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European Commission
Berlaymont, Rue de la Loi 200
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Dear Executive Vice-President Timmermans
Dear Commissioners Kyriakides and Wojciechowski

Review of EU policy on promotion of food products

The EU promotion policy on agricultural products needs to contribute to healthy, sustainable, primarily plant-based diets, while also meeting climate and environmental objectives. It should exclude agri-food products that are not coherent with these essential goals.

The European Commission has initiated a timely review of EU policy on the promotion of food products and has opened a public consultation process.

With this letter, we are pleased to contribute to this consultation and to the broader need for better coherence in related aspects of EU policy: Alignment is needed between all policies that are inter-linked with farming and food, including public health, environmental protection, animal welfare, public procurement, trade, and investment in and subsidies for farming and food production.

We focus here on the environmental and human health aspects of diets heavy in animal products. Recent EU policies recognise the need for a shift to more plant-rich European diets, yet perversely, campaign subsidies under the EU promotion policy have been used to promote consumption of those very animal products.

The EU *Farm to Fork* strategy notes that: Moving to a more plant-based diet with less red and processed meat and with more fruits and vegetables will reduce not only risks of life threatening diseases, but also the environmental impact of the food system .ⁱ

The *Beating Cancer Plan* notes that the Promotions Policy review is being undertaken 'with a view to enhancing its contribution to sustainable production and consumption, and in line with the shift to a more plant-based diet, with less red and processed meat and other foods linked to cancer risks and more fruit and vegetables.'ⁱⁱ

A tsunami of over-production and over-consumption of animal products in the EU has overwhelmed nature. 68% of EU agricultural land is used for animal production and feed. Land-use change related to these activities is the most widespread driver of biodiversity loss. Intensification of crop production for concentrate feed demanded by

industrial animal production leads to soil degradation, overuse and pollution of water, and air pollution. Around 90% of the soy imported by the EU is used for animal feed,ⁱⁱⁱ much of which comes from deforested land. Agriculture stands for 10.3% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions, of which close to 70% come from animal agriculture. The Farm to Fork Strategy notes that 'If European diets were in line with dietary recommendations, the environmental footprint of food systems would be significantly reduced.'ⁱ

The high levels of consumption of red and processed meat made possible by industrial production contribute to heart disease, obesity, diabetes and certain cancers.^{iv} The World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer has classified red meat as probably carcinogenic to humans, and processed meat as carcinogenic.^v The Farm to Fork Strategy notes that: 'It is estimated that in the EU in 2017 over 950,000 deaths (one out of five) and over 16 million lost healthy life years were attributable to unhealthy diets, mainly cardiovascular diseases and cancers.'ⁱ

Yet in recent years, nearly one third of the 200 million euros of the promotion budget has been dedicated annually to advertising animal products, in some cases funding up to 80% of marketing campaign costs. Some of these have explicitly aimed at reversing decline or maintaining growth in meat consumption. This policy needs reform so that it supports public health, environmental protection and animal welfare instead of putting them at risk.

We call on the European Commission to reform the EU promotion policy for agricultural products, so that it provides support and incentives for the crucial shift to more plant-based diets in Europe, for the benefit of animals, people and the planet.

Yours sincerely

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ⁱ European Commission, 2020. [Farm to Fork Strategy: For a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system](#).

ⁱⁱ European Commission, 2021. [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ IDH and IUCN NL, 2019. [European Soy Monitor](#). Researched by B. Kuepper and M. Riemersma of Profundo

^{iv} Willett, W. et al., 2019. [Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems](#). *The Lancet* 393:10970. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31788-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4)

^v International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2015. [IARC Monographs evaluate consumption of red meat and processed meat](#). Press Release N° 240.