



Press release

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Sustainable Food Consumption: Experts Demand Ambitious Governance Reforms in the EU

Experts promote transition towards a sustainable food system // Current food consumption and production patterns cause severe impacts on health and environment // Opposing Food Waste: Industrialized countries' food waste would be sufficient to feed the world's malnourished people // Knowledge brokerage consortium RESPONDER stresses the need of strong governance structures and actions

Lisbon/Vienna, 6 May 2013 – For two days more than 50 specialists from 15 countries discussed current food consumption trends and necessary reforms in order to achieve a sustainable food system. Identified hotspots that call for interventions are, firstly, the damages to environment that are caused within the food chain, such as soil degradation, water pollution or eutrophication. Secondly, also health issues are high on the agenda. About a quarter of the world population suffers from nutritional problems: About 800 million people around the world lack adequate access to food, in contrast to at least one billion people overweight, especially in industrialized countries. The experts emphasised the need of strong governance structures and actions in order to make food consumption more sustainable.

The Multinational Event "Shaping the future of Sustainable Food Consumption: Challenges and opportunities for policy and science integration" held on 18-19 April 2013 in Lisbon was organized by the consortium RESPONDER and CENSE – Centre for Environmental and Sustainability Research/New University of Lisbon, with the support of the Portuguese Ministry for Agriculture, Sea, Environment and Spatial Planning, enabling scientists and policy makers to exchange experiences and knowledge with regard to sustainable food consumption issues.

Link policy and researchers - time is up for a shift

"For me, for Portugal, it is important to link policy makers and researchers", stated Nuno Vieira e Brito, Secretary of State of Food and Agrifood Research from the Portuguese Ministry for Agriculture Sea, Environment and Spatial Planning. "It is time to shift towards sustainable food consumption".

"Past food production and consumption have been mining the planet" explained Prof. Tim Lang from the Centre for Food Policy, City University London, UK. "Evidence suggests large-scale system change is needed, not just small-scale individual change. Consumers need help. A new Intergovernmental Panel on Sustainable Diets could chart new directions for food culture. And the EU needs to map how the current CAP can become a Common Sustainable Food Policy".

These thoughts were confirmed by the workshops participants. Especially integration of policies nowadays fragmented into different areas is needed to overcome institutional blockades. "A holistic policy integration" was requested by Prof. Sirpa Kurpa from MTT Agrifood Research Finland.

Against Food Waste

Approximately 300 million tons of food are wasted in the industrialized countries every year – an amount that is estimated to be enough for feeding the 870 million malnourished people in the world. “Keeping this in mind, it is obvious that we must put great effort on opposing food waste”, explained Frieder Rubik from the Institute for Ecological Economy Research in Heidelberg. Food waste is generated along the whole value chain during cultivation, processing, distribution and consumption. Rubik: “It is of uttermost importance to minimise food losses in each stage. Required changes include label formulations other than “best before”, suitable storage and packaging or a change of portion sizes. The recent campaign ‘Too good for the garbage bin’ by the German Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection is one example of addressing these challenges.” Andrew Parry from WRAP UK pointed out pathways for changing consumer behaviour, based on success demonstrated in the UK, such as “raising awareness, encouraging action, making use of partnership working, and promoting new habits around food”, concluding that “A more integrated approach to food related objectives, be they related to health, waste, safety or sustainability, could deliver greater impact”.

Ambitious Governance Reforms needed

The experts called for more ambitious food policy which addresses the combined environmental, health, economic and societal problems of food production and consumption. “Food security goes beyond the concern for food availability” underscored Alexandre Meybeck from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). “It also entails issues of accessibility, utilization and stability”. The complexity involved in shaping the future of sustainable food consumption and production calls for strong governance structures and actions by the several players in the food system. “Sustainable food systems are on the current UN agenda” added Alexandre Meybeck, pointing out to recent initiatives, such as the work developed by the Committee on World Food Security and its High Level Panel of Experts on food security and nutrition (HLPE) and the FAO/UNEP program on sustainable food systems.

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About RESPONDER:

The European project RESPONDER aims to promote sustainable consumption by assessing potential contradictions with economic growth. The project links four communities by facilitating a structured dialogue: science, policy, pro-growth, and beyond growth.

Further information: <http://www.scp-responder.eu>



Contact

Dr. André Martinuzzi
Associate professor and Director of the
Research Institute for Managing Sustainability
Vienna University of Economics and Business
phone: +43-1-313 36 46 98 | email: andre.martinuzzi@wu.ac.at

The RESPONDER consortium:

The RESPONDER consortium comprises ten partners from eight European countries:

Organisation	Country
Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Research Institute for Managing Sustainability (project coordinator)	AT
Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW)	DE
Sustainable Europe Research Institute	AT
University of Barcelona, Institute of Environmental Science and Technology	ES
Technical University of Denmark, Department of Management Engineering, Innovation and Sustainability	DK
University of Surrey, Centre for Environmental Strategy	GB
Institute for Forecasting of the Slovak Academy of Sciences	SK
Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Center for Environmental and Sustainability Research	PT
Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development, Sustainable Development Section	CH
German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety	DE