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National Pathway for Food Systems Transformation in Support of the 2030 Agenda - Switzerland

1. Introduction

In the run up to the UN Secretary General's Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) that will take place on 23 September 2021, all member states were invited to articulate and submit their national pathways for food systems transformation in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). The present document lays out Switzerland's pathway, drawing primarily from Switzerland's 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS 2030), supported by the results of the national Food Systems Summit Dialogue (FSSD) that was organized in Switzerland as part of the preparatory process for the UNFSS.

Sustainable development makes it possible to meet the basic needs of all people and ensures a good quality of life throughout the world, now and in the future. It encompasses the three dimensions of environmental responsibility, social solidarity and economic efficiency, and this on an equal, balanced and integrated basis, while also factoring in the tolerance limits of global ecosystems. In line with this understanding, our vision is that by 2030, the Swiss food system has been transformed in a way that it plays its part in a world moving towards zero net greenhouse gas emissions, where the loss of biodiversity has been reversed and hunger and malnutrition are a thing of the past.

With the aim to coordinate Switzerland's efforts to promote sustainable development within the reference framework provided by the 2030 Agenda, the Swiss Federal Council adopted the SDS 2030 on 23 June, 2021. The Strategy lays out how Switzerland intends to implement the 2030 Agenda over the next ten years. Sustainable Consumption and Production is one of the three priority topics of the SDS 2030, with a dedicated chapter on furthering the transformation to sustainable food systems in Switzerland and abroad. This chapter, with its specific and measurable goals until 2030, together with the concrete measures of the action plan that belongs to it, constitutes Switzerland's pathway for food systems transformation in support of the 2030 Agenda.

Switzerland conducted a series of two national and three city level workshops as part of its national FSSD between March and June 2021, where key stakeholders from the agri-food sector discussed eight themes: 1) sustainable food environment; 2) sustainable food demand and sustainable diets; 3) sustainable production; 4) climate change mitigation; 5) adaptation to environmental changes, resilience and food security; 6) food wastage (avoidable waste and losses); 7) socio-economic dimensions of the agro-food sector; 8) entrepreneurship, innovation, science and technology. Among other things, many participants to the national FSSD called for the development of a cross-sectoral food policy. The results of the national FSSD are largely supportive of the strategic directions of Switzerland's SDS 2030, also point to areas of divergence between different actors, and they will be taken into account for the development of further measures for the implementation of the Strategy.

2. An Overview of Key Challenges in Switzerland's Food System

The Swiss food system is characterized by the following main challenges, which our pathway for food systems transformation aims to address:

- Agriculture accounts for more than 10% of the total greenhouse gas emissions in Switzerland.

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- Agriculture can lead to a loss of soil functions. The greatest challenges arise from soil compaction, soil erosion, loss of organic matter and pollution.
- Around half of the food consumed in Switzerland is imported. This division of labor promotes competition, innovation and the general level of prosperity in Switzerland, but it also means that a large part of the ecological and social impact of nutrition occurs abroad.
- The loss of habitats and the deterioration in habitat quality threaten Switzerland's biodiversity. The main reason for this is the intensive use of land, including through agriculture. Since around 70% of the consumption-related land use to meet Switzerland's needs takes place abroad, Switzerland also degrades biodiversity abroad (e.g. tropical rainforests) through its domestic consumption.
- The decline in the number of farms continues: In 2019 there were a total of 50,038 farms in Switzerland. This is 814 fewer than in the previous year. At the same time, the size of the farms is constantly increasing. Of the 50,038 farms, 7284 were organic and 42,754 were conventional.
- The diet of the Swiss population is unbalanced. For example, sweets and salty foods are consumed far more than recommended. The consumption of oils, fats and nuts roughly corresponds to the recommendations. While legumes, fruits, vegetables and dairy products are not being eaten enough, the average consumer eats more meat than what is being recommended.
- Taking into account the environmental impacts along the entire value chain, food is the highest polluting consumption area (28% of total environmental pollution from consumer goods).
- Food consumption in Switzerland across all stages of the food chain, both domestically and abroad, generates 2.8 million tons of food waste per year. This corresponds to 37% of agricultural production, about half of the agricultural production surface in Switzerland or a cost of over CHF 600 per person per year.

3. Achieving the Food Systems related SDGs by 2030

3.1. Switzerland's 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy

Switzerland's pathway for food systems transformation in support of the 2030 Agenda is defined in the Federal Council's 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS 2030), which contains a dedicated chapter on this topic, with four specific and measurable goals:

- The portion of the population consuming a healthy, balanced and sustainable diet in keeping with the nutritional recommendations of the food pyramid rises to a third.ⁱ
- Avoidable food losses per capita are half the 2017 figure.ⁱⁱ
- On the basis of environmental accounting, the carbon footprint from final per capita food demand declines by one-quarter compared to 2020.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The proportion of farms engaged in especially environment and animal-friendly production under public and private sustainability programmes rises by a third compared with 2020.^{iv}

To provide general guidance on how to achieve these goals by 2030, the SDS 2030 lays out the following four national strategic directions:

Promoting healthy, balanced and sustainable nutrition

Within the scope of its remit, the Confederation supports the relevant players, on the one hand, in improving the composition of food and meals according to sustainability criteria and in further developing it through research and innovation, and on the other, in making a balanced, wholesome and sustainable diet attractive and affordable for all. To that end, it supports the relevant information and awareness-raising activities, among other things.

Reducing food waste

The Confederation devises and supports measures to reduce avoidable food waste all along the value chain up to and including the consumption stage. Those measures are devised and prioritised so as to reduce the environmental impact as drastically as possible and ensure food security. The Confederation and the industries jointly set specific reduction targets.

Enhancing sustainability throughout the food value chain

The Confederation creates favourable, transparent and efficient framework conditions for sustainable food systems throughout the food value chain, from agricultural production through to consumption. It promotes the internalisation of external costs and transparency regarding the origin and production methods of food. In so doing, it is especially mindful of environmental impacts, social circumstances and animal welfare considerations. It foments a transition to sustainable food systems by further fine-tuning agricultural policy and other relevant policy areas. In the realm of production, the Confederation supports enterprises in

the changeover to production methods that are resource-saving, socially sustainable, locally adapted and geared to the market.

Besides, it explores and where appropriate applies greater restrictiveness in permitting the agriculture sector to introduce hazardous substances into the environment. In so doing, it ensures that the measures are economically and socially sustainable. The Confederation is committed to ensuring that the relevant stakeholders are able to apply knowledge so as to avoid greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to climate change and promote biodiversity as well as agrobiodiversity. The Confederation also promotes the strengthening of basic and continuing education in the field of sustainable food systems. It promotes the transformation through coordinated collaboration in the agriculture and food sector, as well as with and among players in all other relevant policy areas.

Enhancing the resilience of the food system

The Confederation promotes the resilience of the food system in order to ensure long-term food security. This includes responsible investment, strengthening the social and economic situation of agricultural enterprises, diversified, locally-adapted and resource-efficient domestic production including at difficult production locations (e.g. mountain regions), and facilitating the relevant training opportunities. The Confederation strives to limit adverse environmental impacts, especially on climate and biodiversity and to foster the adaptation of the agriculture sector to changing overall climatic conditions. For this purpose, it draws on the principles of agroecology among other things. Moreover, the Confederation supports technological development for the enhancement of existing and future production methods.

3.2. Measures to be taken in the coming three years: the Action Plan for 2021-2023 for Switzerland's 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy

In order to support the implementation of the SDS 2030, an action plan has been developed for the initial three years of the strategy, defining concrete measures and key milestones, and providing an overview of other related planning documents, as outlined below. In addition, the below sections show how the measure of the action have been reflected in the discussions and outcomes of the national Food Systems Summit dialogues that were held in Switzerland between March and June 2021. Finally, sections 3.2.4. and 3.3. focus on the questions of multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration.

3.2.1. Reduction of food waste

Measure 2021-2023:

The Federal Council is drawing up an action plan containing measures to combat food waste. The goal is to halve avoidable food waste in Switzerland by 2030 compared to 2017. The measures are designed in such a way as to lead to a maximum reduction in environmental pollution. In addition, indicators are being developed to regularly monitor the reduction of food waste and the related environmental impact at the different stages of the food chain. In 2024, a review will be carried out to determine whether the measures are sufficient or whether adjustments are necessary.

Main findings of the national Food Systems Summit Dialogues, of relevance to this measure:

Regarding food waste reduction, a great potential exists in the retailing, processing and agricultural sectors, especially by optimizing the valorization of by-products and “unaesthetic” items (including to develop new food products, as animal feeds, etc.) and facilitating access to surpluses (e.g. through exchange platforms, for donations, etc.). Bringing unsold food on the market at reduced prices offers multiple wins. Improving the legislation on best-before dates and the creation of a legal basis to apply already existing technologies to assess the edibility of food items, would also help to reduce food waste. This all would benefit from improved coordination along value chains. Finally, positive (e.g. awards) and negative incentives (e.g. fees) could be implemented as a further means to fight food waste.

Milestones:

- By the end of 2021: adoption of the action plan by the Federal Council under Chevalley postulate 18.3829.
- By 2023: federal government takes measures to reduce the environmental impact of food waste in its own procurement and invites cantons and communes to take similar action.

Existing related planning documents:

- The measures to combat food waste are being drawn up as part of the report drafted in response to Chevalley postulate 18.3829.
- Between 2013 and 2019, basic principles were developed, a stakeholder dialogue was conducted and initial measures were implemented as part of work surrounding the green economy.
- Key documents can be accessed at <https://www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/en/home/topics/waste/guide-to-waste-a-z/biodegradable-waste/types-of-waste/lebensmittelabfaelle.html>.

3.2.2. Updating the climate strategy for agriculture

Measure 2021-2023:

The Federal Council is updating the climate strategy for agriculture from 2011. The goal is to specify the contribution of agriculture and food to the Federal Council's targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions and climate change adaptation. The strategy sets out principles, objectives and lines of action (part 1) and defines corresponding measures (part 2). It is designed to help minimise the greenhouse gas footprint of the food system. At the same time, resilience will be maximised to ensure food security under future climate conditions. The contents of the strategy will feed into further development of policies relating to the food system.

Main findings of the national Food Systems Summit Dialogues, of relevance to this measure:

Some of the current farming methods and practices must be reviewed if we want to mitigate our environmental impact – on climate, but also on biodiversity. Yet, the national context needs to be fully acknowledged. For example, an important part of Switzerland consists of mountain areas, which play a central role in our food system and fulfil important ecosystem functions. However, these areas are less adapted for crop production and better suited for animal production. Participants considered using feed additives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, applying a carbon tax, and renouncing to soybean meal from tropical regions in livestock feed. One major suggestion to adapt to climate change consisted in developing models to determine which elements of our food systems would be most affected. Some participants stated that local consumption and short supply chains should be favored, in order to retain control over how food is produced. Finally, the agricultural vocational training should integrate the topics of climate change and sustainability.

Milestones:

- End of 2021: part 1
- End of 2022: part 2

Existing related planning documents:

- Climate strategy for agriculture (FOAG 2011)
- Climate change adaptation in Switzerland – parts one to three of the Federal Council's strategy (FC 2012, FC 2014, FC 2020)
- Switzerland's long-term climate strategy (FC 2021)

3.2.3. Determination of the baseline number of farms producing in a particularly environmentally and animal-friendly manner

Measure 2021-2023:

The baseline is used to determine the outcome of objective 2.4 of SDS 2030 ("*The proportion of farms producing in a particularly environmentally and animal-friendly manner as part of specific public and private sustainability programmes has grown by one third compared to 2020*"). A list of criteria must also be drawn up to determine what is understood by "particularly environmentally and animal-friendly" and which public and private sustainability programmes are taken into account for this purpose. In addition, the findings from this will inform proposals for measures for integration in the second action plan for SDS 2030. The following key questions should be considered:

- What is meant by "particularly environmentally and animal-friendly"?
- Which public and private sustainability programmes are taken into account and why? What criteria apply for new programmes to be included in future (e.g. no sustainability certificates based on self-declarations)?

- What measures (for the second action plan) are needed to achieve the SDS 2030 target on agricultural production by 2030?

Main findings of the national Food Systems Summit Dialogues, of relevance to this measure:

Meat and dairy production must be locally adapted and may need to be reduced while avoiding compensatory imports from abroad triggered by unchanged demand. Innovation, digitalization and the adoption of locally adapted new technologies are crucial to make agriculture more sustainable. In terms of digitalization, one meaningful application could be a tool to collect data on the environmental footprint of all food value chain actors. All food systems stakeholders have a role to play to promote more sustainable and environmentally friendly food production – including consumers through their everyday shopping decisions (importance of consumer education), but also retailing and catering (e.g. by promoting local products / short value chains), and industry (e.g. by setting voluntary sustainability goals). Public procurement is an important lever, if sustainability criteria are included in addition to price criteria. In addition, in order to gear consumption towards more sustainably produced food, it was felt that a pilot project on true cost of food and transparency should be launched. However, all these actions mentioned above will only work if there are direct benefits for farmers. In this context, the provision of multiple ecosystem services by farmers should be better valued and remunerated, planning and income security for farmers should be ensured by political framework conditions, and the value added should be distributed more equitably along the supply chains.

Milestones:

- By the end of 2021: identify relevant programmes and draw up a list of criteria.
- By the summer of 2022: draw up measures for second action plan.

Existing related planning documents:

- Ordinance on Promoting Quality and Sustainability in the Agriculture and Food Sector (QSO)
- Digital Switzerland Strategy (2020)
- Direct payments (incl. PEP, production system contributions)
- Resources programmes and water protection programme
- Package of measures for clean drinking water and more sustainable agriculture (parliamentary initiative 19.475 'Reducing the risks associated with the use of pesticides', de/fr/it). Spring 2021

3.2.4. Dialogue for a sustainable food system

Measure 2021-2023:

The Federal Council supports the switch to sustainable food systems through dialogue with a representative group of stakeholders. The aim is to develop recommendations for policymakers that support implementation of the food system approach adopted. A sustainable approach considers the food system as a whole and takes into account the interdependencies and conflicting interests within the system, from production to the recycling of food waste. The dialogue is intended to lead to policy recommendations that point to possible holistic solutions. In addition, ongoing work such as that undertaken in preparation for the United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021 should be further pursued.

Main findings of the national Food Systems Summit Dialogues, of relevance to this measure:

Participants recommended to seize the momentum created by the preparations for the Food Systems Summit to establish an ongoing dialogue with a food systems approach at national level. One group proposed the creation of an independent body supporting existing local networks of food system actors and ensuring their coordination and strengthening their collaboration. In this sense, a group underlined the importance of ensuring the intergenerational and multi-stakeholder character of these dialogues. Through their proximity with local populations, cities can (re-)build the link between urban consumers and rural producers. The catering sector could team up with farmers committed to sustainable production. In addition, one group proposed the creation of a national food day, which could serve as a showcase for food systems transformation. Finally, participants called for the development of a cross-sectoral food policy.

Milestones:

- Start: June 2021
- End: end of December 2023

Existing related planning documents:

- Fulfilment of postulates 20.3931 and 21.3015 on future direction of agricultural policy

- Federal government measures for a resource-efficient, sustainable Switzerland (the green economy)
- Swiss food strategy and Swiss dietary recommendations

3.3. Multi-stakeholder collaboration for the implementation of the SDS 2030

Attaining the SDGs is incumbent on the whole of society and will require the collaboration of all players within their respective spheres of competence. Switzerland's SDS 2030 therefore recognizes the need for all relevant stakeholders, including the cantons, communes, civil society, the business sector and academia as well as the population at large, to be involved in and contribute towards its implementation.

3.3.1. Cooperation with cantons and communes

Future dialogue and structured tripartite cooperation between the different levels of state in implementing the 2030 Agenda will be addressed at a political level (Conference of Cantonal Governments and Conferences of Cantonal Directors) and at a technical level (Cantonal Sustainable Development Network and thematic bodies). Towns and communes in particular play an important part in the effective implementation of sustainable development locally. They are also involved at an international level.

Institutional cooperation and coordination between the Confederation, cantons and communes is being further strengthened and open dialogue and inclusion encouraged. The Federal Council is urging the cantons and communes to incorporate sustainable development into their regular planning and management processes, and has invited them specifically to take account of the aims and strategic directions of the 2030 SDS priority topics in so doing.

The national Food Systems Summit Dialogues conducted in Switzerland recognized that cities are important actors in the national food system and highlighted the need for closer coordination and collaboration between cities and the Confederation.

3.3.2. Cooperation with civil society, business and academia

The Federal Council takes on board all relevant interest groups in a participatory and partnership based manner in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the 2030 SDS by intensifying and institutionalizing the dialogue with them and, in particular, consulting them on future revisions of the 2030 SDS and the associated action plans as well as the various reports. It is keen to foster open dialogue between all partners and further reinforce multifaceted cooperation on sustainability policy both domestically and internationally. This paves the way for a range of perspectives to be taken into account and makes for a better understanding of the cross-connections between individual sustainable development goals and of the 2030 Agenda in its entirety.

For this purpose, the Federal Council uses existing vehicles and creates space for mobilising new players and ideas. The 2030 Agenda Advisory Group appointed by the 2030 Agenda Steering 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy 40 Committee – comprising director-level representatives of civil society, business, academia and other interested parties – plays a pivotal role here.

4. Conclusions

The 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS 2030) that was adopted by the Swiss Federal Council on 23 June, 2021, with its specific and measurable goals until 2030, together with the concrete measures of the action plan that belongs to it, constitutes Switzerland's pathway for food systems transformation in support of the 2030 Agenda.

A large number of the results of the national FSSD are reflected in Switzerland's SDS 2030. However, some key recommendations of the FSSD are not fully addressed in the current action plan. These include the development of a coherent and holistic cross-sectoral food systems strategy of policy; promoting food systems transformation through awareness raising and education; reflecting the true cost of food in prices and distributing the added value in fairer and more equitable way among value chain actors; and promoting research, innovation, digitalization and new technologies.

While Switzerland's SDS 2030 remains valid until 2030, its action plan will be revised and adapted on a four-yearly basis in 2024 and 2027, coinciding with a legislature period. In early 2024 and in the framework of the dispatch on 2023-2027 legislature planning, the Federal Council is to approve a new action plan for the 2024-2027 period including additional federal policy measures. In terms of content, the SDS 2030 should in essence remain as consistent as possible throughout the implementation period up to

2030. Where necessary, the Federal Council will refine the strategy in a pragmatic manner, especially to take proper account of new challenges, political decisions, as well as international or domestic developments. At the various stages of the review, the cantons and communes, as well as the business sector, civil society and academia are consulted and included in the process as appropriate.

These revisions of the action plan of the SDS 2030 will thus provide an opportunity to further take into account the recommendations of the national FSSD as well as the major recommendations that emerged from the overall UNFSS and FSSD processes, when developing additional measures for the implementation of the Strategy. These, together with the results of the measures of the current action plan, including the continuing dialogue as laid out in 3.2.4., will also be taken into consideration when formulating recommendations for the regular legislature process.

Switzerland thus has a clear and targeted pathway for food systems transformation in support of the 2030 Agenda, which is in line with the national FSSD that was conducted as part of the UNFSS preparatory process, that remains adaptable to future developments and open to multi-stakeholder input, and that will contribute to the implementation of the results of the UNFSS well beyond September 2021, until 2030.

ⁱ Long-term goal: By 2050 the population's diet will be in line with the food pyramid. A linear development would see 33% of the population consuming a diet in line with the recommendations of the food pyramid by 2030.

ⁱⁱ Postulate 18.3829, Isabelle Chevalley, 5.03.2018. Action plan against food waste.

ⁱⁱⁱ According to the sectoral strategy on climate, agriculture and nutrition (as of 18.06.2020). The great need for action in this area is made clear in both national studies (e.g. Zimmermann et al. 2017) and international ones, such as [The Lancet \(2019\): Food in the Anthropocene](#) or [Akenji et al. \(2019\)](#). The latter postulates that: "the required footprint reductions in the case of developed countries are at least 47% in nutrition (...) by 2030." The present intermediate target was set with feasibility in mind.

^{iv} The implementation of the target and the measurement of its achievement are set out under Action area 3 of the Action Plan.