

1 Context

In **July 2022**, the French National Food Council (*Conseil national de l'alimentation* – CNA) adopted [Opinion No. 90 "New food behaviours: proposals for action for food compatible with sustainable food systems"](#). This opinion is the result of a self-referral by the CNA. A consultation group (1), chaired by Ms Pascale Hébel and vice-chaired by Mr Fabrice Etilé, worked for a year on its development.

The objectives of the group included:

- the **assessment of the current situation and categorisation of 'new food behaviours'** in the light of the 'One Health' approach and the notion of a sustainable food system;
- the identification of which of these new behaviours have or could have a **structuring impact on the sustainability of food systems** through the analysis of their health, environmental, economic and social consequences;
- the proposal of **operational solutions** enabling the food system to anticipate changes in food behaviours and to respond to societal expectations and the issues they raise in order to support transformations compatible with sustainable food systems.

2 Findings

The discussions within the consultation group, as well as expert hearings and the analysis of the scientific literature, revealed **several findings**.

1. Several influencing factors at individual and social levels shape consumers' food needs and preferences in the short and long term: **neurophysiological factors** (influence of the nervous system on human behaviour), **age** evolution, moments of **biographical breaks**, etc.

2. A set of determinants related to the food environment also influences the evolution of dietary behaviour: **food supply** and its financial and geographical availability, **food marketing and advertising, legislation**, etc.

3. Food behaviour is a matter of individual and collective choice, and thus has consequences for human, animal and environmental health

- The **composition of diets in terms of quality and quantity, as well as physical activity and sedentary lifestyle**, play a role in the development of pathologies such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and certain cancers.
- On an **environmental level**, food systems account for almost a third of global greenhouse gas emissions. They require a high consumption of natural resources and have an impact on biodiversity and ecosystem health.

4. The major changes in eating habits over the last ten years are due in particular to the consideration of environmental issues, to which citizens are increasingly attentive

Two categories of dietary behaviour change have been identified:

- Promotion, within the same product category, of **certain production, processing or distribution methods** (e.g. increased importance of animal health and environmental concerns, etc.).
- Changes in the **quantities consumed of different product categories** (e.g. decrease in meat consumption, increase in consumption of protein-rich plant products, etc.).



"New food behaviours"

In Opinion No.90 of the CNA, new food behaviours are understood to be behaviours that have become **more widespread over the last ten years or so**: they correspond to **emerging trends**. This opinion focuses on behaviours that reflect **strong concerns about the sustainability of food systems**.

(1) The list of members of the Consultation Group is provided in the opinion (see Annex 3).

3 Scope and issues

This opinion proposes a **systemic approach**, in order to take into account **the influence of the food environment on the evolution and sustainability of eating habits**. On the basis of the findings identified and given the scope of the subject, this opinion focuses on **four major issues**:

1. The challenge of rebalancing animal and plant food categories: in a context of climate change and ecosystem degradation, the food system transition scenarios are characterised fairly centrally by increased consumption of plant-based foods and decreased consumption of animal-based foods.

2. The challenge of developing production and logistics methods that meet society's expectations in terms of sustainability and equity and limit food waste: over the last ten years, society's expectations have increased with regard to the development of production methods that are more respectful of the environment, global health, fair remuneration further up the chain and animal welfare.

3. The challenge of supporting and developing digital tools to promote sustainable food behaviours: digital tools are playing an increasingly significant role in the evolution of food behaviour, reflecting strong consumer and producer expectations in terms of product information and transparency.

4. The issue of constraints limiting the possibilities of transition to sustainable food systems: the food environment of each individual exposes them to daily injunctions and constraints on the health, nutritional, environmental and economic levels. These can be perceived as stigmatising for part of the population whose access to food that allows them to articulate these issues is not assured.

"Sustainable Food Systems"

Based on the [FAO definition](#), the CNA wishes to highlight the importance of the following dimensions in defining sustainable food systems:


- **human health dimension:** sustainable food systems provide access to health-promoting food for all people everywhere and ensure that nutritional needs are met;
- **animal health and welfare dimension:** they ensure the protection of animal health and welfare;
- **ecosystem health dimension:** they integrate issues relating to

climate change, soil health, water resource conservation, and biodiversity loss;

- **economic and social dimension:** they ensure fair remuneration for producers and employees in the food chain and guarantee access to sustainable food for all;
- **territorial and participatory dimension:** they relate as much as possible geographically to a catchment area and its surrounding territory and allow the people who live there to participate in defining their needs and the means to meet them.

4 Shared common objectives

The recommendations in the opinion are designed to meet **four objectives** identified during the work of the consultation group:



Promote rebalancing between the consumption of foods of plant and animal origin, in particular through moderation in meat consumption



Develop and publicise production and logistics methods that meet society's expectations in terms of sustainability and equity and limit food waste



Supervise the development of digital tools to promote sustainable eating habits



Address the constraints limiting the possibilities of transition to sustainable food systems

4 Key recommendations

Opinion 90 proposes **some fifty recommendations to meet these four objectives**. Among these, **12 "key" recommendations** were identified (2):

A - Better education and information on food practices and production methods that are consistent with the objectives of the transition to sustainable food systems

A.I. Redefine the official nutritional recommendations adapted to each age of life and to physical activity so as to also take into account sustainability issues. Redefine the modalities for the development of these benchmarks **by including ADEME** (the French Ecological Transition Agency) **in the validation process**. Make proposals in the framework of the future National Strategy for Food, Nutrition and Climate (...).

A. II. Set up information campaigns aimed at the general public to encourage rebalancing in the consumption of animal and plant products, in line with the official nutritional guidelines: moderation of meat consumption and other animal products, increase in the consumption of fresh and raw fruits, vegetables, legumes, wholegrain cereals and nuts, taking into account the nutritional needs of each population. Explain in particular in the context of this campaign why and how to achieve this rebalancing, as well as the benefit of the territorial integration of food. In particular, increase the funding allocated to *Santé publique France* (the French public health agency) for the implementation of these actions.

A. III. Include educational actions on balanced diets and diets that are compatible with the sustainability of food systems in general, and in particular on rebalancing the consumption of animal and plant products, in the national education and teacher training programme, ensuring the allocation of the necessary financial and human resources for schools. Deploy these actions in connection with the various compulsory lessons in the context of education on food and taste, taking into account all the dimensions of food (pleasure, health, sustainability).

B - Guarantee information on product quality and better inform consumers

B. I. Introduce an environmental labelling system for food products that encourages a shift in the consumption of products of animal and plant origin and the consumption of products from sustainable agricultural models (organic farming, agro-ecology), in particular by including an **indication of the farming method**.

B. II. Strengthen the controls on food advertising and marketing on social networks and websites aimed at young people in order to limit the promotion of products that are not compatible with sustainable food systems as defined in this opinion. Prohibit, in particular, practices that **circumvent regulations** (sponsorship of programmes, sponsorship of influencers or YouTube channels, etc.).

C - Support and give the means to collective catering to be a lever for transforming food practices

C. I. Strengthen the initial and ongoing training of professionals in private and public catering (cooks, central kitchen or restaurant managers, quality managers, dieticians, etc.) on:

- the development of **vegetarian menus that are attractive from a taste point of view and guarantee the nutritional balance** of meals, in particular to avoid waste;
- the development of **recipes that are economical** and compatible with the sustainability of food systems, combined with information on nutritional requirements. Use, for example, the "Fabrique des menus" proposed on the Mangerbouger.fr website to diversify menus;
- **rebalancing the consumption of animal and plant products** and ways to increase the proportion of plant products in non-vegetarian menus;
- **supply management and logistics** for plant-based raw material.

C. II. Implement, develop and reform the economic support for collective catering (via a reevaluation of the price of the meal in particular) to enable it to achieve the objective of introducing **at least "50% sustainable and quality products, including 20% organic products"** in the supply (see the French law "EGalim 1"), and to cope with the economic context (health and diplomatic crisis, regulatory requirements, increase in production costs, etc.).



(2) Members of the CNA have expressed dissenting positions on these recommendations. These have been developed in the table of recommendations on pages 37 to 56 of Opinion 90.

D - Promote production, processing and marketing practices that contribute to the development of a supply of products derived from production methods that are more respectful of the environment, animal welfare and human health, while limiting food waste

D. I. Gradually rebalance public aid and subsidies (CAP, National Strategic Plan, national and regional funding) to support production methods that favour the **environment, nutritional quality and animal welfare**, in order to develop a larger offer that is more accessible to consumers and to ensure a fair remuneration for producers:

- Increase public funding to support the **development of organic farming and legume cultivation** by guaranteeing the financial accessibility of products from these productions;
- Increase public funding to support the **conversion, installation and maintenance of the most sustainable forms of livestock farming**;
- At the same time, reduce **public funding for less sustainable production methods** by defining exclusion criteria for the allocation of such funding (cage farming systems, zero grazing systems, farms subject to ICPE authorisation).

D. II. Defend the implementation at European level of **measures to protect agricultural and food products** from competition from imported products that do not meet European health and environmental standards. **At the same time, reduce exports** of products from **unsustainable production methods** that could destabilise markets and traditional farming methods in southern countries.

D. III. Develop the **commercial offer** (distribution, local shops, collective and commercial catering) of **products and dishes based on plant-based foods that are favourable to sustainable food systems, little processed, of good nutritional quality and simple to cook**. In particular, promote voluntary commitments in this direction and direct public funding and calls for projects towards these products, based on an environmental assessment based on independent LCA data.

E - Develop research on current food dynamics for which the CNA considers research work insufficient

E. I. Develop public research to better **identify regimes that combine several characteristics** of sustainability ("positive deviants" regimes). On the basis of this work, set up an **intervention research** project to define the modalities for supporting people with different characteristics (socio-demographic, geographical, health status, etc.) in the adoption of these diets that have been identified as more sustainable. Identify the brakes and levers in the adoption of these behaviours.

E. II. Develop public research on the **impact of social networks** as levers for disseminating verified and regulated information and on their role in **changing dietary behaviour**, particularly among children and adolescents. This work could be included in a more general call for research on the effects of food media, marketing and advertising on food markets (consumer and business behaviour).



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