

# PLAN'EAT



## ROADMAP FOR A EUROPEAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL



A COMPLIMENTARY GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



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PLAN'EAT: Food systems transformation towards healthy and sustainable dietary

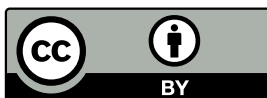
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# Acronyms

<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>DG AGRI</b>	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
<b>DG CLIMA</b>	Directorate-General for Climate Action
<b>DG COMM</b>	Directorate-General for Communication
<b>DG ENV</b>	Directorate-General for Environment
<b>DG ECHO</b>	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
<b>DG HERA</b>	Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority
<b>DG JUST</b>	Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers
<b>DG RTD</b>	Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
<b>DG SANTE</b>	Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
<b>DG TRADE</b>	Directorate-General for Trade
<b>EBAF</b>	European Board on Agriculture and Food
<b>EESC</b>	European Economic and Social Committee
<b>EFPC</b>	European Food Policy Council
<b>EPHA</b>	European Public Health Alliance
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FPCs</b>	Food Policy Councils
<b>HLPE</b>	High-Level Panel of Experts
<b>IPES-Food</b>	International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>REA</b>	European Research Executive Agency
<b>SCAR</b>	Standing Committee on Agricultural Research

# Executive Summary

**Europe's food systems face mounting pressures, yet transforming them also holds significant potential to enhance environmental, health, economic, and social resilience.**

Realizing this requires reforms to governance structures. The current European Union's (EU) agri-food policymaking landscape is characterised by limited participation, entrenched vested interests, sectoral silos, and institutional lock-ins. To address the systemic and cross-sectoral nature of food systems challenges democratic innovations are needed to broaden participation, rebalance power asymmetries, and better align policymaking with the public interest.

The concept of *food democracy* provides a normative framework for such reforms, emphasizing inclusiveness, deliberation, transparency, and accountability.

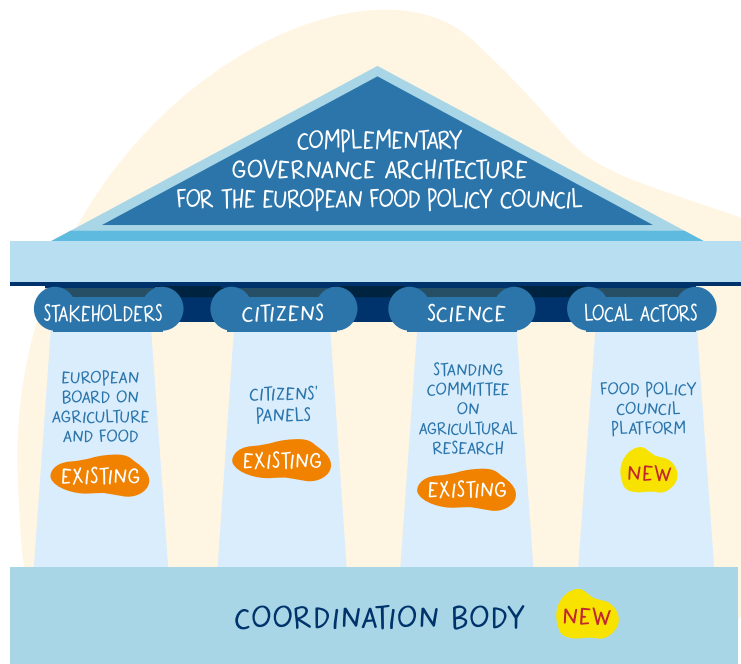
**Across Europe, experimentation with participatory food governance is already taking place through the emergence of local Food Policy Councils.**

At the EU level, calls for a European Food Policy Council have gained traction in recent years, but have not yet led to institutionalisation.

This roadmap identifies three key governance gaps in EU agri-food policymaking: limited deliberative quality within existing participatory structures; political reluctance to advance transformative food system change due to concerns about backlash; and weak vertical integration of food policy across governance levels. Not more dialogue, but better-connected and more structured dialogue is needed.

**To address these shortcomings, this Roadmap for a European Food Policy Council proposes governance reforms to improve agrifood policymaking of the EU.**

The proposed governance innovation centres on establishing an inclusive, participatory food



policymaking that brings together stakeholders, citizens, scientists, and local actors, ensuring that EU food policies are evidence-based and aligned with the public interest. The European Food Policy Council architecture rests on five complementary governance components:

- 1. The European Board on Agriculture and Food** articulates organised stakeholder interests at EU level and ensures policy feasibility.
- 2. Citizens' panels** bring a deliberative public-interest perspective through randomly selected participants from across the EU.
- 3. The Standing Committee on Agricultural Research** serves as a science-policy interface.
- 4. A European Food Policy Council Platform**, linking the EU policy level with local Food Policy Councils, provides grounding of EU-level food policies in implementation realities and enables the scaling-up of local innovations.
- 5. These four bodies are complemented by a dedicated Coordination Body**, responsible for monitoring outputs, strengthening linkages, and ensuring follow-up.

**The value of this governance configuration lies in its functional complementarity.**

By interlocking distinct perspectives agri-food stakeholders, citizens, scientists, and local practitioners it balances different forms of knowledge and strengthens public-interest representation in EU food policymaking. The overall aim is not to create an entirely new institutional layer, but to strengthen and connect existing mechanisms while addressing key gaps in participation, coordination, and knowledge integration. A more coordinated and inclusive food governance architecture would not only enhance policy effectiveness and legitimacy, but also facilitate the transition to a resilient, just, and sustainable European food system.

**To operationalise this governance architecture, the roadmap identifies targeted reforms of existing institutions for the European Board on Agriculture and Food, Citizens' Panels, and the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research, alongside the creation of new structures for a European Food Policy Council Platform and a Coordination Body.**

To enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of the **European Board on Agriculture and Food** as the stakeholder-engagement forum of in the European Food Policy Council, targeted procedural reforms are required to address serious shortcoming, including reducing power asymmetries and strengthen inclusiveness.

**Citizens' Panels** should be closely linked to concrete policy initiatives so that deliberations take place at moments where they can meaningfully influence decision making, while clear follow-up mechanisms ensure that recommendations are systematically considered.

**The Standing Committee on Agricultural Research's** role as a science-policy interface should be more clearly operationalised and strategically embedded in EU food policymaking processes to effectively contribute to the European Food Policy Council architecture.

**A European Food Policy Council Platform** would strengthen vertical integration in EU food governance and systematically integrate terri-

torial experience into European policymaking, by providing a structured space for exchange among existing national and local Food Policy Councils across Europe. This Platform should be created as a new institutional component within the European Food Policy Council architecture and could be hosted by the EESC. Finally, a dedicated **Coordination Body**, potentially hosted jointly by the European Commission and the EESC, would ensure coherence across the architecture by monitoring outputs, facilitating exchanges between the different bodies, and supporting follow-up within the EU policy cycle.

**The roadmap outlines how the reform of existing governance bodies and the establishment of new ones could unfold by proposing a sequence of actions for key actors.**

The roadmap outlines how reforms of existing governance bodies and the establishment of new ones could unfold by proposing a sequence of actions for key actors. In this coordinated approach, the **European Commission** should take a leading role in supporting reforms of existing participatory fora, including the European Board on Agriculture and Food, the Citizens' Panels, and the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research. The **EESC**, as a key institutional advocate for civil society engagement, should lead the creation of the European Food Policy Council Platform and, together with the European Commission, establish the Coordination Body as a joint initiative. For **civil society organisations and EU citizens**, the roadmap also highlights ongoing EU initiatives that can be strategically leveraged to build political momentum and outlines practical steps for the gradual establishment of a European Food Policy Council.

# 1. Introduction

Today's food systems are major contributors to environmental degradation, poor health, and social inequalities, yet transforming them also holds significant potential to enhance environmental, health, economic, and social resilience (Rockström et al., 2025).

**Such transformation is particularly challenging due to the inherent complexity of food systems,** which involve multiple stakeholders, conflicting interests, and unequal distributions of power and authority (Kennedy et al., 2021). These characteristics create path-dependent dynamics and feedback effects that reinforce existing structures and hinder policy innovation (Kay, 2003). As a result, incremental adjustments are often insufficient to address systemic problems. Addressing this complexity requires effective governance mechanisms that operate across policy sectors and governance levels (Candel, 2022; Schneider et al., 2025), alongside both technological innovation and policies that foster broader change in socio-technical systems to reshape institutions, incentives, and practices that sustain current patterns (Kivimaa & Kern, 2016).

## TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS REQUIRES CHANGES



## IN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

**Food policymaking is criticised as being largely top-down and disproportionately influenced by corporate interests** (IPES-Food, 2023). Recurring protests by farmers—as well as mobilisation by environmental groups and consumer organisations—signal persistent dissatisfaction with existing governance arrangements. These dynamics point to perceived deficits in democratic legitimacy, representation, and inclusiveness within food systems governance, which can ultimately also reduce the effectiveness of these policies. Academic literature increasingly acknowledges that the influence of powerful actors in policymaking “risks undermining democratic participation in food systems by not only prioritizing corporate interests in the policy process, but also by weakening the capacity of individuals and communities to have a say in governance decisions because they lack the same kinds of financial resources and channels of influence” (Clapp et al., 2025).

**Addressing contemporary food systems challenges therefore requires expanded opportunities for participation and citizen involvement through democratic innovations** that complement traditional forms of political decision-making (Fesenfeld et al., 2023). These innovations do not seek to replace representative institutions but to enhance their legitimacy and capacity by incorporating diverse perspectives into policymaking processes. Further reforms of traditional representational democratic systems are needed to address existing power asymmetries and to place the public interest at the centre of food policymaking.

**Democratic innovations have gained increasing prominence at EU, national, and local levels.** Mechanisms such as citizens’ panels, multi-stakeholder fora, European citizens’ initiatives, and public consultations are being used to strengthen participatory governance and improve the legitimacy of public decision-making. By creating structured opportunities for dialogue between public institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), and citizens, these approaches aim to bridge the gap between societal debates and policymaking.

**Within the food policy domain, Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are considered a democratic innovation.** They are defined as “networks of stakeholders from government, business, civil society, and citizens, that use democratic institutional structures to engage in exploring, planning, implementing, evaluating, and adapting sustainable food system initiatives” (Michel et al., 2022, p. 3). Across Europe, FPCs already play a growing role in shaping local and regional food systems.

**Building on these experiences, this report recommends a concrete governance arrangement for a European Food Policy Council (EFPC).** It examines how such a body could strengthen deliberative food systems governance, counterbalance dominant actors’ voices by broadening participation, and foster more coherent and science-based policymaking at the EU level.

## 2. Background

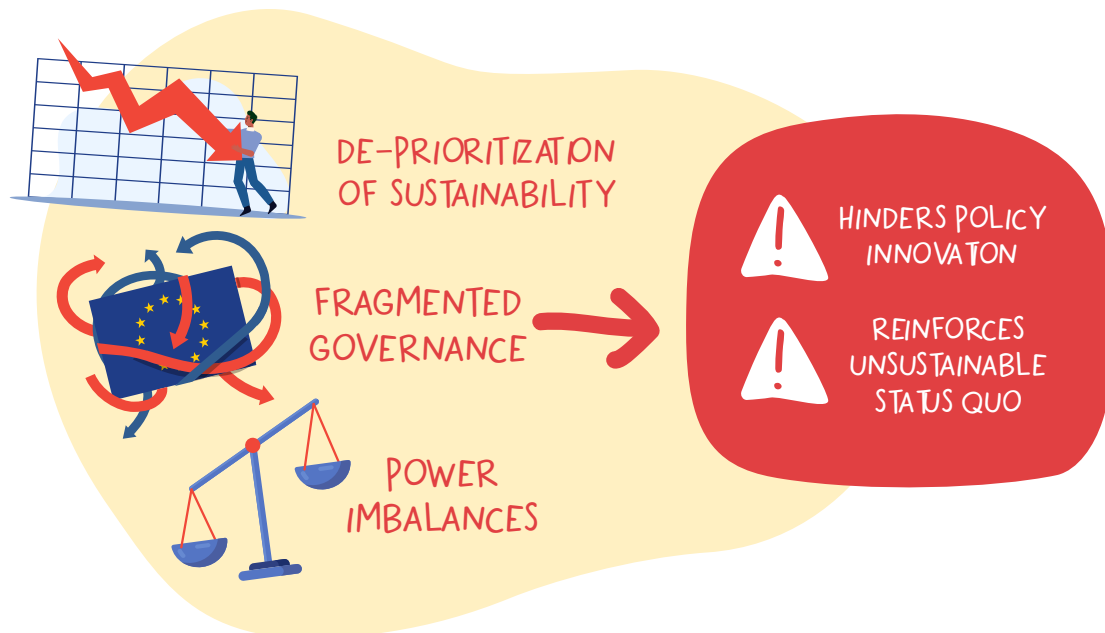
**The concept of “food democracy”,** as introduced by Tim Lang, refers to “the demand for greater access and collective benefit from the food system” (Lang, 1999, p. 218). As a sub-field of agri-food governance, food democracy shifts attention from purely technocratic or market-driven approaches towards questions of participation, power, and collective decision-making within food systems. Central to food democracy is the inclusion of citizens and organisations to represent groups that have often been marginalized or excluded from political and economic decision-making. Within this context, FPCs are widely regarded as a promising institutional vehicle for advancing food democracy. By enabling deliberation and co-creation among diverse actors across the food systems, FPCs can contribute to more inclusive, transparent, and democratically legitimate food governance (Bassarab et al., 2019).

**FPCs originated in the United States in the early 1980s,** with the establishment of the Knoxville Food Policy Council in 1982 (Morgan, 2025). Since then, FPCs have been adopted and adapted in diverse political and institutional contexts worldwide as an approach to fostering food democracy and addressing complex and cross-sectoral food systems challenges. FPCs are regarded as a governance innovation suited to tackling “wicked problems’ that require boundary-spanning relationships” (Bassarab et al., 2019, p. 32).

**FPCs are commonly understood as deliberative, participatory governance arrangements.** Deliberative democracy builds on the premise that political decisions should be a result of fair and reasonable discussion among citizens (OECD, 2020). Rather than merely aggregating preferences through voting, it focuses on finding common ground through fair and transparent exchanges in which diverse perspectives are heard, evidence is weighed, and participants can develop more nuanced views, leading to more legitimate and robust policy outcomes by

fostering deeper engagement than traditional voting alone. Across governance levels, deliberative processes in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries between 1986 and 2019 are most prevalent at the local level, accounting for 52 percent of cases, followed by the regional level at 30 percent, and the national level at 15 percent, while only 3 percent operate at international or supranational levels (OECD, 2020). Despite the increasing diffusion of such processes, food democracy discourse and the institutionalisation of food policy councils at higher levels of governance remain relatively underdeveloped. At national level, FPCs are not widespread and mainly function as networks for knowledge exchange and coordination rather than as formally institutionalised governance bodies.

**At the European level, there have been calls for the establishment of an EFPC for at least two decades** (De Schutter, 2019; Lang et al., 2005). In 2023, in the context of the Farm to Fork Strategy, these calls gained renewed political traction with the publication of the European Economic and Social Committee’s (EESC’s) “Towards a European Food Policy Council as a new governance model in the future EU Framework on Sustainable Food Systems” (EESC, 2023b). The EESC an official EU institution and advisory body that promotes a prominent role of organised civil society in the EU legislative processes conclude in their opinion paper that a bottom-up EFPC built on national and local food policy councils is not feasible. This is because local food policy councils are not yet sufficiently established across Europe to ensure representative geographic and societal coverage. They instead envision the EFPC as a science-based, multi-stakeholder and multi-level platform, with participation of scientists, food supply chain actors (farmers, food businesses and processors, retailers, trade unions), education system actors and CSOs (anti-poverty networks, food banks, social platforms, environmental and development NGOs), youth representatives, and institutional representatives (Parliament, Council, Commission, EESC, Committee of the Regions).



After an initial phase and once more established, the EESC recommend that the EFPC should also include representatives from local, regional, and national levels and food policy councils (EESC, 2023b, p. 3). According to the EESC vision, the intended functions of an EFPC included strengthening democratic participation through deliberative food systems governance, addressing power asymmetries, and overcoming entrenched policy silos across sectors and levels of governance. Despite initial momentum, efforts to establish an EFPC have not yet been successful.

**Today's EU food policy landscape** is characterised by a partial dismantling of Farm to Fork ambitions, alongside a renewed prioritisation of competitiveness objectives, justified with a security argument, often at the expense of a strong and long-term sustainability focus (Brussels Policy Lab, 2025; Mangnus & Candel, 2025). Governance challenges are further exacerbated by both horizontal and vertical fragmentation. Horizontally, food-related competencies remain dispersed across multiple Directorates-General, which means the goals of achieving sustainable food production and sustainable diets remain siloed from each other. Vertically, weak coordination mechanisms hinder effective multi-level governance between the EU, national, and local levels (Lang et al., 2009). In addition, the Commission's policy focus remains predominantly oriented towards primary production, with comparatively limited attention to demand-side food policies (Brussels Policy Lab, 2025).

The development of this roadmap follows a qualitative research design combining expert consultation and co-creation. It builds on an exchange with the EESC regarding previous work on an EFPC, as well as a workshop with PLAN'EAT consortium partners reflecting on experiences with multi-stakeholder platforms and exploring possible governance models. The analysis further combined a review of academic and grey literature with consultation and co-creation through PLAN'EAT's Brussels Policy Lab, which serves as an interface bringing together policymakers and other key food policy actors to analyse food system challenges and explore systemic policy solutions. To assess the current political and institutional context, the literature review was complemented by five expert interviews with Policy Lab members, including high-level EU policymakers. The Brussels Policy Lab also informed the roadmap through a focus group with its civil society and policy stakeholders, which was used to discuss governance principles and identify potential windows of opportunity for implementation.

Based on these inputs, the roadmap sets out updated, context-sensitive recommendations to address current gaps in EU food systems governance and contribute to more coherent, democratic, and transformative EU food policy-making.

# 3. Gaps in food systems governance & ways forward



We identified three key gaps in current governance arrangements that hinder effective food system transformation.

**A first major gap in food systems governance concerns the limited deliberative quality of existing participatory structures.** Prevailing EU-level arrangements tend to prioritise representation over deliberation. Many mechanisms only rely on organised interest groups speaking on behalf of constituencies, often in adversarial or position-driven ways. This consultation-based logic fosters prepared statements, leaving little room for reasoning, mutual justification, or the joint exploration of alternative policy pathways. Moreover, sustained participation in stakeholder fora requires high levels of organisational, financial, and technical capacity. Well-resourced actors are therefore better positioned to engage continuously, follow complex policy files, and shape agendas, while civil society groups, small-scale producers, and marginalised food system actors often face capacity constraints that limit their influence, leading to a narrow range of perspectives.

Democratic innovations such as citizens' panels, which give voice to individuals rather than organised interests alone, can achieve high deliberative quality and generate well-reasoned recommendations grounded in public interest considerations. However, they are frequently organised as stand-alone exercises and remain weakly connected to established policy processes. Without stronger institutional embedding, their policy impact and perceived legitimacy risk remain limited. Combining the deliberative strengths of citizen participation with the sectoral knowledge and implementation capacity of organised stakeholders could offer a promising way forward (EESC, 2025; Fesenfeld et al., 2023). Local food policy councils already provide practical examples of such hybrid models, bringing together local food system stakeholders, citizens, and local policymakers.

**A second key gap lies in the political reluctance to advance transformative food system change due to fears of political backlash.**

Agri-food policy is highly contested and involves visible distributional effects, making it particularly vulnerable within short electoral cycles. Policymakers often face strong resistance when proposed reforms affect prices, production practices, or consumption patterns, which can discourage ambitious long-term action. This challenge is further exacerbated by the institutional fragmentation of EU food policy, e.g. across different Directorates-General of the European Commission, including the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE), Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV), Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA), and Directorate-General for Trade (DG TRADE), each operating with distinct mandates, policy frames, and epistemic communities. Deliberation tends to occur within these silos rather than across them, limiting joint problem-framing and collective learning about trade-offs between health, environmental sustainability, social justice, and economic objectives.

Addressing this gap requires governance arrangements that support coherent, long-term food policymaking beyond short-term political considerations. Robust and continuous science-policy interfaces that synthesise and assess knowledge around food systems for policy purposes (Turnhout et al., 2021) are essential in this regard, as they can act as brokers between complex and contested food system knowledge and political decision-making. By transparently engaging with trade-offs and grounding decisions in scientific evidence, such interfaces can strengthen policymakers' capacity to justify ambitious reforms and enhance the legitimacy of transformational policies.

**A third major gap concerns the weak vertical integration of food policy across governance levels.** Responsibilities for food-related policies are distributed across international, EU, national, regional, and local authorities, often without effective coordination, resulting in fragmented and sometimes incoherent implementation.

While certain EU-level competences, such as public procurement rules, have strong local impacts, many demand-side instruments remain primarily within national or subnational jurisdictions. Existing mechanisms to integrate food policies vertically—i.e., to coordinate policies and instruments between local, national, and EU strategies—are limited, reducing the overall effectiveness of EU agri-food governance. An EU-level platform could facilitate systematic exchange among Member States, enabling the sharing of best practices and lessons learned while improving coordination across governance levels. National, subnational, and local food policy councils could play a crucial role in connecting these levels by translating EU objectives into context-specific strategies, feeding local and national implementation experience back into EU-level deliberations, and fostering mutual learning across regions. Institutionalizing such vertical linkages would strengthen coherence, improve implementation, and ensure that EU food system ambitions remain grounded in local realities.

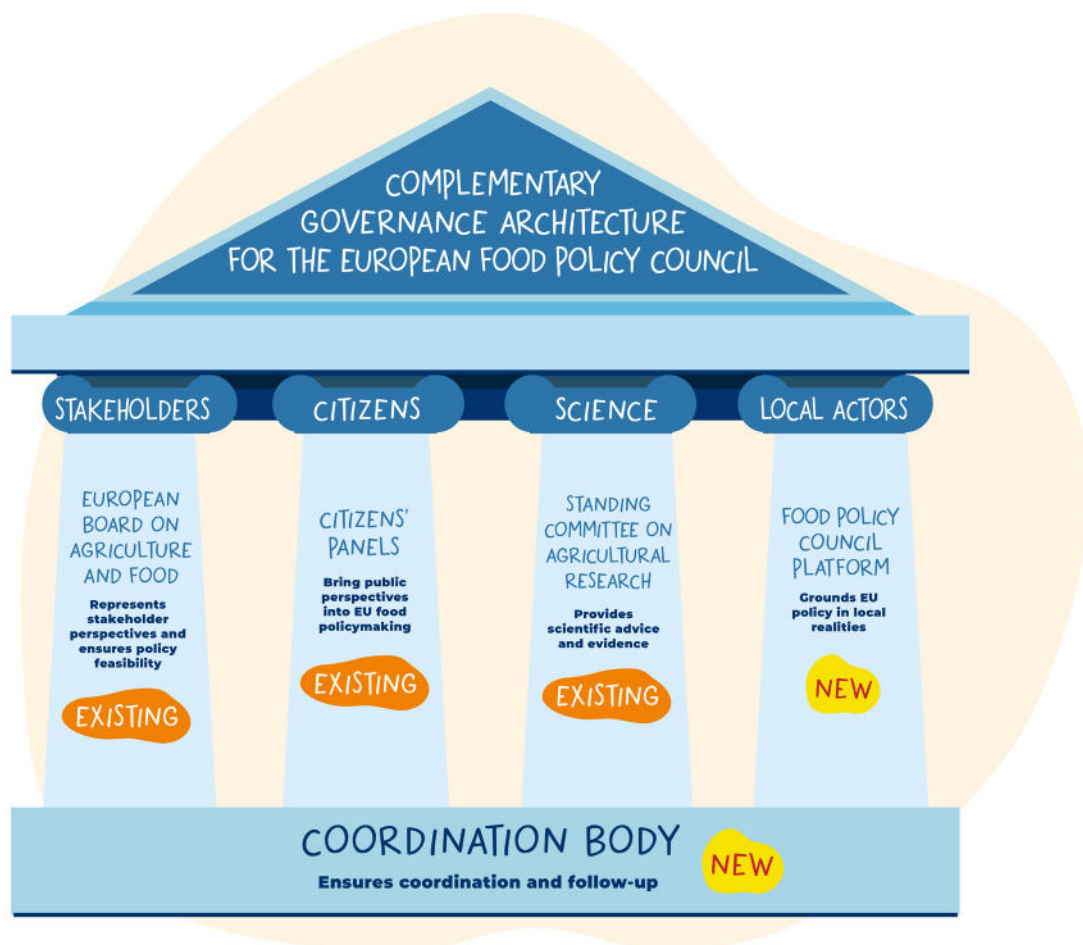
Taken together, these gaps highlight the need for a governance configuration that combines high deliberative quality, political relevance, and systemic integration across policy domains and governance levels. The following section proposes a complementary governance architecture designed to address these shortcomings and strengthen EU food policy governance.



# 4. Proposed complementary governance architecture

Taking into account the gaps identified in the previous chapter, this section describes a complementary governance architecture for EU food systems governance. Rather than proposing the creation of a new institution, it conceptualises a coordinated configuration of existing governance mechanisms that can strengthen deliberative quality, political impact, and policy integration. The underlying premise is that **no single participatory format can adequately address the complexity, contestation, and multi-level nature of food systems transformation** on its own.

EU agri-food governance is already characterised by a diversity of participatory and advisory bodies, each rooted in different democratic logics and performing distinct functions. However, these mechanisms currently operate largely in parallel, with limited coordination and weak functional integration. As a result, stakeholder perspectives, deliberative insights, scientific evidence, and local food system perspectives are rarely connected in a systematic way. This chapter argues that greater effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability can be achieved not by blending these logics into a single forum, but by deliberately maintaining their differentiation while strengthening coordination.



The EFPC architecture rests on five complementary governance components:

**1. The European Board on Agriculture and Food (EBAF)** articulates organised stakeholder interests at EU level and ensures policy feasibility.

**2. Citizens' panels** bring a deliberative public-interest perspective through randomly selected participants from across the EU.

**3. The Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR)** serves as a science–policy interface.

**4. A European Food Policy Council Platform**, linking the EU policy level with local Food Policy Councils, would provide grounding of EU-level food policies in implementation realities and enable the scaling-up of local innovation.

**5. These four bodies would be complemented by a dedicated Coordination Body**, responsible for monitoring outputs, strengthening linkages, and ensuring follow-up.

**The following sections examines the five governance components (three existing, two new) that together form the complementary EU agri-food governance architecture:**

a reformed European Board on Agriculture and Food (EBAF); Citizens' Panels on selected agri-food system topics; the integration of the (SCAR); and a new Food Policy Council Platform as well as a new EFPC Coordination Body. For each, the analysis focuses on their current role, strengths and limitations, proposed reforms, and their potential contribution within a more integrated and coherent EU agri-food governance configuration.

**The proposed architecture is guided by the principle of functional complementarity.** Two distinct approaches to participatory governance can be identified at the EU level: First, multi-stakeholder fora bring together organised actors, with CSOs often acting as intermediaries that channel stakeholder perspectives into policymaking. Second, citizens' panels place randomly selected citizens at the centre of deliberation, enabling direct public input into policy debates otherwise dominated by agri-food stakeholder representation.

Furthermore science–policy bodies can mediate complex and contested evidence and translate it into policy-relevant knowledge, while local food policy councils can connect EU-level debates with national and local realities. When strategically combined and coordinated by the EU institutions, these four bodies can counterbalance each other's limitations and reduce the risk of any single governance logic dominating the process.



## 4.1. European Board on Agriculture and Food

**The European Board on Agriculture and Food (EBAF) was established in early 2025 and is chaired by the Commissioner for Agriculture.** It was created to follow up on the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture and to provide high-level strategic advice on the future direction of EU agriculture and food policy. Its objectives include advising the European Commission on major policy developments, fostering dialogue and trust among key stakeholders, enhancing coherence across EU policies, and delivering opinions on specific issues at the Commission's request. Through these functions, EBAF is closely anchored within the EU policy process.

**The EBAF represents the stakeholder pillar of the proposed complementary EU agri-food governance architecture.** As a high-level multi-stakeholder forum, it provides an institutionalised space for dialogue among organised actors involved in the EU agri-food system. Memberships in multi-stakeholder fora are mediated through umbrella stakeholder organisations, which act as intermediaries between their constituencies and EU institutions. Organised interest organisations, including economic actors, are granted a central role in shaping policy debates and formulation. This may increase the likelihood that policymaking is aligned more closely with corporate priorities than with broader societal interests.

**Multi-stakeholder fora are widely used across EU policy domains under varying names, including civil dialogue, advisory groups, expert groups, and stakeholder platforms.**

Within the European Commission, the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) hosts several such mechanisms, including EBAF, the Forest and Forestry Stakeholder Platform, and the Agricultural Civil Dialogue Groups, while the Directorate-General for Health & Food Safety (DG SANTE) administers comparable bodies such as the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, the EU Health Policy Platform, and the Advisory Group on Sustainability of Food Systems. There is at present no standardised definition or common mandate across these bodies, resulting in a heterogeneous landscape of stakeholder engagement.

**EBAF is composed of 30 EU-level stakeholder organisations which represent farmers, actors along the food supply chain, upstream and downstream industry interests, and CSOs working on environmental protection, animal welfare, public health, and consumer interests.**

This composition should ensure broad sectoral coverage and enable the inclusion of diverse forms of expertise. At the same time, the nature of multi-stakeholder fora limits participation to organised interests with sufficient capacity to operate at the EU level, which shapes both the perspectives represented and the dynamics of deliberation.

**Operationally, EBAF functions as a permanent advisory body regularly convened by the Commission.**

Its strength lies in the sectoral expertise of its members, who contribute practical and technical knowledge to discussions on complex agri-food issues. The platform's chairing by the Commission ensures political relevance and facilitates timely input into decision-making. Moreover, the involvement of umbrella organisations ensures broad input from across Member States, since these organisations usually rely on internal consultation mechanisms.

Their members' networks can also be leveraged to disseminate information and policy outcomes widely. The structure and ongoing nature of EBAF supports continuity, allowing for longer-term engagement, monitoring, and iterative policy learning.

**As a multi-stakeholder forum, EBAF is subject to the well-documented limitations associated with multi-stakeholder governance frameworks.** Power asymmetries between participants can persist or even be reinforced, as well-resourced actors often possess greater capacity to participate, shape agendas, and influence outcomes. In the case of EBAF, CSOs have already raised concerns that procedural decisions taken by the Commission risk disproportionately amplifying established industry voices, while independent expertise and environmental perspectives remain comparatively underrepresented. Such imbalances can weaken trust, reduce perceived legitimacy, and limit the forum's ability for balanced and evidence-informed deliberation (EEB, 2026). In addition, the close alignment with day-to-day policy agendas can limit the depth of deliberation, favouring incremental adjustments over more transformative, long-term perspectives. Currently, EBAF is focused mainly on issues regarding primary-production-side, rather than demand-side, food policy issues.

**To address these shortcomings, the following reforms to EBAF are proposed to ensure that it delivers on its ambition to foster a new culture of dialogue, trust, and multi-stakeholder participation (European Commission, 2025b).**

First, procedural reforms are needed to reduce power imbalances among participants. Agenda-setting procedures should be inclusive, and participants should be given sufficient time and access to information to prepare for deliberations. Second, broadening EBAF's thematic scope beyond production-oriented concerns towards stronger engagement with demand-side policies and food environments would support a more holistic food systems perspective. This could be facilitated through co-chairing arrangements between DG AGRI, DG SANTE and (DG ENV).

In this configuration, EBAF would continue to play a crucial role in articulating stakeholder interests and ensuring political feasibility, while being complemented by other governance elements that strengthen deliberation, scientific mediation, and territorial grounding.

## 4.2. Citizens' panels on selected food systems topics

**Citizens' panels represent the deliberative democracy pillar within the complementary governance architecture, adding a public-interest perspective.**

At the EU level, the first large-scale application of this deliberative approach was the Conference on the Future of Europe in 2021, which sought to systematically amplify citizens' voices in shaping the EU policy agenda. However, evaluations of this first pilot identified several shortcomings, including an overly broad thematic scope, tight time constraints, limited public visibility, and ambiguity regarding its objectives and policy impact (Bertelsmann Stiftung & European Policy Center, 2022). Building on these lessons, the European Commission has institutionalised citizens' panels through the establishment of the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy. The Centre regularly convenes panels on selected policy topics, including agri-food-related issues. To date, two panels have directly addressed food system challenges, focusing respectively on food waste and the decline of pollinating insects.



**Unlike multi-stakeholder fora, which are grounded in organised interest representation, citizens' panels draw on deliberative democratic theory.** This theory starts from the premise that representative democracies face structural shortcomings, particularly in addressing complex, long-term challenges, and seeks to address this through experimental forms of citizen participation that foreground inclusiveness, reflection, and collective reasoning. In recent years, the EU landscape of participatory governance has evolved considerably, with the European Commission explicitly committing to strengthening participatory and deliberative democracy within its current mandate (European Commission, 2024). Citizens' panels have become a central instrument in this agenda. Their primary objective is to enable randomly selected citizens to engage directly with complex policy issues, deliberate on policy options, and formulate recommendations that can inform EU decision-making. By doing so, citizens' panels aim to complement representative institutions, not replace them, by enhancing the legitimacy and societal grounding of public policy. To date, the evidence base informing EU food policy has often reinforced narrow technocratic perspectives rather than opening up deliberation. Impact assessments, modelling exercises, and expert advice tend to privilege quantifiable economic indicators, while normative questions related to social outcomes, environmental values, or cultural priorities are treated as secondary.

**Citizens' panels are composed of individual citizens selected through random sampling methods designed to ensure broad socio-demographic representation.**

Selection criteria typically include age, gender, education, employment status, nationality, and urban or rural residence. This ensures inclusion of groups who are often underrepresented in formal political processes. Panel members participate in structured deliberative processes that combine facilitated discussion, access to expert input, and collective formulation of recommendations. These recommendations are handed over to the European Commission.

**The strengths of citizens' panels lie primarily in their democratic legitimacy and deliberative quality. Random selection expands the diversity of perspectives included in policymaking and strengthens the public-interest voice by reducing the dominance of organised or well-resourced actors.**

When supported by high-quality facilitation, balanced expertise, and sufficient time for deliberation, participants are able to develop informed and reflective positions that go beyond short-term political incentives or entrenched interests. Citizens' panels can thus generate innovative policy ideas, enhance the legitimacy of decisions, and contribute to public trust in EU institutions.

**At the same time, citizens' panels face several limitations.**

First, participants typically require substantial briefing and expert input to engage meaningfully with complex policy issues. While access to relevant knowledge is essential, care must be taken to avoid biased problem-framing or the privileging of particular perspectives. Well-designed panels thus need to invest in independent facilitation and balanced expert input to ensure that citizens are supported in reaching a level of understanding that enables informed decision-making. High-quality deliberative processes are also resource-intensive, both financially and administratively.

Moreover, citizens' panels are typically temporary and issue-specific, which limits continuity and sustained engagement over time. Despite random selection procedures, participation bias remains a challenge, as individuals who accept invitations often have higher levels of motivation, available time, or relevant professional backgrounds, potentially constraining the diversity of deliberative contributions in practice (EU Democracy Reform Observatory, 2023).

**The European Citizens' Food Waste Panel provides an illustrative example of both the potential and the constraints of this instrument.**

Convened between December 2022 and February 2023 and co-led by Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) and DG SANTE, the panel brought together 150 randomly selected EU citizens to deliberate on actions to reduce food waste across the food supply chain. The process resulted in 23 recommendations that

informed the Commission's proposal to revise the Waste Framework Directive, adopted in July 2023, and were shared with the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste.

However, evaluations also highlighted that the panel was convened relatively late in the policy cycle, limiting its ability to influence core elements of the legislative proposal, such as the setting of food waste reduction targets (EU Democracy Reform Observatory, 2023).

**Within a complementary governance architecture, citizens' panels should be strategically used to help define underlying policy goals in the public interest, such as biodiversity protection, clean water, or access to healthy diets.**

To fulfil this, they need to be embedded early in the policy cycle, particularly at the problem-framing stage. Stronger institutional linkages are needed between citizens' panels and other governance mechanisms, including multi-stakeholder fora and science-policy interfaces. The added value of citizens' deliberation to other participatory instruments was also noted by the EESC in an opinion paper that stated that: "the EESC could study its new role in developing further its expertise on all matters relating to citizen participation and participatory democracy. In particular the EESC Bureau is the body that could take decisions on issues such as the scope and methodology for involving citizens panels in the work of the EESC, as well as the topics on which citizens' panels will be consulted" (EESC, 2023a). Citizens' panels could be convened as a series of interlinked panels on agri-food systems issues, combined with a follow-up through other participatory mechanisms. This could strengthen continuity, accountability, and the long-term contribution of citizens' panels to EU agri-food governance.



### 4.3. Standing Committee on Agricultural Research

**The Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) can add a science–policy interface to the complementary governance architecture.** SCAR was established in 1974 as a formal advisory body to support the European Commission and Member States in the coordination of agricultural research and innovation. Its core objective is to strengthen the European Research Area in agriculture, food, and bioeconomy by fostering strategic alignment of national research priorities, promoting knowledge exchange, and supporting coherent responses to complex agri-food challenges. Over time, SCAR’s mandate has expanded beyond productivity-oriented agricultural research to encompass broader food system concerns. In contrast to stakeholder fora and citizens’ panels, which respectively focus on interest articulation and public deliberation, SCAR operates at the interface between scientific expertise and political decision-making, helping to structure long-term, evidence-informed policy debates in the EU agri-food domain.

**SCAR is composed of high-level representatives from Member States, typically drawn from ministries responsible for agriculture, research, or innovation.**

It is supported by working groups and a strategic foresight group, which bring together scientists, policymakers, and experts from across disciplines. SCAR explores emerging challenges and

long-term trends, producing reports, strategic recommendations, and research agendas that inform EU and national policymaking as well as Horizon Europe programming. Operationally, SCAR functions through regular plenary meetings, thematic working groups, and foresight processes.

**Its main strength lies in its capacity to mobilise scientific expertise across countries and disciplines and to develop shared understandings of complex and contested food system issues.**

By focusing on medium- to long-term horizons, SCAR is able to address structural challenges that often fall outside short electoral cycles, such as climate adaptation in agriculture or shifts in food environments. This makes it particularly valuable in the agri-food sector, where policymakers face political reluctance to pursue transformative reforms. Additional strengths include SCAR’s credibility as a science-based advisory body, its strong institutional anchoring within EU governance structures, and its role in facilitating coordination across Member States. Its foresight activities help anticipate future challenges and explore alternative transformation pathways, while its links to EU research funding instruments allow it to influence the strategic orientation of research and innovation investments.

**At the same time, SCAR has notable limitations.** Its thematic focus remains largely centred on agriculture and would need to be broadened towards a more comprehensive food systems perspective. SCAR’s membership structure prioritises governmental and scientific actors, which constrains the inclusion of societal perspectives and experiential knowledge from citizens, civil society, and local practitioners. In this regard, the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Food Security and Nutrition of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security could offer a relevant point for comparison. Through a broad participation basis facilitated by both a civil-society- and a private-sector mechanism the HLPE engages with divergent perspectives and policy-relevant trade-offs. The HLPE demonstrates how

scientific advice can inform highly contested policy debates without claiming false consensus. Today, SCAR's outputs are often indirect and advisory, with limited visibility in daily policymaking and unclear pathways to political uptake. While SCAR coordinates research streams across Europe (e.g., Horizon projects), the integration of these findings into policy recommendations is often opaque. SCAR should, in cooperation with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, translate this evidence into actionable policy recommendations and ensure appropriate follow-up.

**Within a complementary governance architecture, several recommendations follow.**

First, SCAR's role as a science-policy broker should be more explicitly oriented towards providing policymakers with credible, transparent, and timely evidence to support transformative food system reforms. Second, stronger linkages with deliberative and participatory mechanisms are needed, ensuring that scientific evidence informs both stakeholder negotiations and citizen deliberations. Finally, more institutionalised feedback loops, such as an obligation of the Commission to answer to SCAR's strategic policy advice, would strengthen policy learning and its contribution to coherent, long-term EU food system governance.

## 4.4. Food Policy Council Platform

**A Food Policy Council Platform would add a territorial and implementation-oriented perspective to the EU agri-food governance landscape.**

Its core contribution would lie in connecting strategic objectives formulated at the EU level with concrete action on the ground, by mobilizing place-based knowledge, policy experimentation, and multi-actor coordination for Food Policy Councils across different levels, from local to regional and national levels. FPCs are closest to policy implementation and therefore uniquely positioned to translate abstract policy goals into operational solutions.

**A dedicated platform, to be created and hosted by the EESC, could provide an institutionalised space for exchange and strategic coordination.**

Horizontally, it would facilitate structured peer learning among FPCs, enabling the sharing of policy instruments, governance models, and lessons learned. Vertically, it would function as an interface between local practice and EU governance, translating EU policy priorities into locally actionable strategies while feeding experiential knowledge, implementation challenges, and social innovations back into EU-level deliberations. Local FPCs across Europe have a broad set of objectives, including the development of sustainable, healthy, transparent, and fair food systems, the promotion of food



sovereignty, shorter supply chains, reduced food waste, sustainable public procurement, urban agriculture, and stronger urban–rural linkages. A coordination platform would support the alignment of those goals with overarching EU food system objectives.

**Membership in the platform would consist primarily of representatives** from established local and regional food policy councils. Given the uneven geographical distribution and varying levels of institutionalisation of FPCs across Member States, the platform should remain open and flexible, allowing emerging councils and less formalised initiatives to participate. Existing networks such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, EUROCITIES, and ICLEI could play a supporting role in structuring participation and outreach. EU-funded research projects can further provide analytical insights into the strengths and limitations of enhanced coordination among FPCs (FoodCLIC, n.d.). Operationally, the platform could convene regular exchanges and thematic working groups, hosted at the EESC premises in Brussels, to ensure proximity to EU policymaking. In addition, selected meetings could rotate across different European regions to enable firsthand engagement with diverse local food system contexts and implementation realities.

**The strengths of a Food Policy Council Platform include its grounding in real-world practice, its capacity to support policy experimentation, and its potential to scale up successful local innovations by fostering structured learning across territories.**

Its added value would lie in systematically capturing implementation experience from diverse territorial contexts and making it usable for higher-level policymaking. At the same time, it could empower local actors by providing clearer guidance on how EU objectives can be operationalised within specific socio-economic and geographical contexts and help to lobby national level parliamentarians.

**However, several weaknesses and risks need to be acknowledged.**

The diversity of FPCs in terms of mandate, capacity, and institutionalisation complicates coordination and comparability. Without adequate resources and facilitation, participation risks being fragmented or dominated by well-established councils from a limited number of countries. When building such an EU-level platform, it is important to acknowledge that organizing bottom-up civil society at the EU level requires time, resources, and a shared identity to generate real impact. Moreover, the advisory nature of such a platform may limit its political influence unless clear channels to EU decision-making processes are established.

**Against this background, several recommendations emerge.**

First, the platform should be institutionally anchored within the EESC, building on its mandate to represent organised civil society and its existing emphasis on multi-level governance. Second, it needs to be strongly embedded into the proposed complementary governance architecture. Third, financial support mechanisms should be developed for countries and regions where FPCs are not yet widespread, to help set up new FPCs and to avoid reinforcing territorial inequalities.

By strengthening vertical integration, a Food Policy Council Platform would help ensure that EU food system governance remains responsive, coherent, and firmly grounded in implementation realities.

## 4.5. European Food Policy Council Coordination Body

**To ensure that the different participatory formats complement one another, a dedicated Coordination Body is required at the core of the EFPC architecture.**

This body would enable the EFPC to function as a permanent advisory structure, providing continuity over time as well as mechanisms for learning, evaluation, and monitoring. By systematically bringing together the outputs of the four constituencies, the Coordination Body would make visible the range of positions emerging from stakeholder fora, citizens' panels, scientific advice, and territorial platforms, thereby enhancing coherence and policy relevance.

**A strong and institutionalised mandate is essential to translate deliberation into policy impact.**

The Coordination Body should therefore be formally anchored within EU institutional structures and hosted as a joint initiative of the European Commission and the EESC. This arrangement would combine high-level political recognition with the EESC's experience in participatory governance. The European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, established as a joint initiative of the European Commission and the EESC, provides a practical example of how such an institutional set-up can be organised and sustained over time.

**The Coordination Body would play a bridging role between participatory deliberation and formal policymaking.**

A primary function would be to monitor, compare, and follow up on the outputs of the four EFPC constituencies. By synthesizing and presenting their recommendations, it would enable Members of the European Parliament and national-level decision-makers to assess areas of consensus and disagreement and to navigate different evidence-based policy options. In addition, the Coordination Body should monitor other participatory and consultative instruments including public consultations, European Citizens' Initiatives, and Commission-led upcoming "Food Dialogues" in order to situate EFPC deliberations within the broader governance landscape.

**To maximise impact, the EFPC should be embedded early in the policy cycle, particularly at the agenda-setting stage.**

This would allow system-level perspectives to inform policy development before options become constrained by political trade-offs. Continuous interaction with policymakers throughout the stages of design, implementation, and evaluation would further strengthen policy uptake. A formal commitment by the European Commission to respond to and discuss EFPC recommendations would reinforce the Council's output legitimacy and ensure meaningful follow-up. To safeguard deliberative quality and manage potential power asymmetries, meetings should be facilitated by an independent facilitator.

Through systematic monitoring, comparison of outputs, and follow-up on recommendations, the Coordination Body would enhance transparency, strengthen accountability, and improve the overall effectiveness and strategic orientation of EU agri-food governance.

# 5. Reflections and discussion

**This chapter reflects on the contributions the proposed European Food Policy Council (EFPC) architecture could potentially make to EU agri-food governance, while also discussing key design choices and remaining limitations.** The discussion is structured around four interlinked governance dimensions: actors' composition; mandate; agenda setting; and accountability. Together, these dimensions provide an analytical lens to assess the proposed architecture in supporting more inclusive, legitimate, and effective EU food policymaking.

## 5.1. Actors' composition

**The value of the EFPC governance configuration lies in its functional complementarity, balancing different views and epistemic logics to strengthen EU food policymaking.** By strategically combining existing bodies, this architecture is both effective and politically feasible. It avoids the unrealistic expectation that a single “silver bullet” institution could address the complexity and contestation inherent in EU food systems governance. Working with established mechanisms ensures legitimacy, continuity, and makes implementation more politically feasible.

**The EFPC architecture reconfigures existing arrangements by assigning complementary roles to each mechanism:** EBAF ensures interest articulation and policy feasibility; citizens' panels contribute a public-interest perspective; SCAR provides science–policy mediation and long-term orientation; and the Food Policy Council Platform offers territorial grounding and implementation feedback. Through the random selection criteria of citizens' panels, individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, including vulnerable groups affected by food insecurity, can bring their concerns directly to EU policymakers, broadening the range of voices heard. By combining these functions, the architecture strengthens participation, counterbalances dominant actors, and enhances the representation of the public interest in EU food policymaking. This can help

**Following research on local FPCs, participation should be conceived from a systems perspective** (Bassarab et al., 2019), structured across three interrelated axes (Irish et al., 2017). **First, representation should span the entire food value chain**, from primary production and processing to distribution, retail, and consumption. This is ensured through the EBAF, which brings together stakeholders across sectors and supply chain stages. **Second, participation must cut across the policy domains that shape food system outcomes.** Citizens' panels provide broad societal input on cross-cutting challenges, while SCAR needs to ensure that policy deliberations are informed by scientific expertise across multiple disciplines, including agriculture, environmental sciences, nutrition and health, social sciences, economics, and governance studies. By integrating multiple epistemic communities, the EFPC can avoid privileging a single type of knowledge and generate more inclusive and robust advice. **Third, representation should extend across sectors (public/private/community)**, linking the governance levels of EU institutions, national authorities, and local implementation through the Food Policy Council Platform. This vertical integration strengthens the connection between EU-level discussions and real-world implementation, while supporting the emergence of national and local food policy councils over time. Structured upward and downward exchange ensures that EU strategic objectives are grounded in local implementation realities, while on-the-ground experience informs higher-level decision-making. The EESC, as an official EU institution, would be best positioned to provide a convening space for this to-be-created platform of Food Policy Councils.

Within this governance configuration, the councils constituent bodies can act as **boundary spanners**, bridging organisational, sectoral, and institutional divides, fostering policy coherence, and enabling a systems-oriented approach to EU agri-food governance (Williams, 2002).



## 5.2. Mandate

A credible and influential EFPC depends not only on the participating actors, but also on how firmly it is anchored within existing political institutions and policy processes. The EFPC is designed to strengthen and complement representative democratic systems by reconfiguring existing bodies rather than creating an entirely new institution. Its mandate derives from bringing together already established participatory formats into a coherent, complementary governance architecture.

**The 2024 Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture initially positioned the EBAF as a central stakeholder platform, while acknowledging the need for additional participation formats.**

An extension of the views represented through EBAF was explicitly foreseen. The Strategic Dialogue states that “the Commission organises, in close cooperation with EBAF, citizen dialogues on agriculture and food systems to provide policymakers with bottom-up feedback on needs and expectations on the ground” (Strohschneider, 2024, p. 52). It also anticipated a multi-level platform for exchange, noting that “the EBAF could be used as a platform to exchange experiences and best practice on the implementation of the mechanisms needed for the transition to sustainable food systems across sectors and at local, regional, national and EU level” (Strohschneider, 2024, p. 52). The EBAF currently does not fulfil this function since all its members are EU-level stakeholder organisations. **The Vision on Agriculture and Food (2025) acknowledges the role of local authorities**, stating that they “are often well placed to lead engagement on how to shape favourable food environments through community-led initiatives” but refers mainly to narrowly scoped food dialogues that promote the exchange of best practices on specific issues such as food reformulation, dietary intake data, and food affordability. Several scholars have noted that this Vision lacks a systems perspective and is substantially less ambitious than the Strategic Dialogue (Van Zanten et al., 2025). Already in 2023, the EU Democracy Reform Observatory also highlighted that citizens’ panels are most effective when integrated into a broader participatory toolkit, where different formats are strategically combined to match policy needs and stages (EU Democracy Reform Observatory, 2023). **This provides strong backing for the EFPC to reconfigure the current EU food governance architecture by building on the existing participatory formats of the EBAF, citizens’ panels, and SCAR, while complementing them with the creation of a Food Policy Council Platform and a Coordination Body.**

## 5.3. Agenda setting

An effective EFPC coordination body requires a clear and transparent set of operational rules to enable sustained and constructive deliberation over time. Particular attention must be paid to power asymmetries between the constituencies. Operational rules should ensure that no single group dominates discussions and that diverse perspectives can be expressed and debated on an equal footing. Scientific hearings should precede deliberations in order to ground discussions in robust and pluralistic evidence.

### **Agenda-setting procedures are a critical element of process quality.**

The EFPC coordination body should retain independence from short-term political pressures and maintain an “above-the-events” perspective that allows it to address structural and emerging food system challenges. While hosted jointly by the EESC and the European Commission, the coordination body should operate independently and ensure that the EFPC addresses relevant topics in a timely manner. This includes the capacity to trigger citizens’ panels for public input or to set focus topics for SCAR working groups. Retaining agenda-setting power within the EFPC would help ensure that politically sensitive or structurally challenging food system issues are addressed. SCAR members, for example, could propose agenda items or work plans to the EFPC constituencies in order to request opinions on pressing food system questions, such as ultra-processed foods or pathways for livestock farming in Europe.

### **The EFPC’s working methods should be grounded in systems thinking, enabling members to address cross-cutting issues, such as food environments, that span policy domains and governance levels.**

Policy co-design approaches across constituencies can serve as effective tools to jointly develop policy options. Such approaches enhance ownership of outcomes and improve the feasibility and legitimacy of recommendations (Grohmann et al., 2025). Examples of such cross-cutting policy issues in the coming years include the revision of the Directive on sustainable public procurement, the debate on ultra-processed foods, and the next reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Multiannual Financial Framework.

### **Further research is needed to refine procedural design choices.**

Established multi-actor governance arrangements, such as the UN Committee on World Food Security or the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition (CONSEA) in the Brazilian context, provide valuable reference points for designing deliberative procedures that balance inclusiveness, effectiveness, and political relevance.



## 5.4. Accountability

**Accountability is central to ensuring that participatory governance mechanisms translate deliberation into meaningful policy influence.** For the EFPC, accountability operates in two directions: towards EU institutions and MEPs responsible for decision-making and towards the public and stakeholder constituencies represented within the governance architecture. Transparent communication about the Council's composition, mandate, and operations is essential for building trust in its work and strengthening accountability.

**Outcomes and recommendations of the individual constituencies should be communicated in a highly visible and transparent manner.** Actors' standpoints should be clearly documented and made public, holding them accountable for their positions. By openly comparing the positions of organised interests with the recommendations of lay citizens, scientific bodies, and Food Policy Councils, the EFPC strengthens accountability and can help reveal potential vested interests. This transparency can support decision-makers in navigating complex policy choices while enabling the media and the wider public to engage in a more informed and transparent debate on agri-food issues.

**To reinforce accountability, the European Commission should be formally required to respond to EFPC recommendations and provide justifications where proposals are not adopted.**

This obligation enhances the Council's output legitimacy and ensures that deliberative inputs are meaningfully considered in policymaking.

**Communication should be led by the coordination body, as well as through the networks of participating stakeholder organisations, Food Policy Councils, and scientific institutions.**

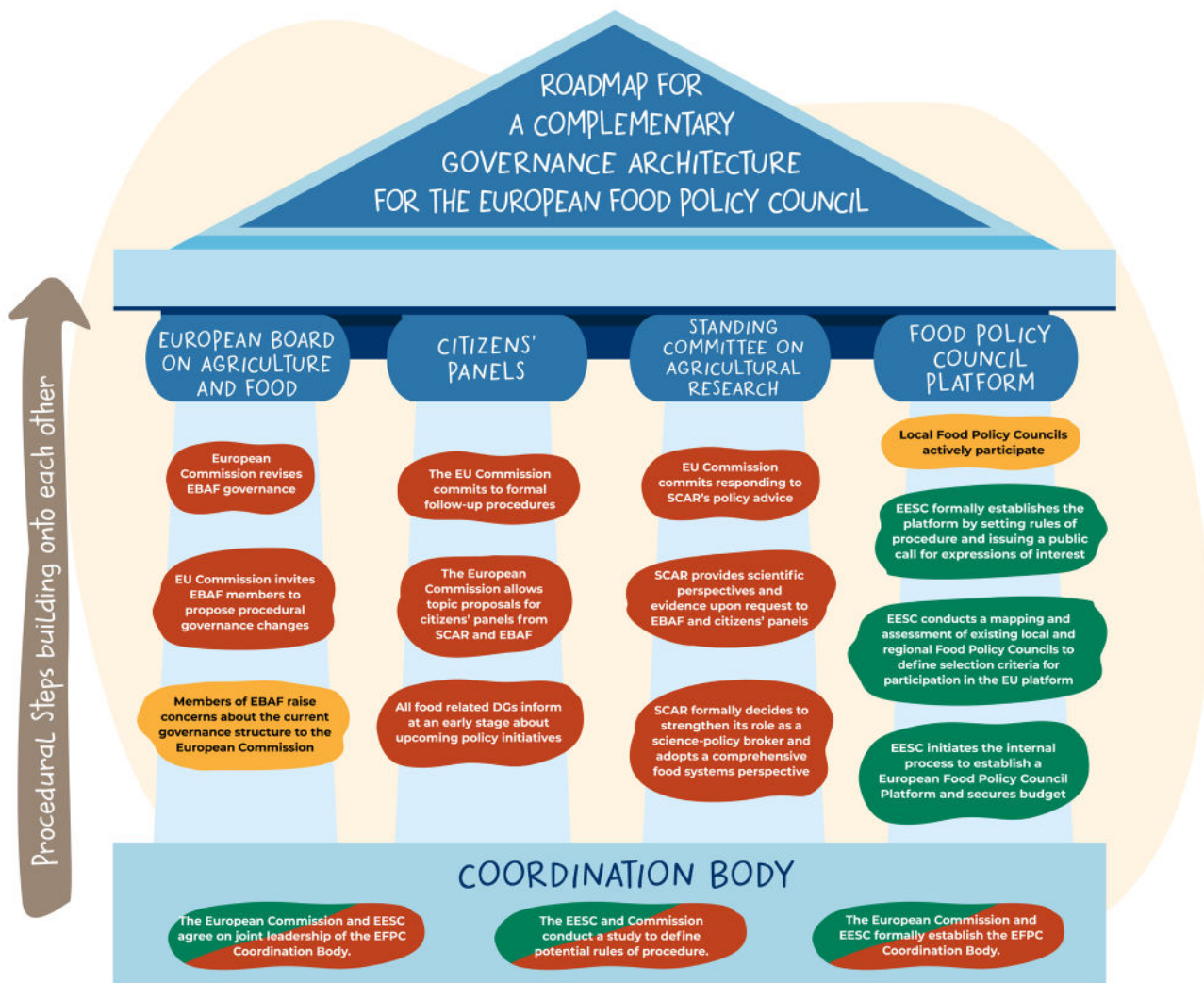
This can amplify outreach, mobilise political buy-in, and ensure that deliberative outcomes resonate across governance levels and societal groups. As emphasised by the EESC: "It is by increasing accountability and participation that the veto of incumbents with little interest in change can be most effectively circumvented, and the impacts of a really comprehensive food policy can be regularly assessed, revised and improved" (EESC, 2023b).

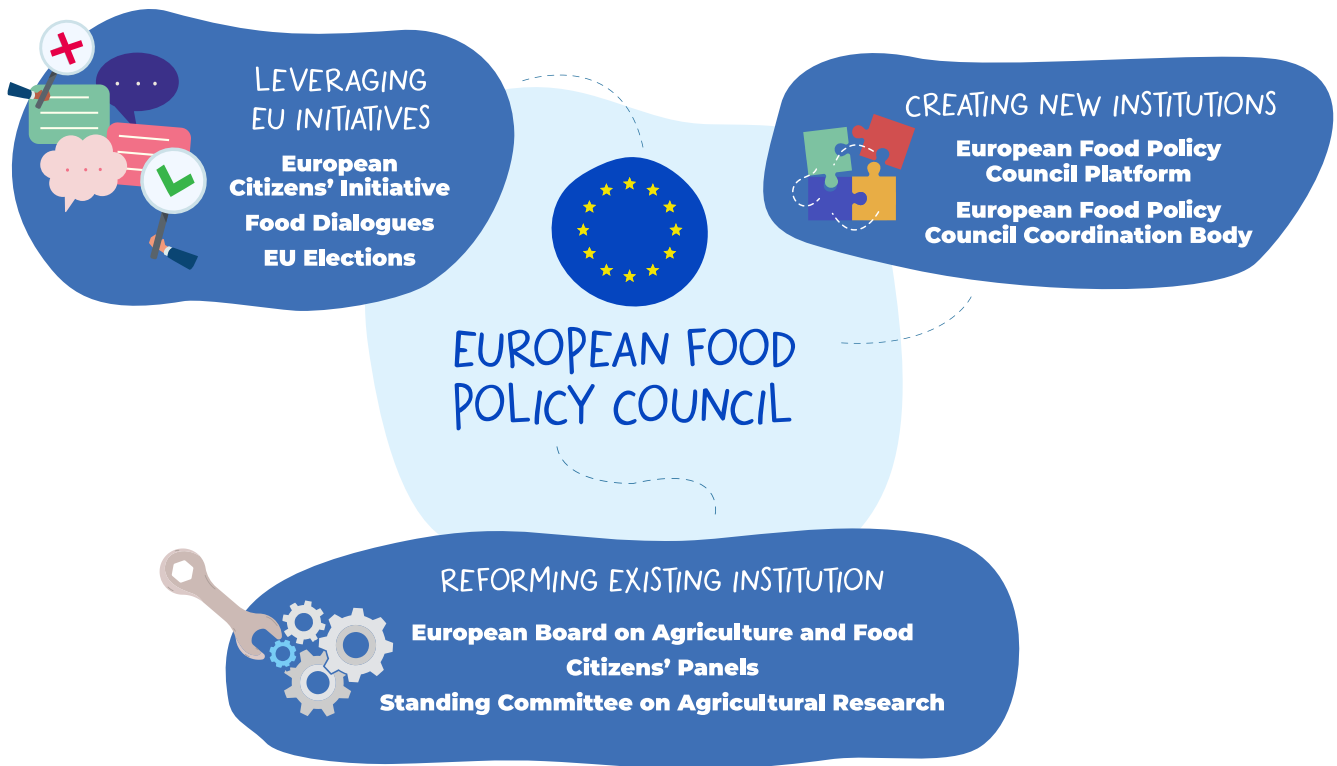


# 6. Roadmap

**This section outlines the necessary steps to establish the EFPC.** Achieving the proposed complementary governance architecture requires targeted reforms of existing institutions, alongside the establishment of new structures. The recommended steps draw on input from PLAN'EAT Policy Lab stakeholders including senior EU policymakers, representatives of CSOs, academic scholars with expertise in EU food governance, and other food policy actors,—gathered through expert interviews conducted in October 2025 and a focus group held in November 2025.

**This roadmap identifies potential steps, responsible actors and highlights windows of opportunity within ongoing EU initiatives and policy cycles that can be leveraged to advance reform.** In addition to institutional changes, leveraging ongoing EU initiatives will be essential to generate political momentum and sustain support across sectors and governance levels. This roadmap provides a structured and politically feasible pathway towards establishing the EFPC. By combining institutional reforms and strengthened coordination of existing participatory mechanisms, it translates the vision of more coherent, inclusive, and deliberative EU food governance into actionable steps.





## 6.1. Reforming existing institutions

### European Board on Agriculture and Food (EBAF): Procedural reforms to reduce power imbalances and strengthen inclusiveness

**Addressee: European Commission: DG AGRI, DG SANTE, DG ENV; Members of EBAF**

One of the first institutional reforms on the road to more coherent, inclusive, and deliberative EU food governance concerns the EBAF. To enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of EBAF as the stakeholder-engagement forum within the future European Food Policy Council, targeted procedural reforms are required. They should address shortcomings identified through the Policy Lab, expert interviews and focus group, notably the persistent power asymmetries, limited inclusiveness, and weakness in deliberative practice.

**First, agenda-setting procedures should become more transparent and participatory.** Member organisations should be granted sufficient time, early access to relevant documents, and the opportunity to propose and co-shape

agenda items. This would help ensure that discussions are not driven primarily by the Commission but reflect the breadth of perspectives represented within the forum.

**Second, mechanisms should be introduced to address power imbalances within the forum.**

Despite the diversity of actors represented around the EBAF table, the perceived balance of influence remains significantly tilted towards agricultural sector interests, with discussions often reflecting production-oriented priorities. This is reflected, for example, in the ability of some actors to block or effectively veto emerging joint positions, including in discussions related to CAP reform. To mitigate this imbalance, the forum should introduce procedural safeguards ensuring that the absence of consensus does not prevent the articulation of the range of views expressed. Where agreement cannot be reached, differing positions should be transparently documented and reflected in the outcomes of discussions. Clear and predictable rules on the selection of external speakers and experts should also be established, to avoid ad hoc choices that may reinforce existing asymmetries and further privilege already dominant perspectives.

**Third, measures to safeguard deliberative quality and accountability should be strengthened.**

This includes independent facilitation, balanced speaking time, and transparent documentation of different positions expressed. Publishing meeting minutes in a timely manner, clearly outlining areas of consensus and disagreement would further improve transparency, accountability, and trust in the process.

**Fourth, EBAF's thematic scope should be broadened beyond production-oriented concerns.**

A stronger focus on demand-side policies, food environments, public health, and the environmental impacts of food systems would support a more holistic food systems perspective. This could be operationalised through co-chairing arrangements between DG AGRI, DG SANTE, and DG ENV, helping to overcome siloed policymaking. Other Directorates-General should be consulted where relevant, including the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (DG HERA), and the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST).

These reforms would not fundamentally alter EBAF's mandate, but they would strengthen its inclusiveness, transparency, and alignment with the broader food systems objectives, positioning it as an important pillar of the EFPC architecture.

#### **Potential steps:**

- Members of EBAF raise concerns about shortcomings in its current governance structure with the European Commission
- The European Commission invites EBAF members to propose procedural governance changes
- The European Commission revises EBAF governance arrangements

## **Citizens' Panels: Strategic embedding of citizen voices in the policy cycle and ensuring follow-up**

**Addressee: European Commission: Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy**

Citizens' panels represent a key instrument for integrating public-interest perspectives into EU policymaking. To fully realise their potential in the field of agri-food governance and effectively embed them into the EFPC architecture, they should be used more strategically and embedded systematically within the policy cycle.

**First, citizens' panels should be convened at early stages of policy development,** particularly during problem framing and agenda-setting. This would allow citizens to shape underlying objectives and value trade-offs before policy options become politically constrained.

**Second, stronger institutional linkages are needed between citizens' panels and other governance mechanisms,** including multi-stakeholder fora such as EBAF and science-policy interfaces such as SCAR. In line with the Strategic Dialogue's recommendation that the Commission organise citizen dialogues in close cooperation with EBAF to provide bottom-up feedback, citizens' panels could serve as a structured and deliberative format to generate such input. Structured feedback loops should ensure that panel recommendations are formally transmitted, discussed, and responded to within other governance bodies. A formal obligation for the Commission to provide written responses outlining how recommendations are taken up or why not would significantly enhance follow-up and legitimacy.

**Third, citizens' panels on agri-food systems could be organised as** a series of interlinked panels over time, allowing for learning and continuity. Their outputs could then feed into other participatory processes, including stakeholder platforms and advisory committees. As noted by the EESC, there is scope for strengthening institutional expertise on citizen participation and clarifying the role of citizens' panels in EU advisory processes (EESC, 2023a).

Through earlier integration, strengthened institutional linkages, and clearer follow-up mechanisms, citizens' panels can facilitate more meaningful participation thereby broadening the range of perspectives in EU food policymaking and reinforcing public-interest orientation of the EFPC.

**Potential steps:**

- DG AGRI, DG SANTE and DG ENV inform the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy at an early stage about upcoming and planned policy initiatives.
- The European Commission revises the procedural framework governing citizens' panels to expand the right of initiative, allowing topic proposals also from SCAR and EBAF.
- The European Commission commits to formal follow-up procedures, discussing and answering to citizens' panel's recommendations.

**Standing Committee on Agricultural Research : Strengthening linkages between scientific evidence and participatory mechanisms to enhance visibility and uptake.**

**Addressee: European Commission: DG Research and Innovation (RTD), DG AGRI; SCAR Steering Group**

To enhance SCAR's contribution within the EFPC architecture, its role as a science-policy interface should be more clearly operationalised to ensure that scientific evidence systematically informs and is strategically embedded in EU food policymaking processes.

**First, SCAR's function as a science-policy interface should be strengthened to provide policymakers with concise and policy-relevant syntheses of scientific evidence related to food system transformation.** This would require translating research findings from Horizon projects, national research programmes, and SCAR foresight activities into structured policy briefs aligned with key moments in the EU policy cycle. In cooperation with the Joint Research Centre, SCAR could develop regular

evidence syntheses that support ongoing legislative and strategic processes, while expanding its thematic scope from predominantly agriculture focus toward a broader food systems perspective.

**Second, formalised linkages between SCAR and participatory mechanisms should be established.** Scientific assessments and foresight exercises produced within SCAR should systematically inform deliberations within stakeholder fora and citizens' panels. Conversely, participatory bodies could signal emerging knowledge gaps, research needs, and contested areas back to SCAR, allowing research agendas and foresight activities to respond to policy debates and societal concerns. This two-way exchange would strengthen the integration of scientific evidence into political deliberation while remaining responsive to societal perspectives.

**Third, institutionalised feedback loops are needed to strengthen uptake and accountability. A formal commitment by the European Commission to respond to SCAR's policy advice—particularly when linked to major food systems initiatives—would enhance transparency and reinforce policy learning.**

Clear documentation of how SCAR recommendations are considered in legislative proposals, impact assessments, and strategic communications would further strengthen coherence.

Through these implementation steps, SCAR can move from a predominantly advisory coordination body toward a more visible and influential pillar of evidence-informed, long-term EU food systems governance.

**Potential steps:**

- SCAR strengthens its role as a science-policy interface and adopts a broader food systems perspective
- SCAR provides scientific evidence and foresight inputs to EBAF and Citizens' Panels
- The European Commission commits responding to SCAR's policy advice.

## 6.2. Creating new institutions

### Food Policy Council Platform

#### Addressee: EESC

To strengthen vertical integration in EU food governance and systematically integrate territorial experience into European policymaking, a European Food Policy Council Platform should be created as a new institutional component within the EFPC architecture. The platform would serve as a structured space for exchange among existing national and local Food Policy Councils (FPCs) across Europe while encouraging the establishment of new councils in countries and regions where they do not yet exist. It should facilitate knowledge sharing and peer learning thereby strengthening food democracy across governance levels and enhancing mutual learning between territories.

#### **Institutional anchoring within the EESC would provide a stable foundation.**

The Committee's mandate to represent organised civil society and its longstanding engagement with multi-level governance make it a suitable host for coordinating and supporting such a platform. At the same time, the EESC must make sure that the platform is firmly embedded within the complementary EFPC governance architecture to ensure that territorial insights are channelled into EU-level deliberations.

#### **The diversity of FPCs across Member States must be carefully considered.**

While some countries have well-established councils operating at local, regional, and even national levels, others have only emerging or loosely structured initiatives. In regions where formal FPCs are not yet developed, other bottom-up networks and food democracy initiatives should be invited to participate and supported in building more structured councils over time.

#### **Adequate resources and professional facilitation are essential.**

Without sustained financial and organisational support, participation risks becoming fragmented or disproportionately shaped by well-established councils from a limited number of countries. Building an EU-level platform for bottom-up civil society engagement requires time, continuity, and the gradual development of a shared identity to ensure meaningful and lasting impact.

#### **Potential steps:**

- EESC initiates the internal process to establish a European Food Policy Council Platform and secures budget
- EESC conducts a mapping and assessment of existing local and regional Food Policy Councils to define selection criteria for participation in the EU platform.
- EESC formally establishes the European Food Policy Council Platform by setting rules of procedure and issuing a public call for expressions of interest from potential participants.
- Local Food Policy Councils actively participate in the European Food Policy Council Platform



## EFPC Coordination Body

### Addressee: EESC, European Commission

To coordinate across participatory mechanisms and translate deliberative outcomes into policy impact, a dedicated EFPC Coordination Body should be established as a central institutional component within the EFPC architecture. To ensure that deliberative processes translate into tangible policy impact, the EFPC Coordination Body requires a clear and institutionalised role within EU institutional structures. It should be formally anchored within EU institutional structures and established as a joint initiative of the European Commission and the EESC. This arrangement would combine political authority and agenda-setting capacity on the side of the Commission with the EESC's expertise in participatory governance.

### **A joint hosting model would provide visibility, legitimacy, and continuity.**

It would also signal that participatory food governance is not an ad hoc exercise but a structurally embedded element of EU policymaking. The Coordination Body should be supported by a dedicated secretariat, clear terms of reference, and defined reporting lines to relevant Commission Directorates-General and the European Parliament.

### **The European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform demonstrates how a joint initiative between the European Commission and the EESC can be organised, maintained over time, and linked to broader EU policy objectives.**

A similar structure for the EFPC Coordination Body would provide a stable framework for monitoring outputs from the four complementary bodies, ensuring follow-up on recommendations. Through formal anchoring, political backing, and clear procedural rules, the Coordination Body would serve as the connective layer that transforms diverse participatory inputs into coherent and actionable contributions to EU food governance.

### Potential steps:

- The European Commission and EESC agree on joint leadership of the EFPC Coordination Body.
- The EESC and Commission conduct a study to define potential rules of procedure for the Coordination Body, drawing on comparative analysis of existing participatory mechanisms such as the Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, EU Platform on Food Loss and Waste, the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and feedback from other EFPC bodies (EBAF, SCAR, Commission for Citizens' Panels, EESC for the Food Policy Council Platform).
- The European Commission and EESC formally establish the EFPC Coordination Body.

## 6.3. Leveraging EU initiatives

### Campaigning with the European Citizens Initiative

**Addressee:** CSOs, EU Citizens

Moments of citizens' mobilisation at EU level can offer strategic opportunities to advance structural reforms in food governance. One example is the European Citizens' Initiative "Good Food for All", which runs from January 2026 for twelve months and aims to collect one million signatures across Member States. The initiative calls for strengthening the internationally recognised right to food within the EU and explicitly demands the creation of an EU Food Council to coordinate action, prioritise underrepresented voices, and address inequalities in access to resources and market power. Its objectives closely align with the proposed EFPC architecture.

**This mobilisation effort provides an important window of opportunity to raise awareness about the need for more inclusive and coordinated EU food governance.**

Beyond signature collection, it can stimulate public debate, generate media attention, and signal broad-based societal support for institutional reform.

CSOs play a crucial role in this process. By acting as multipliers through outreach campaigns, public events, and engagement with local networks, they can broaden participation and encourage citizens to support and sign the initiative. In doing so, they not only support a specific demand but also contribute to strengthening democratic engagement in EU food policymaking.

### Food Dialogues

**Addressee:** European Commission, Civil Society, EESC

The Food Dialogues represent a recent initiative with the potential to strengthen participatory food governance in the EU. Announced as part of the Vision on Agriculture and Food—a strate-

gic communication outlining the future direction of the EU agri-food system—the dialogues aim to convene stakeholders from across the food system, including consumers, primary producers, industry, retailers, public authorities, and civil society to address pressing issues such as food reformulation, dietary intake data, and food affordability (European Commission, 2025a).

The first Food Dialogue took place on 5 March 2026 and focused on sustainable public food procurement as a policy tool supporting multiple EU objectives, including food security, strategic autonomy, healthier diets and stronger local food economies. While the future frequency of Food Dialogues has not yet been formally defined, Commissioner Hansen indicated during the meeting that a second Food Dialogue may take place later in 2026, suggesting that the format may continue to develop.

As this initiative is still at an early stage, several aspects of the format remain to be defined, including its mandate, frequency, and criteria for participant selection. In the first Food Dialogue, for instance, invitations were issued at relatively short notice and neither the discussion format nor the criteria for participant selection were fully clarified. In addition, participation did not include all members of the EBAF.

**If further developed, the Food Dialogues could provide an important opportunity to elevate food policy topics within existing governance structures, including the EBAF.**

In particular, they could place greater emphasis on demand-side food policies, food environments, and public health considerations, which have traditionally received less attention in production-oriented fora.

Early engagement by CSOs and the EESC together with the European Commission could help shape the development of the dialogues to ensure meaningful participation, balanced representation, and clear follow-up mechanisms. In this context, the Food Dialogues could also serve as a space for exchange between the different components of the

EFPC architecture EBAF, Citizens' Panels, SCAR and the Food Policy Council Platform complementing the coordinating role of the EFPC Coordination Body and helping to build momentum towards a more coordinated and participatory EU food governance framework.

### **Reform of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**

**Addressee: CSOs, EU citizens**

Following the presentation of the European Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the future orientation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in July 2025, negotiations on the direction of European agricultural and food policy have intensified.

**As many elements of both frameworks remain under discussion, this process represents an important window of opportunity for governance reform.**

CSOs can use this moment to advocate for stronger participatory structures in EU agri-food policymaking and to raise awareness among citizens of the broader societal implications of CAP and MFF decisions. The negotiations on the next MFF also provide an opportunity to strengthen coordination between agricultural, health, environmental and social policy priorities within EU food systems governance. The proposed European Food Policy Council (EFPC) could provide an institutional mechanism to ensure that a wider range of perspectives are systematically included in policy deliberations, helping to rebalance existing power asymmetries and better address pressing food systems challenges in the next CAP period (2028–2034).

### **EU Elections**

**Addressee: CSOs, EU Citizens**

The 2029 European Parliament elections represent a key political milestone for placing food systems governance more prominently on the EU agenda. Electoral periods create opportunities for public debate and agenda-setting around cross-cutting policy challenges. They could provide an opportunity to frame food policy as a cross-cutting concern linked to health, climate, social justice, and economic resilience.

### **CSOs can use the pre-election phase to advocate for commitments supporting an EFPC in party manifestos and political programmes.**

Targeted campaigns, public debates, and candidate briefings can help ensure that food democracy and participatory governance become visible electoral topics. By raising awareness of how EU food policies shape everyday life—including prices, food environments, health outcomes, and sustainability—voters could be mobilised around food policy priorities. This would signal public demand for more inclusive governance structures.

If strategically mobilised, the 2029 elections can serve as a window of opportunity to secure political mandates for strengthening EU food governance and building sustained support for the EFPC in the subsequent legislative cycle.

### **Political leadership and coalition-building**

**Addressee: European Commission, EESC, CSOs**

Ultimately, advancing the EFPC agenda will require sustained political leadership and coalition-building among actors involved in EU food governance. The steps outlined above demonstrate that many of the building blocks for a more coherent and participatory governance architecture already exist within current institutional arrangements. Strengthening existing mechanisms, creating targeted new coordination structures, and leveraging ongoing initiatives can collectively create the conditions for a gradual institutionalisation of the EFPC approach.

**In this context, leadership from the European Commission, engagement from the EESC, and active participation from CSOs will be particularly important for building momentum and ensuring continuity across policy cycles.**

By working together, these actors can help connect participatory processes, scientific expertise, and territorial experience more systematically to EU policymaking, as reflected in the complementary roles of EBAF, Citizens' Panels, SCAR, and the Food Policy Council Platform.

If pursued incrementally and supported by a broad coalition of institutional and societal actors, the EFPC approach has the potential to strengthen the coherence, legitimacy, and effectiveness of EU food systems governance. In doing so, it can enhance the EU's capacity to address the

interconnected challenges of health, sustainability, and resilience in Europe's food systems through more transparent, inclusive, and evidence-informed policymaking.

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# About the project

PLAN'EAT is a Horizon Europe project running from 2022-2026. PLAN'EAT gathers 24 partners from 11 EU countries, including EU top universities, renowned research centres and expert non-profit organisations. The main objective of PLAN'EAT is to foster the transition to healthy and sustainable dietary behaviour in Europe by understanding its underlying factors and drivers and by designing effective recommendations, tools and interventions targeting food system actors. PLAN'EAT implements a systemic and co-creation approach at macro (food system), meso (food environment) and micro (individual) levels. Various socio-cultural and geographic contexts are considered by implementing nine Living Labs (LLs), five pan-European food value chain Consultation and Working Groups (CWGs) and a Policy Lab in Brussels. This report is part of Deliverable 4.1 European Food Systems Dashboard that presents a coherent mix of policy interventions across governance levels to address key leverage points for accelerating a transition towards healthier and more sustainable EU food systems.



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