

Reply to the public consultation on the roadmap for Farm to Fork Strategy

Water Europe (WE) is the voice and promoter of water-related innovation and RTD in Europe. WE is a membership-based multi-stakeholder organisation representing over 200 members from academia, technology providers, water users, water service providers, civil society, and public authorities. WE activities and positions are guided by its Water Vision “The Value of Water: Towards a Future-Proof European Water-Smart Society”.

In its Water Vision, Water Europe has set out a blueprint for a society in which the true value of water is recognised and realised, and all available water sources are managed in such a way that water scarcity and pollution of water are avoided, water and resource loops are largely closed to foster a circular economy and optimal resource efficiency, while the water system is resilient against the impact of climate change events.

Diffuse agricultural pollution poses significant pressure on 38% of the EU water bodies. Mitigate extreme climate change and reduce over-abstraction of water are also key priorities to secure healthy and affordable food in Europe. Despite a first step with the water reuse regulation for agricultural irrigation, Europe must go further to create structural alternative to water overconsumption and the discharge of nutrients to water bodies.

Therefore, WE replied to the public consultation to fully integrate water-related challenges which need to be tackled to provide a nutritious, safe and affordable food with this new strategy on sustainable food along the whole value chain:

Water Europe welcomes this initiative of the European commission to contribute to the EU Green Deal towards a climate neutral EU. Agricultural production both contributes to climate change and is affected by climate change. In recent years, the sector has been increasingly affected by extreme weather events, leading to reduced yields (EEA, 2017). The use of nitrogen-based fertilisers in agriculture is a primary cause of diffuse pollution, one of the main environmental pressures from agriculture and on water, which is a key element in the full agri-food production cycle. Water pollution from agriculture and the extreme climate events such as floods and droughts affect both water and food production security and are the main threats for our future agriculture. Moreover, the strong connections with the other plans and strategies of the UE demonstrates the importance of considering water as a common denominator to make the Green Deal successful and cope with global water scarcity and crisis.

In a scenario that forecast an increasing and unsustainable demand for water in the next decades, Water Europe supports the importance to optimise the use of water in the agriculture by:

- ◆ drastically reduce the water pollution
- ◆ rationalise and reduce the use of freshwater and
- ◆ boost water recycling/reuse/cascading/symbiosis and promote synergies between the rural, urban and industrial areas to effectively turn competition in a rationale and sustainable collaboration for utilisation of our water resources.

For example, an optimal irrigation strategy through a digitalisation of our agriculture is needed to provide nutritious, affordable and safe food. (WE SIRA page 20 and 29)

Moreover, the resilience of our agriculture against droughts and floods needs investments and an evolution of our agriculture. The Farm to Fork strategy should encourage investments in hybrid-grey infrastructures, nature-based solutions and diffuse digitalisation of the water systems. Through an inclusive dialogue to adapt and improve the water governance, infrastructure and systems to climate change and create a systemic management and decision-making process for resilience (SIRA page 32-35).

Therefore, Water Europe supports the creation of rural Water oriented Living Labs to create a Water Smart Society, in which the true value of water is recognised and realised, and all available water sources are managed in such a way that water scarcity and pollution of groundwater are avoided, by applying the technological and non-technological innovations developed in line with the Farm to Fork strategy and Green Deal targets. The main characteristics are (SIRA page 42-44):

- ◆ targeted at reducing the impact of agriculture on over-abstraction of ground water and overuse of surface water,
- ◆ using advanced sensor systems and monitoring technologies, including Earth observation, to obtain detailed and real-time insights in water use,
- ◆ environmental regulations and standards, eg. For controlling agro-chemical use,
- ◆ novel green-agricultural technologies to reduce water use for crop production,
- ◆ application of new economic instruments towards more efficient use of water;
- ◆ integration of agriculture, industry, nature representatives into novel participatory governance models,
- ◆ Spatial integrated planning including buffering of water.

To deepen the above cited topics, please read our [Vision and SIRA](#).

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