

Caring and sharing

Few challenges to voluntary measures, few challenges to mandatory measures

Confronted with a series of disasters, including COVID-19, droughts and floods, pests, and animal and plant diseases, there is widespread societal awareness that an urgent change in behaviour is needed to avoid future food shortages. Strong, visionary leaders step up and propose drastic changes that would until recently not have obtained support.

Agriculture, health, environment and rural development are no longer treated in isolation but considered as integral parts of a resilient food system. There is an increasing understanding and appreciation of the importance of soil for food production and other environmental functions, and soil is widely seen as a public good. Recent disasters that put food supplies at risk lead to a level of solidarity that helped us transition to a more inclusive society with high levels of trust in public institutions. This, together with an increase in communication technologies, also results in a continuous sharing of ideas, good practices and machinery (some government-funded for rural communities), and free advisory services to bridge the gap between research and practice.

This new mindset puts the focus on healthy, sustainably produced food and acknowledges the value of the additional ecosystem services the landscape provides. It comes with a long-term outlook that prioritises climate-resilient agriculture that provides a range of benefits to society. There is widespread awareness and support for investment in more sustainable practices: consumers are willing to spend a larger part of their household budget on food; while a strong government provides financial support to enable this transition and leave no one behind. While local product diversity is burgeoning, reliance on imports is reducing and the associated reduction in food choices is generally accepted by consumers.

With the appreciation of the agricultural environment comes an increased appreciation for living in the countryside, leading to vibrant rural communities that provide a good quality of life. Cities experience a similar change, with a range of urban farming and green initiatives supporting the urban environment and its ecology. Social and technical innovation is high as farmers, citizens and the entire value chain find more sustainable and inclusive ways to produce and consume food. This comes with a sense of belonging and an appreciation for the natural resources the region offers. A strong focus on resilience means that individual choices are restrained through environmental taxes (e.g. carbon tax), with tax revenues being used for environmental benefits and to support those unable to pay more for food.

The change in behaviour extends beyond food production, with fully functional circular economies making sustainable use of resources, and an overall value and care for the environment. Society is more place-based, with less travel for work and holiday, and a lifestyle facilitated by technology (e.g. an increase in remote working, telemedicine etc). Globalisation is mostly knowledge-based, and imported products have to meet the same social and environmental standards in their production as in Europe.

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