

Summary record: Meeting with FoodDrinkEurope on 5 May 2020, online

*Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius, a Member of his Cabinet and an official from DG ENV met representatives of FoodDrinkEurope (FDE) on the request of the latter to discuss the European Green Deal (EGD) from the perspective of the sector they represent.*

FDE described their plans to contribute to the implementation of the EGD. FDE explained that due to COVID-19, food consumption had increased with the exception of the food consumed by restaurants/bars and that the sector has been able to adapt well due to the close relation to the agricultural sector and the good collaboration with EU institutions. FDE shared that they have already set a 'sustainable food systems' strategy in November 2019, which included forward looking objectives (i.e. reducing food waste by 25%). FDE has also made commitments to reduce plastics consumption and the uptake of recycled plastics. FDE was looking at increasing the amount of food-grade recycled plastics. FDE relies on research and development funding for this and would be happy to exchange with the Commission on improving separate collection systems. The role of packaging to ensure food safety was underlined. Clear guidance from the Commission on materials that could be recycled into food contact materials and the availability of food grade recycled materials at competitive price were emphasised as key for businesses in the sector. The role of funding and investments vis-a-vis bans or soft incentives was brought up.

Commissioner Sinkevičius underlined that the EGD remains the EU growth strategy, together with digitalisation, and that the EGD is the EU strategy for a sustainable recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. He thanked FDE for sending their recommendations on the implementation of the new Circular Economy Action Plan, and emphasised some key elements in the context of the crisis:

- Resilience of value chains: actions to strengthen resilience range from the sustainable product legislative initiative, waste prevention and actions in key value chains;
- Food packaging and recyclability: the Commission will update the essential requirements of packaging, aim at making packaging recyclable and reusable by 2030 and support the uptake of recycled content.

In the exchange that followed, FDE underlined the need to bring together various overarching objectives: growth, protection of the environment, food safety. They were interested in knowing how the articulation of the initiatives on biodiversity, deforestation, Farm to Fork and CAP (and its greening) will take place, stresses the need to set a holistic approach in the biodiversity strategy and brought up the role of structured dialogue and formalised ways of cooperation.

Commissioner Sinkevičius underlined that the future Farm to Fork strategy is prepared in synergy with other initiatives (for instance, the EGD ambitions on climate neutrality and biodiversity and in the light of deforestation strategy from July 2019) and it will address the entire food system including production, processing, packaging, marketing and consumption of food. He expressed the high level of political commitment in the Commission to deliver an ambitious Biodiversity Strategy and to ensure that the biodiversity crisis comes to the forefront of the global political agenda – similar as for climate change ahead of the Paris Agreement back in 2015. He also expanded on innovation as a way to boost growth and the role of Horizon Europe.

In conclusion, FDE assured of their readiness and willingness to continue supporting the environmental agenda for the food sector in the next years.