

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Saturday, 15 November 2025 11:00 GMT +01:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Food, Culture, Community: A Living Heritage in the European Food Transition
CONVENED BY	Virginia Cepollina - WP8 Leader
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/53333/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	European Union

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	38
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PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

1	0-18	21	19-30	11	31-50	3	51-65	2	66-80	0	80+
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PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

18	Male	20	Female		Prefer not to say or Other
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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

1	Agriculture/crops	23	Education		Health care
	Fish and aquaculture	6	Communication	1	Nutrition
	Livestock	1	Food processing	1	National or local government
	Agro-forestry		Food retail, markets		Utilities
1	Environment and ecology	3	Food industry		Industrial
1	Trade and commerce		Financial Services	11	Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

	Small/medium enterprise/artisan		Workers and trade union
2	Large national business		Member of Parliament
	Multi-national corporation	1	Local authority
	Small-scale farmer		Government and national institution
	Medium-scale farmer		Regional economic community
	Large-scale farmer		United Nations
	Local Non-Governmental Organization		International financial institution
10	International Non-Governmental Organization	2	Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance
	Indigenous People		Consumer group
23	Science and academia		Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

The Dialogue was designed in such a way that it would embody the UNFSS Principles of Engagement through the creation of a safe, inclusive and multi-stakeholder environment, hence, involving representatives of different groups (age, gender, country, professional background). The dialogue revolved around the idea of learning as a team rather than debating. Participants, representing such professional backgrounds as research, journalism, academia, civil society, and local practitioners, were divided into groups to ensure balanced participation and diversity. The facilitators guided discussions by encouraging all participants to speak from their experience and professional insights. Through the applied technique, all participants had time to express their ideas, and no one was left behind. The Dialogues included structured reflection sessions. With the experience every participant brought with them, it was possible to reinforce grounding discussions that had both evidence and cultural realities. Hence, fostering mutual respect across disciplines and geographies. The participants were exploring the interconnections between nutrition, production, heritage, and aquatic food systems, creating and supporting systems thinking. Transparency was also ensured through the final presentations facilitated by the group rapporteurs. The Dialogue was a key moment of collaborative reflection within the SWITCH (Project number: 101060483) network and the celebrations marking the 15th anniversary of UNESCO's recognition of the Mediterranean Diet.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

The Dialogue embodied the set Principles of Engagement. First of all, it recognised the complexity through the link between cultural heritage and regenerative agriculture, nutrition, and blue food systems. Secondly, it embraced inclusivity. Participants were encouraged to speak from their personal food-systems experience (professional and personal) and cultural knowledge. The third criterion, building trust, was applied by making the space open for disagreement and bringing confidence to all participants. Lastly, every participant was acting with urgency by spotting immediate opportunities for education, community action and awareness. Hence, it gave a push to sustainable food transitions in real terms.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

We would recommend other Dialogue Convenors to pay close attention to the group composition by bringing together participants with different professional and personal backgrounds, as well as from different age and gender groups. Hence, encouraging them to learn from unfamiliar perspectives as well as facilitating conversation instead of debates. Moreover, we would advise reminding participants about the importance of divergence. Therefore, reducing defensiveness and allowing more creative thinking about what future food systems might look like. Another key point of conveying the Dialogue is to offer clear guidelines on reflecting all voices in the outcomes of the discussions. Moreover, convenors can see the benefits from supporting the younger participants or early-career professionals, whose perspectives and expertise enrich the conversations, but sometimes might be underrepresented.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

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Yes

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No

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

The Food Systems Dialogue “Food, Culture, Community: A Living Heritage in the European Food Transition”, organised by the Future Food Institute in Pollica on November 15, 2025, as part of the SWITCH Project (Project number: 101060483). The dialogue aimed to explore the ways food systems across Europe could shift toward being more sustainable and fair, while staying connected to local cultures. The dialogue embraced the links between nutrition, agroecology, sustainability in blue ecosystems, and traditions around living food heritage. The main goal centred on defining real steps that could facilitate change in the stakeholder behaviour, including consumers, producers, institutions, and policymakers. What is more, the conversation aimed to protect ecosystems and build up community health in the process.

The Dialogue was preceded by SWITCH sessions (presentations and research), including “Eat Well, Stay Well, Save the Plate: The Mediterranean Diet and the Longevity Algorithm” and “Healthy Oceans, Healthy Lives”, which offered scientific and cultural framing for the later working-group discussions. The Dialogue displayed that transforming food systems should not be limited to just technological solutions. Culture, education, and governance are incredibly crucial as well. The participants stressed that sustainable change can be realised when healthy diets feel both reachable and appealing to people. It is also supported by farming methods that help rebuild ecosystems instead of wearing them down. Moreover, marine and freshwater resources have to be handled sustainably. All of these actions are then supported by the traditions around food that tie communities together, keeping them alive and engaged.

One key topic, which can be seen in every conversation, was to adapt the societal view on the sustainable food systems shift from quick wins (for example, easy access and low prices) to a long-term perspective. There should be actions towards creating a lasting balance, sustainability, and purpose. One of the steps towards it includes guiding people, regular people and professionals. The change should also be supported by policies and the market setup.

Overall, the Dialogue aimed to link the various fields of the food system and explore how education, policy, financial measures, and community involvement can act together to facilitate the change to healthy and sustainable nutrition for everybody.

ACTION TRACKS

- ✓ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- ✓ Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- ✓ Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- ✓ Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| ✓ Finance | ✓ Policy |
| ✓ Innovation | ✓ Data & Evidence |
| Human rights | ✓ Governance |
| ✓ Women & Youth Empowerment | ✓ Trade-offs |
| | ✓ Environment and Climate |

MAIN FINDINGS

Participants came to understand cultural perspectives on food as a resource rather than a challenge. It has been demonstrated that these perspectives can significantly contribute to sustainable practices in innovative ways. Elements such as living heritage can influence behaviour by reconnecting people with the underlying reasons for food, including taste, identity, and seasonal variations. Education has emerged as the most significant means of achieving this, evident in school curricula and community initiatives. Labelling and dissemination of culinary knowledge also play a role. Participants emphasised the importance of addressing larger issues, such as the lack of financial support for small-scale food producers. Public awareness of sustainable farming practices and information on sustainable fishing and nutrition remains limited. The group emphasised the need to strengthen connections between various stakeholders involved, including researchers, local groups, teachers, and food producers. They discussed establishing learning spaces that promote environmentally friendly choices.

The discussion led to several main points that were shared by all participants:

1. Education plays a crucial role in transforming food systems for the better. Speakers emphasised the importance of teaching about nutrition and food traditions, as well as the need for literacy on sustainability to be spread throughout society. This includes children and their families, farmers, shoppers, and even policymakers. This type of education empowers people to choose foods that promote health and help maintain balance in the environment;
2. Market-based incentives and rewards can influence consumer and producer behaviour. Ideas for systems that recognise restaurants for using high-quality ingredients that are sustainable over time have been suggested. Loyalty programs in stores could award points for purchasing healthy, locally sourced products. Public procurement for institutions such as hospitals and schools could focus on seasonal meals that are less harmful to the environment. Such measures could contribute to making healthy, sustainable choices the norm;
3. Agroecology and sustainable farming are essential for maintaining strong ecosystems and supporting livelihoods. Practices such as crop rotation and multi-functional land management stand out as effective approaches. These practices help restore natural life by reducing soil disturbance, promoting tree planting, and facilitating animal grazing. They also contribute to carbon sequestration and reduce the use of harmful chemicals from factories. However, there are concerns about the costs of implementing these practices, as well as the difficulty in certifying them. This highlights the need for financial support and knowledge sharing to facilitate widespread adoption;
4. Similarly, managing marine and freshwater ecosystems requires immediate action to address threats such as overfishing and the impact of large factory boats on biodiversity. Ensuring sustainable practices in these areas is crucial for the well-being of local communities and the long-term sustainability of these resources;
5. Developing skills and training programs for those responsible for setting regulations and enforcing regulations is crucial for achieving sustainable outcomes. Laws and regulations play a significant role in shaping how these resources are managed over time;
6. Food heritage contributes to sustainability by providing it with real meaning and a sense of our identity. Traditions surrounding home cooking and eating in groups reinforce this. By valuing what is in season and acquiring cooking skills, waste is reduced, and harm is also minimised. Promoting these practices in schools and public spaces can reverse the trend towards convenience foods.

Throughout these discussions, one clear theme emerged: changing food systems works best when sustainability is seen as something people desire, not something imposed upon them. This approach improves health and preserves cultural heritage. Nature remains safe, and more people can find ways to make a living. Participants stressed that such initiatives as SWITCH (Project number: 101060483) can be perceived as a bridge, connecting policy, science, and community-led engagement. Food culture then becomes an active driver of sustainability. The Dialogue emphasised the significance of networks, which can translate high-level research (for example, presented by project partners in nutrition, marine science, and environmental health) into community action and behavioural change.

The Dialogue strengthened the value of the SWITCH network in facilitating shared spaces, which incorporate scientific knowledge and evidence, a high level of youth engagement, cultural heritage, and community-based innovation. Their interaction, hence, accelerates the transformation of European food systems.

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✓	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

✓	Finance	✓	Policy
✓	Innovation	✓	Data & Evidence
	Human rights	✓	Governance
✓	Women & Youth Empowerment	✓	Trade-offs
		✓	Environment and Climate

OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/4

First topic: Regenerative Agriculture. How can agroecological and regenerative practices act as a catalyst for thriving rural communities and resilient European food systems? Agroecological and regenerative approaches can be a catalyst for the success of rural communities and the resilience of European food systems. The participants agreed that regenerative agriculture has the potential to restore ecosystems and revive rural economies simultaneously. However, its adoption is constrained by financial risks, regulatory uncertainties, and limited public awareness.

The participants emphasised the importance of agroecological practices, such as crop rotation, multifunctional land management, agroforestry, rotational grazing, and reduced tillage, which help reverse soil degradation, improve water retention, protect biodiversity, and reduce reliance on external inputs. The group emphasised that the transition to regenerative agriculture must provide socioeconomic benefits for farmers and land managers to be sustainable and scalable.

Urgent actions are clearly evident. One of them involves increasing dedicated financial support and transition funding for farmers adopting agroecological practices. Another action calls for the development of harmonised and credible carbon and soil certification systems, which would monetise ecosystem services and increase investor confidence. Additionally, knowledge transfer needs to be strengthened through demonstration farms, extension services, and open-access data platforms. The communication of regenerative benefits to consumers also needs improvement to strengthen market pull.

Several groups have responsibility in this regard. Policymakers at the EU and national levels need to take action. Universities and agricultural research centres play a crucial role, while ministries of agriculture also have duties in this area. Farmers' associations and cooperatives can also contribute.

Progress assessment relies on specific indicators. Soil health is a crucial factor, encompassing carbon content, biodiversity preservation, and erosion control. The adoption of carbon credits and soil certification programs demonstrates progress. A reduction in monoculture farming also serves as an indicator. Participation in farmer training and peer learning activities indicates engagement.

Despite these positive developments, barriers and challenges persist. Financing limitations for transitional stages pose a challenge. The complexity of regenerative practices for farmers adds to the difficulty. Public understanding of ecosystem services is limited, slowing progress. Lack of clear economic incentives in the early stages of transition remains a concern.

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KEYWORDS

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/4

Second topic: Nutrition. What actions and innovations can drive community-led shifts toward dietary habits that support human well-being and environmental health?

Discussions emphasised that nutritional changes should not be based on restrictive messaging, but rather on empowering communities with knowledge, meaning, and balanced information. Participants emphasised that dietary sustainability can be achieved when it is relevant to culture, easy to implement, and aligned with wellbeing rather than guilt. Schools and families were identified as pivotal spaces for forming food literacy and habits, but broader societal mechanisms such as media and trusted digital channels also need to shift toward evidence-based and culturally relevant communication.

Urgent actions include integration of nutrition literacy and food systems education into school curricula for all age groups, development of dietary guidelines that balance health and cultural identity, and creation of practical, hands-on learning opportunities in schools and communities, such as cooking workshops, seasonal meal challenges, and food labs. The responsible stakeholders are: government health authorities, education ministries, universities and research institutions, educators, food media, and communication channels.

In order to measure the progress, it would be crucial to decrease the prevalence of nutrition misinformation, increase dietary diversity scores, increase student awareness of food origin and seasonality and participation in cooking and food literacy programs. However, some potential barriers include competition from conflicting nutrition narratives and influencers online, pressure of time constraints on families, lack of engagement among young people outside of formal education settings and financial barriers to accessing healthy food in some households.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/4

Third topic: Living Heritage. How can living heritage serve as a cultural driver to inspire sustainable food transitions across Europe?

Participants emphasised that sustainable transition can be more easily achieved when food practices are based on identity, enjoyment, and community values. Living heritage, including culinary traditions, the transmission of recipes between generations, seasonal community meals, and shared eating rituals, was seen as a valuable resource against the high-waste and high-convenience food system. By recognising heritage as an asset, rather than simply nostalgia, communities can rediscover low-impact practices such as home cooking, food preservation, and the revival of traditional “fast foods”, which are nutritious and require minimal processing.

To promote this shift, urgent actions are needed:
Encourage intergenerational knowledge exchange about cooking in educational and community settings;
Support community programs, festivals, and food workshops that showcase traditional preparation methods and seasonal ingredients;
Develop storytelling platforms to connect producers with consumers and highlight the significance, history, and environmental benefits of food.

The discussion prioritised schools, municipalities, cultural organisations, community kitchens, youth groups, and food heritage organisations as key responsible actors. The key progress indicators could be the increased participation in community-based food events and workshops, increased demand for seasonal and locally produced foods, and a decrease in avoidable food waste due to the rediscovery of traditional cooking and preservation techniques. Nonetheless, potential challenges are the increasing loss of traditional flavours and skills, reliance on mass-produced processed foods, socioeconomic barriers that prevent access to diverse foods, and limited institutional recognition of food heritage as an important aspect of sustainability.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/4

Fourth topic: Blue Foods. What is the role of blue food systems in shaping sustainable and equitable food futures for coastal communities in Europe?
The discussions acknowledged that marine and freshwater resources are strategically significant for food security and livelihoods. However, their long-term viability depends on effective management of ecosystems rather than solely on consumer choices. Industrial fishing practices, lack of transparency, and limited consumer awareness create a mismatch between seafood demand and ecological limits.

Participants emphasised that empowering policymakers with scientific knowledge can create the regulatory framework necessary for the sustainable use of these resources in the long term. This, in turn, would enable responsible access for local communities. The urgent actions should focus on strengthening transparency regarding fish sustainability, stock levels, and supply chain origins, integrating scientific data and ecosystem insights into policy formulation and decision-making, and enhancing public awareness of responsible fishing practices and consumption of both commercial and non-commercial species in marine and freshwater environments. Hence, the change should involve marine research organisations, environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), ministries of fisheries and coastal development, scientific advisory boards, media outlets, and community communication platforms.

The undertaken actions should focus on improving the availability and accessibility of certified sustainably produced seafood, increasing consumer awareness regarding ocean-friendly dietary choices, introducing fishing quotas and measures to control illegal fishing, and adopting sustainability training programs across regulatory bodies.

However, it is crucial to anticipate such barriers as the complexity of marine ecosystems and their stock assessments, limited consumer understanding of the health of the ocean, economic pressures on fisheries, and globalised seafood trade, which limits visibility into the practices and origins of products.

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	Human rights	✓	Governance
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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

During the dialogue, participants expressed a shared commitment to establishing sustainable and equitable food systems in Europe. However, there were several differences in opinions regarding the most efficient ways to achieve this transformation. These divergences reflected different perspectives on the cultural factors influencing food behaviour, the rate of change, the scope of interventions, and the interests of stakeholders that should be prioritised.

One of the main areas of disagreement concerned the role of cultural heritage in sustainable food transitions. Some participants viewed heritage as a valuable resource, arguing that traditional diets, seasonality, low-waste cooking methods, and local food production systems provide a blueprint for restoring biodiversity, promoting healthier diets, and reducing environmental impact. They believed that reconnecting communities to the origins and history of food could strengthen environmental stewardship and support rural economies.

Others adopted a different approach, arguing that, although cultural heritage can contribute to sustainability, it should not become a hindrance to scientific progress or inclusive diets that address contemporary health concerns and social realities. The disagreement did not call into question the significance of heritage itself, but rather how it should be incorporated into forward-thinking strategies.

Differences also emerged regarding the pace of the transition. Some argued for rapid, systematic interventions, including strict environmental standards, financial incentives linked to verified climate performance, and regulations that accelerate the shift away from unsustainable production models. They argued that delaying action increases climate and biodiversity risks and disadvantages future generations.

Others have warned that accelerated, top-down measures may provoke resistance among farmers, manufacturers, or consumers who lack the necessary resources or knowledge to adjust. From this standpoint, long-term behavioural change must be grounded in education, capacity building, and cultural acceptance. Stimulus-based and community-led approaches were preferred over regulatory pressure, both to guarantee fairness and to enhance public ownership of the transition. The main disagreement concerned not the necessity for change, but rather whether the most efficient path is structural and immediate or educational and gradual.

A third area of divergence focused on the scope of transformation. Some participants emphasised systemic levers – finance, trade regulations, certification systems, and national policies – because they argued that only large-scale interventions could shift market dynamics rapidly enough to ensure food systems compatible with climate change. Others emphasised grassroots innovations – intergenerational knowledge transfer, community kitchens, school-based food education, and local food identity – as being more responsive to people's needs and better able to create lasting behavioural change. These perspectives were not mutually exclusive, but rather, the disagreement centred on which approach should drive investment and policy focus in the short term.

Further divergence emerged regarding the prioritisation of stakeholders. Some argued that farmers and fishers should remain the primary beneficiaries of transition pathways given their central role in maintaining ecosystems and rural livelihoods. Others emphasised the importance of consumers, particularly young people, in shaping the long-term viability of sustainable food production models through changes in demand. A third view emphasised the role of public institutions in leading the transition process, emphasising that sustainability cannot solely depend on individual or sector-specific initiatives.

Despite these differences, there was a consistent theme throughout the Dialogue: participants viewed divergences not as obstacles, but as sources of innovation. They recognised that cultural, regulatory, educational, and economic approaches can coexist and support each other. Instead of converging on a single approach, the Dialogue highlighted a shared willingness to adopt multiple solutions that address Europe's diverse food systems, community identities, and environmental challenges. What is more, the SWITCH (Project number: 101060483) framework was perceived as an example of the convergence of diverse scientific disciplines and cultural perspectives. Altogether, they contribute to the innovation within sustainable food transitions.

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ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

RELEVANT LINKS

- **Food Systems Dialogue Photos "Food, Culture, Community: A Living Heritage in the European Food Transition"**
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15qRje3-9pc0iiap8BxXC8-h9_Ps-6coW?usp=share_link
- **Transcript of the Food Systems Dialogue "Food, Culture, Community: A Living Heritage in the European Food Transition"**
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XU0cKqHeOGvHWO44KpQW9GnY8OP4SrdD/edit?usp=sharing&oid=114271011766439026971&rtpof=true&sd=true>