. To develop truly sustainable food systems for the future, we need to act together in a well-functioning single market.

¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652058/EPRS_BRI%282020%29652058_EN.pdf

² Eurostat (2023) – Food waste and food waste prevention – estimates – Statistics Explained (europa.eu)



Key asks

Connecting sustainable production and consumption, within a legal framework for sustainable food systems.

We remain fully supportive of the Commission's ambition to establish an EU Framework on Sustainable Food Systems. Cooperation along the supply chain plays a key role in fostering sustainable production and consumption. Together with producers and other sectors of the supply chain, retailers and wholesalers have been establishing and initiating sustainable partnerships and schemes, such as dedicated supplier networks and tripartite contracts. Within the competition framework, such partnerships and initiatives should be further facilitated to strengthen relationships, drive positive change throughout the supply chain and to address common challenges effectively. To collectively advance the transition, more work is needed on clarifying and agreeing on definitions, criteria and objectives. This is especially important for retail and wholesale businesses, in support of their voluntary initiatives, practical operations, strategic direction and investments.

1. The Framework for Sustainable Food Systems should be coherent with other initiatives, create legal certainty, and ensure proportionality in obligations for all operators.
2. Future criteria and standards should be science-based and accompanied by a methodology that can be practically applied by all. The three sustainability pillars (economic, social and environmental) must be considered.
3. A future framework should enable businesses to continuously innovate, remain competitive and create market opportunities for new, sustainable products.
4. Further encouragement and facilitation of existing and future supply chain partnerships is essential to achieving a common goal.

Food information to consumers: an essential tool to help

Retailers and wholesalers are fully committed and have continuously invested in providing consumers with meaningful and easy-to-understand information. Commercial initiatives are most effective when accompanied by comprehensive education programs. All foods can play a role in a balanced and varied diet, and consumers should be informed on how to achieve this.

1. All food information needs to be understandable, clear, and science-based, thus adhering to the principles established under the Food Information to Consumers Regulation.³ Before introducing and implementing any new labelling regulations, the efficacy and innovative/informative nature of schemes already on the market should be thoroughly assessed.
2. We need a coordinated and coherent framework approach to allow digital solutions to provide consumer information where possible.

Preventing food waste remains top priority, including via consumer information campaigns

Retailers and wholesalers are dedicated to tackling food waste and recognise the importance of collective action throughout the supply chain, especially at those stages where numbers are higher, to ensure major progress towards establishing a more sustainable food supply chain.

1. To have a true impact, food waste should be addressed across the entire food supply chain.
2. Investment in public campaigns, targeting consumer information and behavioural change, particularly regarding best-before and use-by dates, is necessary.
3. To further reduce waste it is important to ensure that donations are exempt from VAT.

³ Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers