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# ECOSOCIAL FOOD POLICIES – PROPOSAL FOR A NEW SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC APPROACH

## HOW TO TRANSFORM THE EU FOOD SYSTEM

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In the run-up to the European elections in 2024, this policy study delves into the essential question of why we need to transform the EU food system and how to do it – adopting an ecosocialist perspective that serves as a basis for a new, progressive, social-democratic and ecological food policy.

The current failure to transform the food system jeopardises human welfare and political stability. Despite its critical importance, the food system is marred by practices that harm the environment, exploit people and deepen social inequalities. The meaningful change announced by politicians with the Farm to Fork Strategy (European Commission 2020) and the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP; European Commission 2023) has yet to materialise. Growing discontent about food policies is exemplified by recent farmer protests that have reverberated through European cities. The response from national politicians to these protests, much like the environmental crisis, has been characterised by short-term concessions, political expediency, fragmentation and superficiality, rather than long-term vision, leadership and comprehensive structural change. The rise of populist parties has further complicated the situation, exploiting anti-environmental sentiment and undermining efforts to promote social justice and sustainability.

While we need to take the fact that certain groups not only feel less heard in our political system, but are less heard, very seriously, we need to develop better truly socially just policies to counter authoritarian populist parties that undermine democratic systems and exacerbate the climate crisis and deny it. Climate and environmental policy and social policy must go hand in hand if a far-reaching sustainability transformation is to succeed. This also requires a closer look at a fairer distribution of power in our social, political and economic systems. Ecosocialism emerges as a crucial framework for addressing the interlinked challenges of environmental degradation, economic pressures and social inequalities in the EU food system. By integrating ecosocial principles into the political discourse, social-democratic parties can offer a comprehensive vision for a more just and sustainable future, appealing both to traditional social-justice bases and to a wider electorate seeking solutions to pressing environmental and social challenges.

In this policy study, we first provide an overview of the problems of the existing industrial food system and political answers to it, especially the Farm to Fork Strategy and the CAP. We then clarify our understanding of ecosocialism, highlighting why ecosocialist policies are crucial for a successful transformation. Finally, we sketch out the key cornerstones of a social-democratic ecosocialist approach to EU food policy, providing policy recommendations and narratives for transformation that focus on bringing social justice and welfare into harmony with environmental considerations. Our key policy recommendations can be summarised as follows:

1) replace area-based CAP subsidies and reward the implementation of ecologically and socially sustainable economic practices;
2) ban the sale of agricultural land to non-farmers;
3) curb the concentration of market power in the food system;
4) improve international cooperation concerning the enforcement of standards of social and environmental sustainability in the food system;
5) implement measures to combat both food poverty and overconsumption, and replace the

goal of “green growth” with the goal of “a good life for all”;

6) set stronger incentives for healthy consumption patterns; and
7) create a permanent, institutionalised dialogue between the various actors in the food system and policymakers, and promote equal access to political arenas.

# 2. THE EU FOOD SYSTEM AND ITS ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

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The EU food system is a complex and interconnected network of a wide range of sectors and industries that play vital roles in the food supply – comprising production, processing, packaging, logistics, distribution, consumption and waste management (Figure 1).

Producing, processing, packaging and distributing food heavily relies on natural resources, especially on access to land, nutrients, water and energy (Bujnicki et al. 2020). The depletion of these resources, which transgresses planetary boundaries and exacerbates the climate crisis, has serious implications for food provisioning systems (Steffen et al. 2015). At the same time, as the climate crisis is intensifying and ecosystem services are declining, the global demand for food is increasing by an estimated 50% by 2050, according to FAO (2014) and the UN, putting an additional burden on food provisioning systems. Strategies to avoid or minimise negative ecological impacts of the food system, according to FAO (2014), must consider the following areas: animal and plant health; biodiversity and ecosystem services; climate change mitigation; the carbon footprint; air quality; water quality; soil quality; land use; and demand side policies, e.g. to decrease

**Figure 1. An overview of the EU food system.**


**Source:** CORDIS 2018.

decrease the demand for animal protein, which drives many of the environmental consequences (Pardey et al. 2014).

Food-system emissions account for about 32-37% of the total greenhouse gas emissions, and thus, exacerbate the problem of global warming, with about 10% of the total greenhouse gas emissions being generated in the agricultural sector (Bujnicki et al. 2020; Recanati et al. 2019). More than 80% of the agricultural greenhouse gas emissions stem from CH4 emissions from enteric fermentation of animals and N2O emissions from soils – however, there are significant differences between EU member states (European Environment Agency 2023). Additional negative environmental impacts arise from water consumption and water pollution, as well as fertiliser use and pesticide use, primarily in the food production process. Although the average concentration of nitrate in EU water bodies is below that mandated by the Water Framework Directive, the water quality in some parts of the EU is negatively affected by nutrients from fertilisers and livestock (Allen et al. 2018). Agriculture both contributes to and faces water risks. Increasing droughts, on one hand, and incidents of heavy rainfall, on the other, lead to reduced crop yields and pose a risk to food security. High water consumption in certain regions of the EU exacerbates the problem of water scarcity (Recanati et al. 2019).

The same applies to ongoing biodiversity loss, which has been driven through the above-explained negative impacts of food production on the environment and which, at the same time, limits the ability of the agricultural sector to adapt to changing climate, and thus, poses another risk to food security (Allen et al. 2018). Three quarters of the genetic diversity of plants have already been lost during the 20th century (Allen et al. 2018). This loss of biodiversity extends beyond plant species to include a decline in the diversity of insects, birds and other wildlife that play crucial roles in maintaining ecosystem balance (Benton et al. 2021; Hoban et al. 2023). Biodiversity loss alone necessitates immediate food-system reforms, including dietary shifts, habitat preservation and nature-friendly farming (Benton et al. 2021). Much less data on environmental damage exists for non-agricultural sectors of the food system, namely, food processing, distribution, consumption and associated industries. The environmental impacts linked to these sectors primarily encompass increased energy use and greenhouse gas emissions due to energy-intensive operations and long-distance transport; resource consumption, including energy and water; generation of food waste and packaging materials contributing to pollution; and air and water pollution from industrial processing and transportation (Jurgilevich et al. 2016; Vermeulen et al. 2020; Hirth et al. 2021).

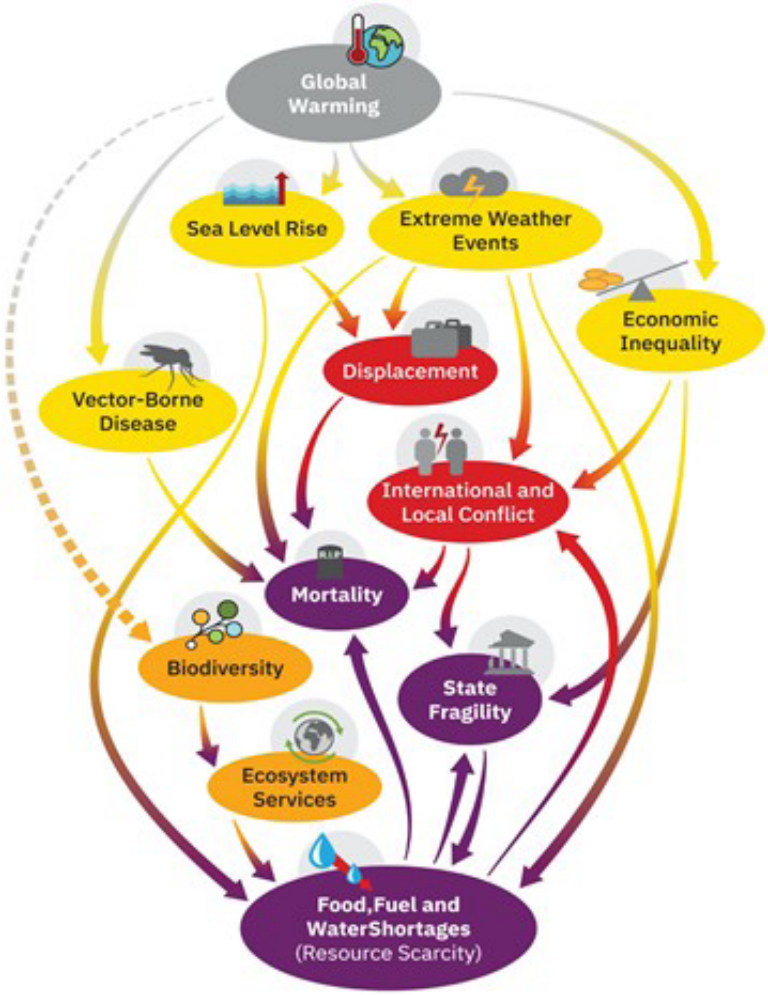
The already mentioned threats to food security are one of the many negative social consequences of an environmentally unsustainable food system. An unsustainable food system also harbours risks concerning the affordability and equitable distribution of food and the health of consumers. Consumer prices for food in the EU increased by 35.3% between 2006 and 2021. More than one quarter (22.4 %) of all people in Bulgaria experienced food poverty in 2021 (meaning that they could not afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every second day), with the next highest share in Romania (19.2 %) (Eurostat 2022). Hungary, Slovakia, Greece and Germany also recorded double-digit shares in 2020. It is young and older people in particular who have been affected by food poverty (Eurostat 2022). On the other end of the spectrum, people who can afford it consume amounts of animal proteins, including meat and dairy, that are beyond optimal thresholds (De Schutter 2019). All in all, nutrition-related diseases and public health costs are increasing (Recanati et al. 2019).

At the same time, with rising consumer prices, there has been a real fall in agricultural factor income per annual work unit in many EU member states (comparing 2006 with 2021), a rapid increase in input prices for the EU's agricultural industry, comprising prices for fertilisers, energy, lubricants and land, and a relatively strong decline in farms (37% between 2005 and 2020) that has mainly affected small farms (with less than 5.0 hectares) (Recanati et al. 2019). Already before these events, the level of agricultural income was generally lower

than the average income in the whole economy (with women earning even less than men, on average, in this sector as well) (Bujnicki et al. 2020; EPRS 2020). The vulnerability of many food producers is not only visible in economic figures, but also by looking at their working conditions. Eurostat (2022) reports that the average working hours in agriculture are longer than typical, and there are higher incidents of work-related health problems among the agriculture workforce in 18 of the 23 EU member states for which data are available. In addition, the average age of the majority-male farming population is relatively high, while the incentives and opportunities for young people to enter farming are relatively low (Recanati et al. 2019; EPRS 2020). Precarious working conditions are also prevalent in other sectors of the food system, like food processing and the food and beverage service activities sector. Fixed-term contracts or even employment without a formal contract, atypical working hours (e.g., shift or weekend work), and low scores on indicators that measure the quality of working hours and employment prospects all play a role here (Eurofund 2012 and Lenaerts et al. 2020).

It becomes clear that the different social and environmental systems are interrelated and that the interconnected and cascading global threats to human welfare and food security are closely linked with the impacts of climate change (Kemp et al. 2022). A causal diagram (Figure 2) illustrates

**Figure 2. Cascading global climate failure.**




**Source:** Kemp et al. 2022, p. 7.

these relationships and how rising temperatures can lead to various risks and vulnerabilities, with potential consequences for health, welfare and food systems. The likelihood of "climate-triggered food price shocks" is expected to increase with higher temperatures, with potentially deadly effects on human welfare. The interconnected nature of "food and transport distribution systems" is also identified as a source of fragility, as networks are relatively homogeneous and may be more susceptible to disruptions, posing serious threats to the stability of these systems. Indirect stresses, including economic damage, loss of land, and water and food insecurity, are interlinked. The cumulative effect of these stresses may lead to system-wide synchronous failures. The probability of multiple "breadbasket failures" increases with temperature rises. And "climate-triggered food price shocks" are likely to be the deadliest for the most vulnerable members of society, both locally and globally (Kemp et al. 2022).

# 3. SHORTCOMINGS OF MAINSTREAM FOOD POLICIES: LOOKING BELOW THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

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The urgency for policymakers to respond to the sustainability crisis and the socio-ecological problems of the food system described in the previous section increases dramatically. The flagship of the EU food system policy is the Farm to Fork Strategy, launched in 2020. The strategy is closely bound to the European Green Deal and aims at making the EU food system fair, healthy and environmentally friendly, while strengthening its resilience and ensuring food security (Moschitz et al. 2021). According to Schebesta and Candel (2020), the introduction of the Farm to Fork Strategy is the first time in the history of EU food law that the EU has addressed food sustainability in a comprehensive manner, from primary production to the consumer. With its four clusters – sustainable food production, sustainable food processing and distribution, sustainable food consumption, and food loss and waste prevention – the Farm to Fork Strategy has an agenda-setting function (Schebesta and Candel 2020).

Although the Farm to Fork Strategy formulates ambitious political guidelines, the success of the strategy depends on the implementation of concrete action plans and legal regulations. This brings us to the first problem: the development of concrete measures to implement the Farm to Fork Strategy has been progressing very slowly. For example, the promised legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems (FSFS), one of the legislative building blocks that puts the non-binding Farm to Fork Strategy into practice, has still not been implemented yet and is also missing from the European Commission's 2024 work programme (WWF 2023; Dahm 2023). There is no clarity on the timeline of the remaining pieces of legislation for the Farm to Fork Strategy (Fortuna 2023).

Clarity is not only missing in terms of the implementation of formulated goals, but also in terms of the formulation of some of the goals. In an interview with Laura Dahm from Euractiv, Marco Springman, senior researcher at Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute, criticises that a shift towards sustainable and healthy dietary patterns is only included as a qualitative target, while production goals are spelled out quantitatively so that they can be assessed at the member-state level. This lack of clarity goes hand in hand with the Farm to Fork Strategy's tendency to focus on technical innovations, while largely ignoring social and structural aspects of the transformation of the food system (Moschitz et al. 2021).

In addition to technological innovations, the Farm to Fork Strategy proposes the substitution and reduction of input factors in agricultural production, in particular synthetic pesticides, fertilizers and antibiotics. The Slow Food movement defends the Farm to Fork Strategy against criticisms concerning this goal and emphasises that a reduction in the input factors mentioned would relieve farmers financially, and thus, support them in the transformation to sustainable agriculture (Slow Food 2021). Apart from the environmental benefits that come along with a reduction of pesticides, fertilizers and antibiotics, however, the effect of this measure in terms of lowering financial burdens for farmers remains more than questionable, as long as a systemic change is not initiated at the same time, which also includes a more equal distribution of market power among the various players in the food system and promotes fair remuneration for farmers (Moschitz et al. 2021). It is far too short-sighted to look at certain actors in the food system in isolation and to ignore dependencies and power relationships,

as well as the higher costs of environmentally sound agricultural production. According to Moschitz et al. (2021), the internalisation of costs for ecologically and socially sustainable production and the internalisation of external costs concerning unhealthy food consumption patterns is overall mentioned only very marginally in the Farm to Fork Strategy.

Significant financial support for farmers is provided through another political programme, the CAP, one of the world's largest agricultural policies, which has an enormous influence on agricultural practices, environmental conservation efforts and socioeconomic dynamics within the EU and worldwide. The CAP today takes up almost one third of the total EU budget, or more precisely, it comprises a budget of €307 billion in the current five-year support scheme for farmers that started in 2023. Since the establishment of the CAP in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, it has undergone several reforms, most recently, in response to the Farm to Fork Strategy (Slow Food 2021). While the CAP initially focused on agricultural productivity, market stability and income goals, some social and environmental concerns have been incorporated into the CAP after its latest reform (Recanati et al. 2018; Pe'er et al. 2019). For example, the new CAP has introduced eco-schemes aimed at incentivising farmers to adopt agroecological practices, and there is also an emphasis on ensuring fairer distribution of payments, more support for smaller farms and rural development promotion (Pe'er et al. 2019). Farmers who also store carbon are being paid extra for their yield, and 10% of direct payments are planned to be reallocated to smaller farms. However, the budget for promoting environmentally friendly measures and supporting small businesses and rural development is comparatively low overall.

Despite the introduction of sustainability considerations into the CAP, a look at the details of the measures and payment schemes associated with the CAP and their effects reveals several problems too, some of which are similar to the Farm to Form Strategy. A comprehensive and coherent understanding of what a "sustainable food system" means in detail seems to be vague in both the Farm to Fork Strategy and the CAP. EU food policies still ignore the complexity of interdependencies between humans and nature and the multidimensionality of sustainability, which means the deeply interwoven ecological, social and economic effects of the current food system. The consideration of sustainability concerning the food system remains very fragmented and appears more as an add-on and "nice thing to have", rather than a coherent, necessary benchmark against which the entire food system and its structures are thought through. This becomes clear, for example, in the distinction between ecological and social policies in the CAP and in how the payments made to farmers by the new CAP are designed. As mentioned before, instead of systematically factoring in the ecological and social costs of food production and creating structures to ensure that neither the environment nor farmers and other disadvantaged groups are left to bear these costs, farmers only receive additional payments if they voluntarily fulfil certain ecoschemes.

On top of that, the majority of CAP payments are still area based, which promotes an increase in social and economic inequalities. Deutschlandfunk reported in 2021 that 20% of agricultural businesses alone received around 80% of the EU funding calculated according to the area farmed (Deutschlandfunk 2021). Farmers, who only cultivate a small amount of land or farmers who have to rent large amounts of land, hardly benefit from the payments because they only receive small payments, or the additional income is added directly to the rental prices. Yet, those who own a lot of land (including those who rent out their land) benefit the most. At the same time, the count of farms (and this holds true for other stakeholders of the food system like food and beverage processors, and food and beverage trade and serving enterprises) is dominated by small and micro-enterprises. Most farms in the EU are family farms (94.8% in 2020), with 63.8% of all farms being less than five hectares in size, 11.4% having 30 hectares or more, and only 3.6% having 100 hectares or more (Eurostat 2022). There are many semi-subsistence farms among the smaller ones, and it is the smallest farms that have been affected most by the decline in farm numbers in recent years. These numbers already indicate a very unequal distribution

of land that tends to be further exacerbated by the development that land has increasingly become a financial investment, which is particularly attractive for wealthy players, who otherwise have nothing to do with food production.

The fragmentation of food policies has further negative effects, as it also leads to the individualisation of responsibility and an isolated focus on individual groups of actors in the food system whose heterogeneity and dependencies on other stakeholder groups are, in turn, not sufficiently considered. We have already addressed this problem concerning the Farm to Fork Strategy: despite the complex interrelations and vulnerabilities described in Section 2, the responsibility of food producers often takes centre stage in the debate on a more sustainable food system, and food producers are the main target of existing environmental policies. This makes sense, as, for example, a large proportion of greenhouse gas emissions are generated in food production. However, this narrow focus leads to inefficient and ineffective policies because it fails to capture the complexity of involved systems and neglects the impacts of (market) power distribution, leading to pressure being exerted on individual farmers (of which, as explained above, the majority run small farms) in particular. The "weak position" of many food producers is currently "a crucial bottleneck in the transition to a sustainable food system" (Bujnicki et al. 2020: 9).

This bottleneck has been vividly demonstrated by the recent farmers' protests across the EU (Di Mambro 2024). Farmers have expressed their frustration over escalating environmental demands, rising costs, inefficient policies and a perceived lack of societal appreciation. Concerns about fuel taxes, cheap imports and regulatory burdens, including environmental initiatives, have exacerbated tensions, with some farmers seeing these policies as additional bureaucratic hurdles imposed from above. The discontent has been capitalised on by populist parties, further complicating the situation: "the farmers' furore is playing into the hands of populists such as France's Marine Le Pen, Germany's Alice Weidel and Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders, who thrive on grassroots grumbling against the metropolitan elites" (Taylor 2024). In response to the protests, politicians again solely concentrate on short-term fixes for farmers stuck in a flawed industrial agricultural system, which worsens the problems we are confronting and only perpetuates a cycle of environmental damage, creating social inequality and causing economic instability. Well-intentioned initiatives, such as the "Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture" launched by Ursula von der Leyen last autumn, are not permanent. After just six months, this dialogue process is set to end in summer 2024. Flawed short-termism and narrow foci, instead of long-term sustainability and the consideration of complex problems and wider contexts, only postpone essential action and worsen the severity of the challenges we face.

Aside from a continuously narrowed focus on the group of farmers, political debates on promoting a sustainable food system assign responsibility to individual consumers. Given the enormous scope of the necessary sustainability transformation and challenges, such as food poverty, which is faced by socio-economically disadvantaged people in particular, it is equally unhelpful to individualise responsibility and shift it onto consumers. The vision of the responsible consumer, who is prepared to pay more for healthier and environmentally friendly choices of food, eventually pressuring food producers to switch production strategies is overly simplified. It fails to consider the circumstances of different social groups and their sometimes limited abilities to associate with such lifestyle choices (Dubisson-Quellier and Gojard 2016). It also ignores the fact that consumers often have limited knowledge of production processes and limited power to change them in reality. Sustainable food products must not become luxury goods that are "nice to have" and only affordable for wealthier groups. At the same time, limiting the overconsumption of more affluent social groups, which runs counter to prevailing neoliberal ideals, has been largely dropped from the political agenda (Fuchs and Lorek 2005), although this could be very effective at bringing about positive environmental change. This concerns, for example, high consumption rates of meat products and non-regional, climate-damaging “superfoods”.

The individualisation of responsibility not only affects food consumption. In the case of food waste, policies rely on appealing to the personal sense of responsibility of individual consumers and disregard the structural effects of trade norms or the growth of the food supply as reasons for increasing waste (Gumbert, in an interview with Haack 2020). Approaches that one-sidedly assign responsibility to individuals thus depoliticise the problem, and conceal unsustainable structural dynamics and corresponding needs for systemic change beyond individual consumer choices.

# 4. BUILDING ECOSOCIAL ALTERNATIVES – AND A PLACE FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

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It is clear from the overview of its social and ecological impacts that the current EU food system is not sustainable or futureproof and that current food policies fail to bring about the comprehensive transformation that we need. Instead, current policies continue to promote existing inequalities and allow the exploitation of vulnerable groups and the environment. Progressive forces and social democrats need to focus on food policies that prioritise and connect both social justice and environmental sustainability and consider the different food sectors and their interrelatedness and power relations. This is the only way we can take the wind out of the sails of right-wing populist movements that many support because they don't feel heard in the current political system – a system tipped in favour of the wealthy – and gain societal support and political majorities for an effective socio-ecological transformation.

This section explains in more detail why we need an ecosocialist approach to achieve this goal. We draw on ecosocialist thought to advocate for a deep transformation of the current food system to ensure affordable, healthy food production; good working conditions and reduced environmental impacts. Ecosocial policies not only align with the core principles of social democracy, emphasising social equity, well-being, and sustainability, but also address urgent environmental challenges and combat climate change to protect the planet for future generations. By championing ecosocial policies, social democrats can offer a comprehensive vision for a more just and sustainable future, appealing to both their traditional social justice base and a broader electorate seeking solutions to the pressing ecological and social challenges of our time.

## 4.1 Ecosocialism: Combining environmental sustainability and social justice

The concept of ecosocialism provides a potential answer to address ecological and economic challenges in the food system, and an integration of ecosocialist principles is urgently needed within social-democratic politics to ensure a successful transformation towards a sustainable path, ensuring social welfare, while also taking into account ecological sustainability.

Ecosocialism combines socialist ideals of social equity, public ownership and collective decision-making, with a strong emphasis on environmental responsibility and ecological sustainability, working to hold governments and corporations accountable for their environmental and social impacts. It advocates for a more democratically controlled and ecologically responsible economic system. In ecosocialist thought, a central focus is placed on addressing environmental crises, such as climate change, resource depletion and biodiversity loss, together with social outcomes. It seeks to create economic and agricultural systems that coexist harmoniously with nature. For that, some ecosocialists promote a transition from a growth-driven economic model to one that prioritises the needs of people and the environment over endless expansion for the sake of profit. This approach challenges the traditional pursuit of unlimited economic growth. Moreover, ecosocialists advocate for an environmentally and socially equitable society. Ecosocialism also emphasises the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, addressing the disproportionate impacts

of environmental degradation on marginalised communities, both locally and globally. It works towards a more equitable society, aiming to reduce wealth and income disparities which drives the environmental crises. Thus it aims to ensure access to basic necessities for all, including food, healthcare and education. Ecosocialism furthermore emphasises the importance of a "just transition" to protect workers in carbon-intensive industries as economies shift towards sustainability, and as a way to gain political trust and legitimacy for change.

Politically, the most central question of ecosocialism is not only how to fight the myth of an external nature, but also to demonstrate how it is the same dynamics that exploit labour and nature. The success and popularity of Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything* (2014) demonstrates the potential of mainstreaming ecosocialist thought. However, ecosocial principles are not new. Istvan Mészáros analysed the precarious relationship between production and nature in 1971, one year before the publication of *Limits to Growth*. Mászáros warned of the effects of unregulated relations of production causing increasing alienation between society and nature, eventually ushering its collapse. Although the notion of planetary boundaries was not yet present in Mészáros' early work, he incorporated "absolute limits" later on, highlighting the urgency of the matter (1995). Paul Burkett's *Marx and Nature* (1999) and John Bellamy Foster's *Marx' Ecology* (2000), are further academic milestones in ecosocialist thought, and contributed significantly to the advancement of the theoretical understanding of ecology. Since then, researchers from a variety of disciplines have adopted notions from the ecosocialist tradition, such as ecofeminism (Salleh 1997), climate change (Weston 2013, Foster and Clark 2004, and Clark and York 2005), ecological imperialism (Foster and Clark 2004) or marine ecology (Longo et al. 2015).

To achieve political support for the concept and to ensure its practical relevance to marginalised groups, it has to become integrated more strongly into social politics. Since the concept of ecosocialism has predominantly existed in an academic audience, it yet remains underappreciated in policy discourses. Perhaps, even though academic definitions are clear, another problem is that ecosocialism means different things to different people, and that in political contexts, politicians and policymakers in many countries in Europe wish to avoid using the term "socialist" or "ecosocialist".

We however advocate for the use of the term ecosocialist against the backdrop of the escalating climate crisis precisely as setting a new tone for policy. That is why we will define the concept as ecosocial politics from a social-democratic standpoint.

Academic conceptions can act as sources of inspiration for carving out an ecosocial strategy, because they expose the contradictions between ecology and economy. Building an ecosocial framework on hope, and not on fear (Boucher et al. 2003), we intend to advocate for a social movement able to strive for a just transition.

## 4.2 Ecosocial food policy guidelines

In the discussion of ecosocial strategies, the Declaration of Belem (Angus et al. 2009) specifically refers to food policies, proposing radical transformation of "food production and distribution, by defending local food sovereignty as far as this is possible, eliminating polluting industrial agribusinesses, creating sustainable agro-ecosystems and working actively to renew soil fertility". To integrate the ecosocial framework into the reformist tradition of social democracy, we need to formulate some strategic avenues for achieving a just transition. As such, we argue that it needs a social-democratic strategy that builds on the principles of social justice, participation and solidarity. Ecosocial food policy rests on a deeper consideration of systems and connections, keeping the big picture and the interrelation of different aspects of the food system – in its connection to the environment, society, labour and human health – in mind (Helne and Salonen 2016).

An ecosocialist food policy framework is intended to especially support those who are under pressure due to the unequal distribution of market power and means of production, like farmland, and to promote

sustainable production at the same time. Ecosocial policies should help distribute the benefits and burdens of sustainable forms of business and internalise environmental and social costs of food production, food processing, retail and waste management. Sustainability standards should be strengthened throughout the whole supply chain. Instead of the logic of a voluntary "add on", we need to fundamentally rethink the structures of the food system based on sustainability principles, namely, ecological and social principles. However, such standards also need to be introduced on the consumption side. This means, above all, that we must find ways to combat both food poverty among disadvantaged groups and the overconsumption of more affluent groups. So far, both have been placed far too heavily on the responsibility of individual consumers and, in terms of combating food poverty, on civil society organisations. Political action is needed here. Such food policies should furthermore promote healthy diets. In our view, concrete steps to achieve these goals must include the following actions:

1) **Replace area-based CAP subsidies and reward the implementation of ecologically and socially sustainable economic practices:** Subsidies calculated by area still favour a small number of farms with large landholdings and landlords, including companies that use the leasing of land as a lucrative financial investment and constantly increase lease prices. Farmers with little land of their own are still under pressure. Area-based subsidies exacerbate inequalities and make sustainable farming more difficult, rather than achieving the opposite, and should therefore be gradually abolished. In the long term, ecologically and socially sustainable farming practices must be fully priced in, and farmers must be paid appropriately for their services. On the way there, subsidies should be awarded based on performance. This means that farmers should be supported through subsidies for the implementation of ecologically and socially sustainable forms of farming.

2) **Ban the sale of agricultural land to non-farmers:** Rental prices have continued to rise in recent years, and private investors or companies that buy farmland as a financial investment are forcing farmers out of the land market because farmers are often unable to keep up with the offer prices. This puts farmers under enormous pressure and jeopardises food security in the long term. Agricultural land should be used to produce affordable food and not be available as a lucrative financial investment for investors. We therefore advocate that private investors or companies that otherwise have nothing to do with agriculture should not be allowed to buy agricultural land.

3) **Curb the concentration of market power in the food system:** The sale of agricultural products at fair prices is made more difficult by the fact that a few large supermarket chains can dictate prices. Market power in the production of agricultural inputs, such as the production of seeds and pesticides, is also concentrated in the hands of a few large players. We thus need to implement effective policies that prevent individual corporations from amassing too much market power. These policies could include measures such as effective anti-trust regulations, market diversification strategies, and support for local and smaller companies as well as for alternative business models.

4) **Improve international cooperation concerning the enforcement of standards for social and environmental sustainability in the food system:** Local, regional, national or EU-wide efforts for a sustainable food system must not be corrupted by the import of unsustainably produced products from outside the EU. At the same time, the externalisation of environmental or social costs for the production and processing of food in the EU, and thus, harming the environment and people outside the EU, should be prevented, and thus, harm the environment and people outside the EU. We thus need serious efforts and long-term, institutionally secured political initiatives beyond the EU to enforce ecological and social standards for the production and processing of food. In addition to ecological criteria, this also concerns international cooperation on

labour and social-justice issues within the food system through partnerships, agreements and multilateral initiatives, advocating for fair trade practices and ethical sourcing standards that ensure fair wages and ethical treatment for farmers and workers throughout the food supply chain.

5) **Implement measures to combat both food poverty and overconsumption and replace the goal of "green growth" with the goal of "a good life for all":** The neoliberal narrative of the possibility of green growth is an illusion. Planetary boundaries do not allow for an unlimited increase in the consumption of resources. The idea of unlimited growth has also contributed to exacerbating social inequalities within and between nations. These realisations seem almost banal in scientific circles but are still a politically taboo subject. We will not overcome the climate crisis if we only focus on *efficiency* gains and not *sufficiency* – if we do not limit consumption at the same time. We are used to being able to consume any form of fruit or vegetable at any time at the expense of the environment and future generations, and meat consumption in industrialised nations has continued to grow together with increasing prosperity. This growth in the food supply is also partially responsible for exacerbating the problem of food waste. At the same time, there are relatively large groups in many countries, who, as a result of the growing social gap and a lack of state support, cannot afford the essentials and suffer from food poverty (see Section 2). As states are increasingly failing to fulfil their responsibilities, increasing numbers of civil society organisations, such as food banks, are stepping in to ensure adequate nutrition and to alleviate people's suffering. Consumption corridors (Fuchs and Lorek 2005) or per capita CO2 budgets would help curb overconsumption and make the problem of food poverty visible. The introduction of appropriate measures or corresponding calculations that break down which supplies are necessary for a good life and which consumption patterns are not ecologically sustainable would be an important step towards climate justice. Of course, further political measures are needed to support and ensure compliance with such consumption corridors and CO2 budgets and the fair distribution of consumption opportunities.

6) **Set stronger incentives for healthy consumption patterns:** From a human welfare and medical point of view and given the limited resources of healthcare systems, stronger measures would be needed to counter the power of Big Food in pushing unhealthy "foodlike substances". Stronger frameworks are needed that enable citizens to live more healthfully. Such measures could include tax increases on highly processed, high-sugar and high-fat foods, with the revenues used for subsidised or free healthful foods (especially in schools and kindergartens) as well as combating food poverty and food deserts. Measures could also include regulating or banning advertisements for unhealthy foods, much like advertisements for smoking have been regulated. Positive incentives, such as subsidies or tax-breaks for the consumption of healthy, unprocessed foods, and ensuring access to healthy food are key to guaranteeing that these measures do not lead to regressive effects on the poorest or marginalised. Strengthening education in the area of nutrition, especially for children and young people would be another important step in this direction. Appropriate measures may also result in synergies in connection with the reduction of resource consumption and food waste.

7) **Create a permanent, institutionalised dialogue between the various actors in the food system and policymakers and promote equal access to political arenas:** For a relationship of trust and collaboration to grow between the actors in the food system, including consumers and political decisionmakers, we not only need more dialogue but also a more *inclusive* dialogue. Traditional forms of political influence, for example, through the activities of associations, tend to favour financially stronger and well-organised groups. And even more innovative instruments of participation, such as stakeholder or citizen

dialogues, have not yet helped to solve the problem of unequal participation. Furthermore, they are often not designed for the long term and have little influence on political processes. Frustration over declining and unequal opportunities to exert democratic influence on politics is currently driving many people into the arms of authoritarian-populist movements, which, in turn, further damage democratic structures and structures of international cooperation. We therefore advocate the creation of inclusive, permanent spaces for dialogue and participation and more transparency about opportunities and practices of political influence. This also includes greater disclosure of lobbyist influence, especially the influence of Big Food. How levers for the sustainable production, processing, distribution and consumption of food can be designed and what support stakeholders need to carry the transformation must be developed collaboratively. It is a necessary step towards an ecosocial food system to ensure that policies and initiatives consider the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders, particularly those most affected by environmental degradation and social inequities.

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