



Ursula von der Leyen
European Commission President
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200,
1049 Brussels
Belgium
by mail: ec-president-vdl@ec.europa.eu

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State of the Union address - call for ambition and commitment for a greener Europe

Dear Ms. President Von Der Leyen,

As engaged stakeholders representing 46 organisations across the European Union, deeply concerned about the trajectory of our shared environment, human health and animal welfare, we are writing to present some pressing matters for consideration in your upcoming State of the Union speech.

The road to the next European elections as well as the following mandate will have a decisive role in our climate and health targets. We therefore urge your State of the European Union address to encompass the following aspects:

- **Reaffirm the European Green Deal's climate ambitions**, including the Farm2Fork Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy. In light of recent political resistance, we ask you to underscore the undeniable urgency and global importance of our continent leading in the arena of climate action. The European Green Deal is not just a promise but a necessity to future generations;
- **Highlight the need to transform our farming and food system**. Europe's farming and food sector lies at the crossroads of tradition and innovation. It is crucial to recognise the environmental, economic, and health benefits of transitioning towards a sustainable sector. A shift towards plant-based diets can substantially reduce our carbon footprint, while reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy can ensure we balance environmental conservation with economic prosperity;
- **Reinforce the ambition of the Sustainable Food Systems Framework as a flagship policy** that paves the ground for a transformation of our food systems and food environments. This landmark policy should inspire measures and interventions, both at EU and national level, to address the availability, affordability, and desirability of healthy and sustainable food;

Administrative seat:
European Vegetarian Union (EVU) e.V.
c/o Kiez Buero.
Markgrafendamm 24, Haus 16
10245 Berlin / GERMANY

Contact:
Website: www.euroveg.eu
E-mail: info@euroveg.eu
Tel.: +49 157 587 382 33

Legal seat:
European Vegetarian Union (EVU) e.V.
Friedhofstr. 12
67693 Fischbach / GERMANY

Despite the Commission's efforts, current EU actions are deemed insufficient in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)¹, while Sustainable Development Goals related to climate change and biodiversity have moved further out of reach². Recent reports have highlighted that EU food policy^{3,4}, including the Common Agricultural Policy, may have adverse effects on the environment and human health by supporting dietary imbalances, such as excess consumption of meat products. Indeed, food represents Europeans' biggest share of the ecological footprint due to high meat intake⁵. Most notably, the European Court of Auditors has stated that the EU's agricultural sector does not currently abide by the polluter-pays principle⁶.

Transitioning towards more plant-based diets has been recognised as a key strategy to mitigate climate change while also improving human health and contributing to greater food resilience^{7,8}. This dietary shift has been acknowledged by the EU Farm to Fork Strategy⁹, the Biodiversity Strategy¹⁰, the EU Beating Cancer Plan¹¹, and the EU Drivers of Food Security¹², and has been recommended by the 2023 Science Advice for Policy by European Academies (SAPEA)¹³. However, such a shift requires deep changes in our production and consumption patterns that must be supported by a robust EU regulatory framework.

Despite this, meat production in the EU has increased by 80% since the 1960s¹⁴, while important sources of plant protein, such as pulses, have decreased, now representing just 2% of agricultural land¹⁵. In fact, the EU produces about 4 thousand tonnes of pulses a year¹⁶ compared to almost 7 million tonnes of beef, from 76 million cattle¹⁷. This is particularly concerning since beef has been shown to be the most climate-damaging and resource-intensive meat¹⁸. Indeed, if cattle made up an EU Member State, it would be the second largest in population.

We urgently need a food systems transition - one that satisfies multiple needs and leaves no one behind. By making a shift to more plant-based production and consumption a priority across the EU's agriculture, health, environment and climate policies and regulations, we can build a food system that is more resilient, sustainable, healthy and equitable. As the recent Eurobarometer reported, up to 31% of Europeans are already taking this crucial step in their own diets¹⁹, but significant policy measures are needed.

Thank you for your attention and for considering the policy actions necessary to uphold and achieve the European Green Deal targets. May your speech be filled with resilience, determination, and optimism.

European Vegetarian Union

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Markgrafendamm 24, Haus 16
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European Vegetarian Union (EVU) e.V.
Friedhofstr. 12
67693 Fischbach / GERMANY

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