

Case #3EZ. Europe's Farm to Fork Strategy and Sustainability Code of Conduct

<https://foodtank.com/news/2021/08/europe-advances-farm-to-fork-strategy-with-new-sustainability-code-of-conduct/>



The European Union is launching a *Code of Conduct* to encourage environmentally and socially sustainable practices among food manufacturers and retailers. It comes as one of the first deliverables of the *Farm to Fork Strategy* which aims to improve the overall sustainability of the European food system.

The Code details the following seven aspirational objectives, each of which is associated with “aspirational targets” and “indicative actions” (akin to general precepts and specific practices):

1. Healthy, balanced and sustainable diets for all European consumers to a) reverse malnutrition and diet-related noncommunicable diseases and b) reduce the environmental footprint of food consumption by 2030.
2. Prevention and reduction of food loss and waste
3. A climate neutral food chain in Europe by 2050
4. An optimized circular and resource-efficient food chain in Europe

5. Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all
6. Sustainable value creation in the European food supply chain through partnership
7. Sustainable sourcing in food supply chains

“The Code of Conduct is a voluntary instrument where signatories engage in aspirational objectives and targets within their own capacity and remit,” according to Els Bedert, Director of Product Policy at EuroCommerce, an association of trade associations in all of the EU countries.

EuroCommerce is among several associations who helped develop the *Code of Conduct*. Bedert explains that actors who sign on commit to achieve three main goals:

1. the promotion and encouragement of healthy and sustainable consumption,
2. the improvement of sustainability within companies, and
3. sustainable practices among relevant actors in the food value chain.

Companies can decide if they want to follow the objectives outlined in the Code or propose their own sustainability commitments. The Code of Conduct is a voluntary instrument where signatories engage in aspirational objectives and targets within their own capacity and remit. The Code of Conduct is a voluntary instrument where signatories engage in aspirational objectives and targets within their own capacity and remit.

Farm-to-Fork Code of Conduct

https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/sustainable-food-processing/code-conduct_en

The *Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices* offers two frameworks of engagement for participating companies and associations, one general and one for more ambitious commitments. The general framework includes a variety of objectives and targets that companies can commit to. The second framework invites companies to demonstrate leadership by proposing their own sustainability commitments. The targets in both frameworks identify actions to improve the overall EU food system and include goals such as preventing food waste during transportation and distribution, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting good working conditions.

To measure a company’s progress, the Code asks companies to provide an annual or biennial report. “To allow as many actors as possible to voluntarily commit, we have also asked for monitoring obligations to be light, and as far as possible, aligned with existing reporting regimes,” Bedert tells Food Tank.

Participating companies can also cooperate, share knowledge, and learn from one another through the help of a *Collaborative Platform*. This platform meets annually and aims to create an environment that facilitates transitions to sustainable practices. In this way, developers of the Code hope that it “presents an opportunity to showcase the many actions our sector is already doing,” Bedert tells Food Tank.

While providing voluntary standards may encourage more companies to partake in the Code of Conduct, many **European NGOs** are not satisfied with the results. They fear that it falls short in its commitments and does not sufficiently contribute to the transformative changes needed for a fair, healthy, and environmentally sustainable European food system.

The [European Heart Network](#) (EHN), which works to prevent cardiovascular diseases in Europe, provided input in the development of the Code. The Network raised concerns about the Code's healthy consumption goals. Marleen Kestens, Manager Prevention at EHN, explains that NGOs and industry leaders could not agree on a definition of healthy diets, or the level of commitments companies should make. "We wanted to see more, more sustainability commitments, more health commitments. And that's not going to happen, the impact of the Code is going to be too little to make a difference."

[Safe Food Advocacy Europe](#) (SAFE), a non-governmental organization focusing on the protection of European consumers in the food system, also expressed concerns with the commitments presented in the Code. "We agree with the aspirational objectives set so far, but we hope the Code will be able to set further aspirational objectives to fully represent the complexity of the food system challenges," according to Federica Dolce, Policy Officer and Project Coordinator at SAFE.

Dolce highlights issues with the progress-tracking and monitoring system, which she argues was developed too quickly. "More time would have been needed to define more precise standards and timelines to ensure a transparent and reliable procedure that can ensure the best Code progresses-tracking and monitoring," according to Dolce.

Floriana Cimmarusti, Secretary General of SAFE, said, "the intentions behind the Code of Conduct may lead in the right direction but more concrete and higher ambitions are needed to better acknowledge the urgency to act as soon as possible."

CASE QUESTIONS

The Code of Conduct has 8 "Aspirational Objective" that might be viewed as "General Precepts" in the terminology of Module 3. Bedert has distilled these 8 into 3.

- 1. (2) Choose a "specific practice" that would help in implementation of each of the 8 aspirational objectives if you were a food manufacturer like Nestle' (or choose an EU grocery chain with which you are familiar). Present your specific practices in the form, "Nestle' will...(25 words maximum for each specific practice)**
- 2. (2) What would you find to be the most difficult part of implementation of your code of specific practices? (80 words maximum)**