



Q&A Webinar 1: Responsible Research and Innovation in the food systems

Overview of questions:

- From the perspective of a policy maker: How can someone working at the ministry of health (or that of agriculture) in country X, contribute to this food system transition? – *Kelly Parsons*
- You presented the complexity of the European food system very clearly, but how does this link to the diversity in the national food systems – which may differ between European countries? – *Kelly Parsons*
- Policy coherence in the food system will require certain trade-offs, what do you think we should prioritise? At the moment for example, it is probably the economic factors that predominate the food system, rather than the environment or society. – *Kelly Parsons*
- You mention that we need an integrated food policy, at what level should this be? – *Kelly Parsons*
- How do you see the future of the existing JPI initiatives in Horizon Europe. Will they still support (CSA) by the EC and when? – *Karen Fabbri*
- How do you see the future for the ERA-Net Cofunds within the framework of Horizon Europe and what will be the timeframe? – *Karen Fabbri*

From the perspective of a policy maker: How can someone working at the ministry of health (or that of agriculture) in country X, contribute to this food system transition? – *Kelly Parsons*

It is a pertinent question, as get the sense of nervousness and confusion from policymakers in particular about what can be done at a practical level about this high-level idea of ‘food systems’, and the need to take a food systems approach. This sounds sensible, and policymakers can buy into the principle, indeed it is hard to argue with, but what do they actually have to DO? I suggest a few basic practical things for the individual (there are other actions which can be taken at the organisation or government level, such as auditing food system activities and policies, analysing coherence, creating cross-cutting policies and governance mechanisms):

- Understand at a basic level how the part of the food system you are working on is related to other parts. This is about thinking in a systems way: how coherent is what I am working on with what else is happening...what are the wider implications across the food system of a policy intervention. What might the unintended consequences be of, for example restricting a particular ingredient, or supporting a particular technology. Using a diagram of the food system can help to think these through.
- Part of that systems thinking requires knowledge of what other food related policies and projects are happening in other parts of government, because the idea is not just to communicate after a policy has been developed – to check there aren’t any major conflicts, but to look for imaginative ways that policy issues can be better connected. That can be challenging when there is no food strategy or food ministry that you can go to for an overview – so my suggestion is to push for some kind of mapping to clarify what is happening and where there may be incoherence between policies and activities targeting food.
- Policymakers can also look for, and push for, opportunities and mechanisms to collaborate on other policies where they feel their expertise is missing – an example could be bringing a nutrition voice into trade negotiations (though it is of course difficult for individuals to change



governance processes in that way and broader changes and political support would be needed, but change will not happen without some consensus that it would be beneficial).

- An easier option for facilitating more cross-sector working and thinking on food is to be open to meeting stakeholders from outside your policy sector or part of the food system. The only way that cross-fertilisation of ideas, joining-up of goals, creating co-benefits can happen is if policymakers are introduced to new voices outside of their area of expertise. Civil society representatives have reported to me their frustration in being channelled to traditional departments, when they can see implications of their work for much wider policy actors (an example is public health groups wanting dialogue with agriculture ministries but being directed to the ministry of health).
- Part of taking a food systems approach is not being scared to admit you don't know everything about how the food system - which is huge, and complex – works, and to take the plunge and ask silly questions about why things are done the way they are. I have found it really interesting to be at meetings and workshops where representatives of agricultural ministries are learning from policy experts in nutrition policy instruments for example, and seeing these connections being made.

You presented the complexity of the European food system very clearly, but how does this link to the diversity in the national food systems - which may differ between European countries? - [Kelly Parsons](#)

Clearly each country has its own unique food system, nested within regional - ie EU - and global food systems. And each national system is also made up of many sub-national and city food systems. That is why we speak of food systems, to take account of the totality of different types of food system in different localities and contexts.

The idea of multiple food systems acknowledges the huge diversity of food systems at different scales with differing characteristics. From the industrial systems at a global scale to the alternative food systems at a local scale. That is why it is important to understand and map the characteristics of the particular food system you are trying to address. It is also another incentive to include stakeholders working on the ground in understanding that system, because they really know the local context and how the system operates in practice.

Saying this, though each food system is different, there are a set of key challenges – and opportunities around food systems which are somewhat universal - though certain dimensions may be more challenging for a particular context than others.

Policy coherence in the food system will require certain trade-offs, what you do think we should prioritise? At the moment for example, it is probably the economic factors that predominate the food system, rather than the environment or society. - [Kelly Parsons](#)

I don't think there can be any disagreement that two of the biggest societal challenges at present which are linked to food, to how we produce and how we eat, are climate change and obesity. We instinctively know that there are economic trade-offs which are being made which limit some of the more assertive action that governments and companies could be taking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to food, and improve the healthiness and sustainability of the foods that dominate our lives. That is a political decision, and the optimist in me sees some real possibility that making those trade-offs in favour of economic goals will become less and less acceptable.

Alongside those general social pressures, we also have an increasing bank of policy coherence analyses which provide better evidence on where policies in one part of the food system are undermining goals elsewhere. There is a good analysis of the incoherence of the Common

Agricultural Policy and EU climate goals, for example. There are several analyses of the need to better consider health goals in trade policy.

The point here is not that the tensions and trade offs can be solved – they are always going to be there, but there can certainly be more transparency about the trade-offs that exist around food, and clarity about how policy goals are prioritized and why. Governments can also put in place ‘complementary policies’ to mitigate some of the trade-offs between policy goals. An example is supporting and compensating producers to use environmentally-friendly approaches to reduce the trade-off between maximizing yields and protecting nature. Innovation can also mitigate some of the trade-offs, an example of this might be precision nutrient application.

Governments can also create supportive governance structures where space is provided to address food and include different interests; and there are increasing moves to involve citizens in policy processes, and address trade-offs through public participation, in assemblies, labs etc, with the hope of providing a stronger social mandate for difficult political choices which may need to be made by governments.

Developing an integrated cross-cutting food policy is a mechanism which can be used to bring all of the different policies and activities together and being clear about the trade-offs....though in reality most national integrated food policy projects have failed to do this and focus more on collating everything rather than interrogating tensions and trade-offs. Whole of government food policies also traditionally come at food from an agricultural and economic perspective, so it will be interesting to see if the farm to fork strategy can avoid falling into that trap.

[You mention that we need an integrated food policy, at what level should this be? - Kelly Parsons](#)

Integrated food policies can be created at any level, and arguably should exist at every level where multiple policies and activities targeting the food system are happening...which of course is everywhere. They have been called for at all levels, from global – in terms of the need for an IPCC for food systems - to EU, to local.

In terms of real-life examples of integrated food policies we can point to, the most successful examples have been at the local, city level, where cities such as Baltimore, Toronto, London, have taken what I call a ‘food in all policies’ approach to embedding food into other policy areas.

In terms of national level integrated food policies – we have had several attempts but no strong examples have actually been implemented. We have a promising national food strategy currently being developed in England. We have had earlier attempts at the EU-level which have failed to get off the ground, and the same in several countries including England, Australia.

It is helpful to think about integrated policies as a mechanism, a way of working, a tool for creating better policy coherence – which can be done at any level. They can potentially be used to address any and all of the different types of policy coherence that need to be addressed:

- Coherence of policies now in the same jurisdiction – such as whether a country’s trade policy is coherent with its nutrition policy
- Coherence now at different policy levels – for example whether a country’s national obesity policy is helping or hindering its local obesity policy
- Coherence of a policy in one geographical context with policies in another – such as whether a developed country’s agricultural policy is coherent with a developing country food security policy (in fact the origins of the concept of policy coherence is about these questions around development)
- Coherence later – between current and future policies – is an agricultural or trade policy now coherent with the ability to produce food in a more challenging climate in the future.



How do you see the future of the existing JPI initiatives in Horizon Europe. Will they still support (CSA) by the EC and when? - [Karen Fabbri](#)

JPIs have been very valuable in structuring the European Research Area on important societal challenges. As such they play an important role in many research initiatives, on targeted objectives in their respective domain, for example FACCE on GHG mitigation and soils. They are also important building blocks of the Partnerships in preparation. JPI FACCE and HDHL have been part of starting the co-design of the Food System Partnership. More co-design steps will follow. The Workprogrammes of Horizon Europe are still in preparation. The timeframe depends on a decision on the Multiannual Financial Framework.

How do you see the future for the ERA-Net Cofunds within the framework of Horizon Europe and what will be the timeframe? - [Karen Fabbri](#)

Several ERANet Cofunds such as SUSFOOD or CoreOrganic are mentioned in the Food System Partnership initial document. They could be starting points of alignment or co-fund mechanisms. The Food System Partnership is expected to start with Workprogramme 2023. A CSA is planned in Workprogramme 2021.

