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Full speech

Thank you to FEBA for the opportunity to contribute to your discussions today on the transition to sustainable food systems. And certainly, good morning, a warm welcome to all participants.

In my presentation today, I would like to indeed go back maybe into a bit more detail on the Farm to Fork Strategy and in particular, its action plan related to the reduction of food loss and waste, to which of course, the Food Banks are actively contributing. And, President Vandenschrik, you mentioned this morning this very nice phrase, you spoke about the miracle of circular economy. But that miracle doesn't happen without people and action on the ground and certainly, we recognise fully the very active commitment and work of Food Banks and your partners to make these miracles happen. Food Banks are certainly key partners in this transition to sustainable food systems.

So, when we look now to the challenges to the EU food system, of course our food system every day provides us with safe and healthy foods, and this is critical to the lives of citizens and people worldwide. Nevertheless, our food systems face challenges. They account today for nearly a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, consume large amounts of natural resources, result in biodiversity loss, can have negative health impacts, and generate food losses and waste and do not always allow fair economic returns and livelihoods for all actors, in particular, primary producers. And hence, the need to take an integrated approach to address all aspects of sustainability, and food system sustainability, in designing a new strategy to take us forward on this path.



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Last year, the Commission carried out a Eurobarometer to sound the views of European citizens about sustainable food, sustainable diets and we asked citizens what aspects of a sustainable diet are important for them. And what we see through the Eurobarometer's findings is that people are growingly recognising the link between food systems and the three dimensions of sustainability and, in particular, the younger generations have a more global of these sustainability aspects. Consumers generally and citizens primarily associate sustainable foods and diets with health, but they also consider that sustainable diets can support the local economy and minimise waste.

So the objectives, the aims of the Farm to Fork Strategy, are to establish a sustainable food system that has a neutral or positive environmental impact, ensures food security and public health, and preserves the affordability of food. And in this transition or transformation -- to be clear-- food security and food safety remain the foundation of such a system.

The Farm to Fork Strategy sets out some very ambitious targets in the area of food production, calling for a reduction in the use and risk of chemical pesticides, reducing nutrient losses and use of fertilizers, reducing sales of anti-microbials and achieving at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming and a significant increase in organic aquaculture. It should be noted that these are aspirational. These are EU-wide targets, they are not necessarily legally binding, but they give direction. And some may become legally binding, such as the pesticides targets, in the context of the revision of the Sustainable use of Pesticides Directive. But of course, in-line with better regulation principles, any legislative proposals put forward are subject to impact assessment, public consultation and people certainly will have a say in these developments. Not all of the elements of the Farm to Fork Strategy are subject to targets, there are other important objectives and also future targets, which will be set, in particular as regards the reduction of food loss and waste.

Such a transition of course requires the involvement, the engagement of all actors, not least that of citizens and consumers, who in the choices that they make, that we all make as consumers, also drive the direction that our food systems are taking and will take. Then in the next ring of this onion, you have all of the actors in the food value chain actively involved. In the next ring, we have then research, the academic community, finance, advisors, NGOs such as Food Banks and other actors. And, of course, in the outer ring, the policymakers who are working at global level (we'll hear soon from the FAO in that regard), at EU level, national and local levels, are facilitating and enabling this transition. And this means that policies indeed require different instruments, different types of instruments, both regulatory and non-regulatory, of which you have some examples here.

Our Deputy Director-General spoke about some of the overarching initiatives which are put forward as part of the Farm to Fork Strategy. I would maybe just like to focus briefly on the



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establishment of a legislative framework for sustainable food systems. Just as today in the EU we have the General Food law, which provides an overarching framework on food safety, the transition to sustainable food systems does require, we consider, a framework which embodies, which encompasses the general principles and requirements of sustainable food systems. The Farm to Fork Strategy also lays down some nearly 30 actions, which are targeted at different stages of the food value chain and different actors in the food system. The reformed Common Agricultural Policy will support farmers, for instance, in adopting more sustainable farming. The Common Fisheries Policy will remain important as well as EU guidance to support Member States in developing sustainable aquaculture. In the middle part of the food value chain, there are some initiatives there, such as mentioned by Claire Bury this morning, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Business and Marketing Practices. And last but not least, the transition will not happen without a shift in people's diets, and this needs also to be facilitated through the food environment but also by awareness raising and interventions to try to, over time, encourage people to adopt more sustainable consumption practices, and this includes also preventing food waste. In the EU and across the world, we see that, in fact, the majority of food waste is generated at the level of households, and this requires action.

In order to step-up action on food loss and waste in the EU, we have proposed two flagship actions, as mentioned by Claire Bury. The proposed targets to reduce food loss and waste, which we will put forward by 2023 based on the results of the new EU-wide monitoring, which is currently in progress by Member States. We will also be proposing a revision of EU rules on date marking, the 'use by' and 'best before' dates, which today are thought to account for approximately 10% of food waste in the supply chain due to, at times, the misunderstanding of what these concepts mean, in particular the 'best before' dates. So, we are going to explore options through consumer behaviour research also, to better differentiate these concepts, to see whether we can try to avoid unnecessary food waste, which can be linked to the misunderstanding of these dates. We will also investigate food losses at the production stage, not least through European research and innovation programmes. Horizon Europe should contribute in this direction. And we will continue to seek to scale-up and mobilise action across the EU, notably through the work of the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste. And this means both preventing the generation of surplus food, which can lead to food waste, but also, where surplus arises, facilitating its redistribution to people in need.

And I turn then now to your role as Food Banks and your contribution. We hope that the Farm to Fork Strategy, in fact, lays a fertile ground for your work as it highlights the critical social dimension of our food systems, the need to ensure food security, the importance of cooperation between all actors. Clearly, food security unfortunately is on the rise, also linked to the economic crisis linked to the COVID pandemic. And whilst, of course, the root causes of poverty need to be addressed, at the same time it is not excusable that food, which is safe and suited for human consumption, is thrown away. And this is where your work together with



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actors in the food supply chain is critical in order to recover more food which is safe and fit for human consumption.

We have undertaken action, in cooperation with the EU Platform and in particular the Food Banks, to facilitate food donation since 2016. We adopted EU guidelines on food donation. Through an EU pilot project, we contributed to their dissemination and FEBA was actively involved in this work. Member States, through the Platform, also developed a document which outlines practices of Member States in food redistribution, which we understand has been helpful to help each other learn from how they implement relevant legislation to facilitate safe food donation. And there have been developments also as regards food hygiene. Following advice from the European Food Safety Authority, the Commission adopted guidance on food safety management systems for food retail, including food donation and is currently amending EU food hygiene rules. A new chapter on food redistribution was introduced in food hygiene rules, adopted and published in March of this year. Allowing the freezing of meat at retail for the purpose of food donation will also be allowed following, subject to adoption of a Delegated Regulation amending EU hygiene rules, which is expected to be published in June.

We will pursue our efforts to scale-up action and mobilise key players, indeed, aiming to support you as Food Banks in your work. The Platform has adopted recommendations for action in food waste prevention: there is a dedicated food donation section, which in fact, FEBA was the rapporteur for this work. We will continue to strengthen the evidence base for food waste prevention and also support you in taking action concretely through research and innovation, as I have mentioned, and also through grants and calls for proposals through a new Single Market programme, which, the work programme is expected to be adopted later this month.

In closing, I want to again highlight the importance of this collective approach. Of course, Food Banks are so aware of this through the partnerships that you develop both upstream and downstream-- upstream with the providers of food, downstream with associations who are then delivering and making sure that these foods are accessible and provided safely to people in need.

The Farm to Fork Strategy provides both benefits and opportunities to improve lifestyles, to improve health, the environment, leading to benefits for citizens and improving the quality of life. And finally, we hope that the Farm to Fork Strategy will contribute to a global transition towards sustainable food systems, protecting future generations and, in that context, also making a concrete contribution to the game changing solutions to be delivered by the United Nations Food Systems Summit later this year.

So, thank you very much for your attention.



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Moderator: *You mentioned the changes to European legislation about the 'best before' date and the freezing of meat. What will happen at national level? Should the Food Banks bring this information to the attention of national authorities?*

Thank you very much for the question. As regards date marking, this will be a proposal to amend EU rules on food information to consumers and this would be proposed by the European Commission by 2022. I would say that Member States will be closely involved with this work, which also involves consumer behavioural research in order to identify options, which we will test also amongst consumers for their effectiveness, options for perhaps changes to terminology, presentation, etc. So, Member States will be closely associated with the work in advance to the publication of the proposal and of course, as any legislative proposal, there is publication of several regulatory steps. There was already an inception impact assessment that was published last year to raise attention of all stakeholders and Member States to this, and there will be further impact assessment when the proposal is ready. So, close association and information certainly will be provided.

As regards the changes to EU food hygiene rules, national authorities in fact should be well aware because these are developed in close cooperation with competent authorities in the Member States. This is an amendment to Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 related to hygiene rules for food of animal origin, which should be adopted and published following scrutiny. It's a Delegated Regulation of Council and Parliament. So, again, the National Authorities should be aware of these developments but also through our work in the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, where all the Member States are present, we will continue to inform about these developments, which we hope will be helpful. Indeed, when we were developing the Guidelines on food donation, this is a point some Member States raised and stakeholders as well, as being a possible obstacle to saving meat at retail, in view of its redistribution by Food Banks. Thank you.

As I said, for instance, I mean another important action is the Child Guarantee, which really stems from the Pillar of Social Rights. This was adopted on the 3rd of March, so same day, one week later than the European Pillar of Social Rights, stemming from that same logic. And one of the issues, one of the requirements in the recommendation for the Child Guarantee is in fact, you know, adequate nutrition for children in poverty. So, in fact, I think we are getting really good this matter becomes realistic.

Moderator: *To ensure the sustainability of a healthy food system, the point has been made that changes in the diet are necessary. Is there any specific initiative taken to promote education on the population at large? The worse pandemic in the last 40 years might be declared as obesity.*



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Thank you, Laura. And in fact, Mr Torero has really given the whole response. I wanted to come in indeed on the important point he raises on the need to also change the food environment to facilitate consumers' choices. And this is something that, through the Farm to Fork Strategy, as was mentioned by Claire Bury this morning, we are aiming to do: to both strive to improve the information which is provided to consumers -- so, for instance, introducing harmonised, mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling-- but also setting up nutrient profiles to restrict promotion, through nutrition or health claims, of foods which are high in fat, sugars, and salt. This also to provide incentives to food manufacturers to reformulate and reconsider the profile of their foods. As you know, in the EU, it is the Member States who have the competence for education as such and, at EU level, we do have some actions which can complement those efforts, such as the EU Schools Scheme for instance, where colleagues are also looking to improve and strengthen the educational message put forward in this scheme in order to communicate about healthy and sustainable diets. And through the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, for instance, members regularly share educational materials, including those which have been produced by the FAO on reduction of food waste, which have been picked up also by Member States to be utilised in school programmes addressing this issue. Thank you.



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