

EIT Food's contribution to the Commission's Consultation on the Roadmap for the Communication: "Restoring sustainable carbon cycles"

EIT Food welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the roadmap for the publication of the Commission communication on 'Restoring sustainable carbon cycles'.

EIT Food believes that systems innovation, as well as education, public engagement and new business model development and investment will be key enablers for the development and adoption of new green business models and new climate-smart solutions rewarding farmers (and other landscape and ecosystem managers) for climate-positive practices. Indeed, such business models would help provide farmers with new sources of income by means of financial incentives or new sources of revenue to encourage activities leading to carbon removals and storage.

With a view to maximising the uptake of carbon farming solutions, we consider that the EU action should focus on the pillars outlined below:

- **Involvement throughout the food value chain:** The transition to climate-positive practices cannot rest on the sole efforts of farmers. It should involve all players in the value chain through an integrated approach. Food processors, logistics firms, retailers and consumers can support the development and enduring advancement of carbon farming and incentivise regenerative practices. The appreciation of processors, retailers and consumers of food production models that also provide ecosystem services will be pivotal in generating a market "pull" through a shift in consumption habits. We therefore believe that actors throughout the value chain should be encouraged and enabled to reward the farmers' efforts to sequester carbon. To this end, we welcome the European Commission's plan to develop a robust and credible framework allowing for carbon storage, management and removals to be accounted. Full accounting of carbon would foster trust across the value chain, eventually contributing to greater consumer trust in the food system and accelerate the transformation.
- **Deployment of technological solutions:** The last decade has seen significant progress in the development of new and more affordable technologies to monitor carbon emissions and removals. Nonetheless, excessive cost and time required to measure soil carbon content continue to be a major barrier to the uptake of carbon farming solutions across the EU. Public authorities should foster a large-scale deployment of technologies that could increase the accuracy of monitoring, reporting and verification while reducing the subsequent costs over time. This might include setting standards, for example in data collection, including agreement on KPIs to be measured, and the data architecture. In addition, it is important to invest in the development of new innovative solutions which can help create a market pull for carbon farming practices such as: solutions to improve the traceability and transparency of the supply chain from farm to fork through digitalization; innovative food labelling systems which can inform consumers on the environmental and carbon footprint of food products. EIT Food and its partners are already drawing attention to the problem and investing in the development and acceleration of these solutions. However, we recommend that the European Commission further supports this process by: mobilizing additional resources in relevant R&I projects through Horizon Europe and other appropriate funding instruments; facilitating the exchange of best practices and the

dissemination of results of promising R&I projects; promoting the match-making between challenge owners and solution providers.

- **Financial incentives for farmers:** The upfront investment before there is any possibility of a return is a particular concern for farmers and foresters interested in undertaking activities leading to carbon removals and storage. Until the moment carbon credits are produced and verified, farmers would be required to make substantial investments. Therefore, an appropriate mix of financial incentives will be necessary to ensure that their agricultural activity is economically sustainable. This could include non-market sources of financial support, for instance through the Common Agricultural Policy. Against this background, we fully support the European Commission's plan to develop result-based payment schemes for carbon farming in the EU, as they can incentivise farmers to adopt climate-friendly practices, while allowing for some flexibility about the way results are achieved. The mix of financial incentives could however also include market-based mechanisms, offering financial rewards for regenerative practices, for instance, through the trade of carbon credits. Regardless, incentives must also necessarily include measures to stimulate the demand for regeneratively produced food, by raising consumer awareness and appreciation of its benefits.
- **Education and training:** Public authorities should facilitate the reskilling and upskilling of farmers and foresters, providing them with training opportunities to support their transition towards regenerative and carbon farming practices as well as the adoption of those technologies which can support the implementation of regenerative agriculture and carbon farming practices and the monitoring of carbon.

EIT Food's engagement in support of this transition ranges from farm to fork, following our four functional areas:

- **Innovation:** At farm level, in the context of its Sustainable Agriculture focus area, EIT Food issues calls for projects to favour the emergence of market-ready innovative technological solutions, in close collaboration with the worlds of industry, research and development. This includes projects for the reduction of emissions and waste at production and retail level¹ and for the valorisation of side-stream products, as well as a host of projects for reducing emissions and increasing carbon sequestration and storage at farm level².
- **Education:** We provide training and advisory services to aid farmers in the transition to regenerative practices in our "Regenerative Agriculture Revolution" programme. Moreover, through our "Grow Workshops" focusing on new practices and technologies, we seek to establish regional and European networks of farmers and encourage the uptake of sustainable and circular solutions. Additionally, we set up a range of programmes aimed at students to drive innovation

¹ See also our programme for the optimisation of bakery products using computational tools and consumer feedback.

² Some examples: big data and advanced analytics for sustainable management of the dairy cattle sector; our pig tracker; sustainable fertiliser created through waste and by-products of beef slaughter; the MOSOM (Mapping of Soil Organic Matter) project; our decision-supporting tool for net-zero livestock farming. Moreover, in the context of our LINKDAPA project for precision agriculture, algorithms being developed in 2022 will estimate the reduction in negative environmental impacts, such as GHG emissions, achieved by precision fertiliser application.

processes in the agri-food sector, working on responses to global food challenges, including on soil health and sustainability. In particular, our highly innovative Master in Food Systems has produced a number of thesis projects addressing decarbonisation through improved farming practices and the utilisation of sidestreams.

- **Business Creation:** At value chain level, we stimulate investment in innovative start-ups operating in this space, gather data to prove the business viability of regenerative farms, and engage with actors throughout the food chain to develop and upscale viable solutions. Part of our engagement in this field is the “Test Farms programme”, which helps agri-tech innovators test their products and services on real life farms by providing a connection between agricultural start-ups, farmers and testing land.
- **Public Engagement:** At consumer level, we strive to generate awareness of the benefits of regenerative agriculture and drive greater recognition of its value added, to create market “pull” and increase farmers’ economic return. EIT Food’s leading engagement with the public is “Food Unfolded®”, a community platform providing consumer-friendly, science-based information on the major trends and challenges in the food system – including regenerative agriculture.

In this context, EIT Food is collaborating with key stakeholders in the Carbon+ Farming Coalition. With a membership spanning the entire food value chain and a focus on farmers, the Coalition aims to support farmers in managing unprecedented complexity and to encourage the decarbonisation of the EU’s food system while maximising other benefits, such as soil health and farmer resilience, by fostering the uptake of nature-positive practices through a farmer-centric approach. Prioritising 5 country-crop combinations, the Coalition conducted qualitative and quantitative research on the adoption of carbon farming practices by farmers and the obstacles therein. Following this, it will develop and pilot solutions to accelerate uptake and support policymakers with insights, with the ultimate aim of deploying solutions at scale and advance the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy and deliver on the Green Deal.

About EIT Food

EIT Food is the world’s largest and most dynamic food innovation community. We accelerate innovation to build a future-fit food system that produces healthy and sustainable food for all.

Supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union, we invest in projects, organisations and individuals that share our goals for a healthy and sustainable food system. We unlock innovation potential in businesses and universities, and create and scale agrifood startups to bring new technologies and products to market. We equip entrepreneurs and professionals with the skills needed to transform the food system and put consumers at the heart of our work, helping build trust by reconnecting them to the origins of their food.

We are one of eight innovation communities established by the European Institute for Innovation & Technology (EIT), an independent EU body set up in 2008 to drive innovation and entrepreneurship across Europe.

To find out more, please visit: www.eitfood.eu

