

Reclaiming the Future of Food

**Community Pathways
to Resilience, Justice
and Regeneration**



**A collaboratively
written manifesto
for community-led
food system
transformation.**

Policy Recommendations

- 01** **Strengthen local, regional and community- led food systems and infrastructure adapted to local contexts.**
- 02** **Reorient EU food governance and funding to empower small producers and rebalance the food chain through fairer rules and support.**
- 03** **Enable the transition to a just and resilient agricultural and food paradigm by investing in and scaling farmer-led agroecological and regenerative practices with the highest environmental and social impact.**
- 04** **Recognise and support farming as a public service and form of ecological stewardship by guaranteeing decent work, fair income, and social protection for farmers.**
- 05** **Make the transition to a regenerative paradigm viable and attractive for all.**
- 06** **Develop food, soil, nutrition and ecological literacy through all stages of education, while putting special emphasis on schools and basic education.**

07

Rewild and re-cultivate our cities.

08

Shift the innovation and research agenda to drive the just transition in food systems.

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Promote digital democracy and technological sovereignty to empower community-led and ecological food systems.

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Support the creation and recognition of local food councils as participatory governance bodies that drive territorial food strategies and democratise decision-making across the food chain.

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Prioritise local, ecological, and community-grown food in public institutions by reforming procurement frameworks to make sustainable, territorial sourcing the norm.

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Recognise food as a human right in EU laws and policies.

13

Recognise food sovereignty as a matter of global justice by ensuring that European policies uphold, rather than undermine, the rights and resilience of food systems in the Global South.

Executive Summary

Europe's food systems stand at a critical crossroads. The current agro-industrial model — driven by extraction, centralisation and fossil-fuel dependence — not only contributes significantly to emissions, ecological degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change, but also leaves Europe highly vulnerable to disruptions in global supply chains, as seen during recent geopolitical and climate-related crises. It places unsustainable pressure on water resources, depleting aquifers and polluting rivers through fertiliser and pesticide run-offs. **According to the European Environment Agency, food systems account for more than one-fifth of the EU's total environmental and climate impacts. Yet, they also hold the key to regeneration.** Building more localised and diverse food economies would enhance resilience, reduce systemic and water-related risks, and restore balance between human needs and ecological limits. Rooted in local contexts and community agency, food systems can become powerful levers for cutting emissions, regenerating soils and waterways, and ensuring healthy, just and resilient societies.

Across Europe, thousands of community-led initiatives (CLIs) are already pioneering this transformation. From community-supported agriculture and food cooperatives to ecovillages, food councils and permaculture projects, they show that sustainable, democratic food systems are already taking shape from the ground up. Local and regional food economies not only regenerate soil and biodiversity but also drive circular, place-based development — closing nutrient, energy and material loops while strengthening local livelihoods. **Transforming food systems at this level advances multiple policy goals simultaneously:** climate adaptation, public health, rural regeneration, biodiversity restoration and community wealth building, laying the foundations for a well-being economy and the European Green Deal.

However, despite their proven impact, **these initiatives remain largely unrecognised and unsupported by mainstream EU policy and funding frameworks.** Their potential to contribute to systemic transformation is hindered by structural barriers: lack of access to land, resources, finance, and inclusive governance spaces. The new European policy cycle presents a crucial opportunity to reverse this trend—placing communities at the heart of Europe's food future.

What this paper offers:

This co-created policy paper, **developed through a participatory process involving ECOLISE members, networks and partners across Europe**, outlines a shared vision and 13 policy recommendations to empower communities to drive the transition towards resilient, regenerative and just food systems. It aligns local innovation with European policy ambitions, offering concrete pathways for multi-level collaboration and collective impact. An extended edition, to be published soon, will include detailed case studies and good practices illustrating these recommendations in action.

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1. Strengthen local, regional and community-led food systems and infrastructure adapted to local contexts.

- **Promote cooperative and civic food networks as the backbone of resilient local food economies.** Enable shared ownership and resource pooling for infrastructure, such as food hubs, processing units, and digital platforms, to keep value local, strengthen trust across the supply chain, and ensure that governance and wealth remain rooted in communities.
- **Facilitate the emergence of diverse community-driven actors across the food chain** — producers, processors, retailers and consumers— through cooperative structures, civic food networks, and appropriate digital platforms.
- **Fund shared infrastructure** (regional food hubs, processing units, grain mills) to increase food sovereignty, governed collaboratively by local stakeholders.
- **Adapt legal and policy frameworks to recognise and sustain cooperative structures**, civic food networks, and digital platforms connecting producers and consumers.

2. Reorient EU food governance and funding to empower small producers and rebalance the food chain through fairer rules and support.

- **Redirect subsidies** from industrial actors to small-scale, agroecological, cooperative and community-led farms.
- **Review fiscal policy** to ensure that the societal costs of conventional food systems (on public health, the environment, local economies, etc..) are fully internalised, and that the positive contributions of local and sustainable food systems are appropriately rewarded.
- **Simplify and de-bureaucratise market rules**, e.g. by easing requirements for small-scale or direct-to-consumer sales so that small producers aren't overburdened.
- **Promote values-based regulation** to secure fair prices, decent livelihoods, and healthy, affordable food for all.

3. Enable the transition to a just and resilient agricultural and food system by investing in and scaling farmer-led agroecological and regenerative practices with the highest environmental and social impact.

- **Acknowledge and reward the social and environmental value of nature-positive food systems**, such as agroecology, regenerative farming and permaculture by aligning public policies and fiscal incentives across the entire food chain.
- **Redirect harmful subsidies** and financial mechanisms toward practices that enhance ecosystem functions (soil carbon capture, water retention and purification, biodiversity, circularity) through eco-performance-based payments, true-cost accounting, and the polluter pays principle.
- **Create an enabling framework for the scaling of community-centred agroecology and regenerative farming** by investing in outreach, extension and training and advisory services for farmers, as well as in an expanding network of demonstration sites where farmers can see first hand how such practices can be adapted to their local context.
- **Advance water-centred and circular food systems** that recycle nutrients, energy, and water while restoring ecosystems through regenerative practices and ensuring equitable, participatory water governance for smallholders.
- **Safeguard seed and breed diversity** by funding community seed banks, protecting farmers' rights to save and exchange seed, preserving heritage and locally adapted varieties, and ending subsidies and laws that undermine agro-biodiversity and by supporting civil society and farmer organisations working to conserve, improve, and distribute local genetic resources, ensuring that seed sovereignty remains in the hands of farming communities.

4. Recognise and support farming as a public service and form of ecological stewardship by guaranteeing decent work, fair income, and social protection for farmers.

- **Promote Community-Supported Agriculture and cooperative and community-led initiatives** that share risks, land, and labour;
- **Guarantee the right to live and prosper in rural areas**, ensuring that women, youth, migrants, marginalised groups, and newcomers are represented and supported across all levels of governance.
- **Recognise and support the multifunctional role of farms** as living spaces that sustain biodiversity, culture, care, learning, and community life in rural areas.

5. Make the transition to a regenerative paradigm viable and attractive for all.

- **Create a dedicated Agroecological Transition Fund** to support farmers in shifting toward regenerative, circular, and nature-positive practices, combining transition support and debt relief with training and advisory services, ensuring that the shift is fair, viable, and inclusive.
- **Improve access to land for regenerative farming and rewilding** by providing new financial incentives for interested parties.
- **Strengthen networks of best practices**, peer-to-peer learning, and regional knowledge hubs that connect farmers, researchers, and communities, ensuring that learning and innovation flow horizontally across territories. Ensure that agroecological and community-led food systems are fully recognised and integrated within national Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in every EU Member State.
- **Guarantee the long-term viability of this transition** by providing sustained public advisory services and rewarding practices with the highest environmental and social benefits through fair, performance-based payments and targeted incentives that drive widespread adoption.

6. Develop food, soil, nutrition and ecological literacy through all stages of education, while putting special emphasis on schools and basic education.

- **Reconnect citizens with farming and food production and processing** through community gatherings, farm visits, food labelling, school and community gardens, gardening training, and urban food forests.
- **Invest in community learning spaces** within or in relation to food hubs, cooperatives, and networks that link farmers, consumers, and local communities.
- **Promote literacy of culturally appropriate nutritious food**, valuing traditional diets and regional food heritage.

7. Rewild and re-cultivate our cities.

- **Promote Urban Agroecology to reconnect people with the living systems that sustain them** — making cities places where people, food, water, soil, and biodiversity thrive together.
- **Incentivise communities to transform vacant lots, rooftops, and public spaces** in collaboration with their local governments into productive ecosystems that regenerate soils, cool neighbourhoods, and support pollinators.
- Encourage community gardens, food forests, and biodiversity corridors as everyday spaces of learning, participation, and mental and social well-being — where urban life and ecological cycles are once again intertwined.

8. Shift the innovation and research agenda to drive the just transition in food systems.

- **Redirect research and innovation funding** from yield maximisation and industrial-scale technologies toward diverse knowledge systems and appropriate, place-based solutions.
- **Prioritise nature-based, circular, low-tech, and locally adapted innovations** grounded in traditional and ecological knowledge.
- **Promote the co-creation of knowledge** through social innovation labs, participatory research, and citizen science that connect farmers, researchers, and communities in horizontal, non-siloed exchange.
- **Redesign infrastructure and technology policies** to serve the specific needs of food system transformation, ensuring that public R&I funding supports technologies for smallholders, cooperative models, and territorial resilience rather than industrial intensification.

9. Promote digital democracy and technological sovereignty to empower community-led and ecological food systems.

- **Reorient digital innovation toward the commons**, ensuring open access, transparency, and participatory governance of technology, data, and infrastructure.
- **Develop open-source tools, shared data platforms, and digital commons** that serve smallholders, cooperatives, and local food networks.
- **Invest in appropriate, low-tech, and community-owned logistics and infrastructure** — such as online marketplaces, collective storage and delivery systems, regional food hubs, and community kitchens — to strengthen territorial supply chains and ensure that technology remains accessible, replicable, and in the public domain.

10. Support the creation and recognition of local food councils as participatory governance bodies that drive territorial food strategies and democratise decision-making across the food chain.

- **Enable councils to redistribute value and power** by mediating between producers, processors, traders, and consumers to ensure transparency, fair trading, and pricing that includes all externalities.
- **Map and align cities' food needs with the productive capacity of their bioregions**, coordinating flows of food, nutrients, and knowledge while strengthening urban-rural partnerships between municipalities, cooperatives, and citizen initiatives.
- **Institutionalise community participation** — including farmers, youth, workers, and marginalised groups — and create transparent spaces for dialogue with policymakers, ensuring that public food policies reflect shared priorities and local realities.

11. Prioritise local, ecological, and community-grown food in public institutions by reforming procurement frameworks to make sustainable, territorial sourcing the norm.

- **Amend EU and national procurement rules** to enable preferential purchasing from local, agroecological, cooperative, and community producers for schools, hospitals, and public canteens.
- **Complement these measures** with EU-level guidance and fiscal incentives for municipalities and companies that procure from small local producers, ensuring that public food spending supports both community livelihoods and ecological resilience.
- **Embed procurement reforms within broader local economic frameworks, such as Community Wealth Building**, to strengthen cooperative and community food initiatives, unlock finance mechanisms, and promote shared ownership of food-system assets, linking procurement to local capacity, finance, and ownership structures to make public food systems truly transformative.

12. Recognise food as a human right in EU laws and policies.

- **Guarantee universal access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food**, prioritising vulnerable and low-income groups.
- **Advance food sovereignty** by reclaiming land, water, and seeds as commons, and by reforming land governance to prevent speculation and concentration of ownership.
- **Establish Land Observatories** in all Member States to monitor land ownership, use, and transfers, and to prevent speculative acquisition of agricultural and community assets. Develop a transparent inventory of public and community lands to guide equitable land distribution, prioritising access for smallholders, new and young farmers, and agroecological producers, while promoting commons-based land trusts and cooperative ownership models that safeguard land as a social and ecological commons.
- **Guarantee access to clean water** free of chemical and biological contaminants, a basic requirement to grow healthy food free of harmful pathogens and residues.

13. Recognise food sovereignty as a matter of global justice by ensuring that European policies uphold, rather than undermine, the rights and resilience of food systems in the Global South.

- **Align EU and national frameworks with international instruments such as the Nyéléni Declaration and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).**
- **Promote transnational solidarity** among farmers, citizens, and civil society to advance food sovereignty across North and South.
- **Bridge food democracy** with anti-poverty, migrant justice, and climate justice agendas, ensuring that community-led transitions prioritise women, youth, and marginalised groups in shaping policies, land access, and resource governance.



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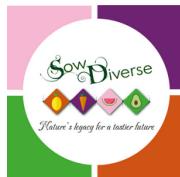
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