



# European Food Legislation and Policy Developments Affecting Consumers

Policy Dialogue on Sustainable Food Consumption · Budapest, 29–30 Sept 2026

Paola Plaku · Fair Trade Advocacy Office

# Before we get to policy

- **Fair Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO)**, speaks up for the Fair Trade movement and trade justice in Brussels, to improve the lives of producers and workers in the Global South.
- We're one of the partners in **CUES**, **Consumers' Understanding of Eating Sustainably**
- co-authored the EU policy mapping on policies related to sustainable food consumption
- This is one of **four** policy dialogues CUES runs across Europe



# What we looked at

Ten years of EU food policy (2015–2025), what actually became law, and what didn't.

**1,500+**

documents screened

**101**

relevant policies

**78**

passed into law

**23**

proposed but never passed

# Six baskets of policy

## Labelling

**17 passed · 5 didn't**

Organic labels, origin labels, greenwashing rules, informs, doesn't push choice.

## Monitoring

**14 passed · 7 didn't**

Food safety, organic certification.

## Agroecological practices

**9 passed · 10 didn't**

Farm to Fork, Green Deal, Biodiversity Strategy, most ambition, least delivery.

## Citizens' initiatives

**7 passed · 0 didn't**

Symbolic registration, none binding.

## Food environments

**0 passed · 1 didn't**

Schools, canteens, procurement, essentially empty.

## Health claims

**31 passed**

Biggest basket, does not touch other sustainability dimensions.

# 2014–2019 — Juncker Commission

**The mood: “keep it simple” — pre-Green Deal, priority on cutting red tape, not raising ambition.**

## Key policies

- Circular Economy Action Plan (waste & packaging targets)
- EU Platform on Food Loss and Waste (monitoring, not binding rules)
- Organic Regulation reform (stronger certification & labelling)
- EU School Scheme (small, narrow food-environment intervention)

## What it meant for consumers

Better labels, slightly more information, but very little changed about what was actually on the shelf, what it cost, or what was served in a school canteen.

# 2019–2024 — von der Leyen I

**The mood: “change everything” — the Green Deal becomes the top priority; production and consumption treated as one system.**

## Key policies

- Farm to Fork Strategy (pesticide & organic-farming targets)
- Proposed Sustainable Food Systems Framework — never adopted
- Sustainable food labelling initiative — proposed
- EU-wide food-waste-reduction targets

## What it meant for consumers

The most ambitious period we found. If delivered: more organic food at lower prices, less pesticide residue, sustainable options as the default. But war in Ukraine, food-price inflation and farmer protests got in the way, so very little of it actually reached consumers.

# 2024–2029 — von der Leyen II (today)

**The mood: “simplify again” — food security and cost-of-living concerns swing the pendulum back.**

## Key policies

- Vision for Agriculture and Food replaces Farm to Fork
- Omnibus simplification packages underway
- Organic Regulation being simplified, not strengthened
- Public Procurement Directives reopened for revision — live now

## What it meant for consumers

Less pressure right now on producers and retailers to change what they offer. The one live exception: the Public Procurement Directives, a real, current opportunity to change what ends up on a plate in a school or hospital.

# So, what do we take from this?

- Juncker gave consumers more information.
- Von der Leyen I aimed for real change — and mostly didn't deliver it.
- Von der Leyen II has, for now, paused that ambition.

**EU food policy has consistently set ambitious goals — and consistently struggled to turn them into anything binding.**

# What's working, and what are the gaps?

## WORKING WELL

- Labelling & monitoring codes have delivered real, enforceable rules across all three Commissions.
- Organic certification, geographical indications, food safety standards

## THE GAP

- Food environments ( schools, canteens, procurement) has essentially no adopted policy across any of the three periods.
- A structural blind spot, not a temporary oversight.

### From our own CUES research :

People report fairly positive attitudes toward sustainable food (3.88/5), but actual consumption is markedly lower (2.43/5). Labelling reaches opinions. It doesn't reach shopping baskets.

# What stops policy landing in practice?

- **The clearer pattern: the more a proposal touches food environments directly, the less likely it survived.**
- **Public procurement: mandatory sustainability criteria promised for 2023, never proposed. No agreed EU definition of “sustainable food”; procurement touches national competence directly.**
- **The 2014 Public Procurement Directives are being reopened right now, the Commission’s own evaluation found they improved transparency, but failed on flexibility and mainstreaming sustainability.**

## **Our own research explains part of why:**

it’s the perception of sustainable food as expensive, not the actual price, that stops people buying it. And moralistic messaging makes people push back, not comply.

**Hungary’s 2011 Public Health Product Tax — cited in our own report as a model. France has since done something similar. Neither waited for Brussels.**

# What would make the biggest difference?

## 1. Resolve the missing definition

of “sustainable food”, the recurring blocker behind procurement, labelling, and other stalled files.

## 2. Shift effort to food environments

away from labelling, toward procurement criteria and school meal standards, empty across three Commissions.

### The definition already exists in the research

- CUES reviewed 84 existing definitions and proposed an integrated one, covering environmental integrity, public health, fair livelihoods, cultural appropriateness, food waste, biodiversity and animal welfare, at individual and system level.
- What’s missing isn’t the thinking. It’s turning it into something EU law can use.

## Q4 — Who needs to work together?

### The Commission

Needs national & regional evidence to design implementable criteria — now, while procurement directives are open.

### National ministries

Keep pushing proven domestic tools, Hungary's tax as a model for the rest of Europe, not a footnote.

### NGOs + Projects

Sit in between — translating a Hungarian school canteen's experience into evidence Brussels can use.

# To close: one challenge, one recommendation

## The challenge

Across three very different Commissions, one thing hasn't changed, the EU has built strong tools for telling consumers what to choose, and almost none for shaping what there is to choose from.

## The recommendation

Use today, and use the timing. The procurement directives are open right now. Carry what's discussed here directly into that live consultation, it needs exactly the evidence sitting in this room.



# Thank you

Köszönöm szépen

Paola Plaku  
Fair Trade Advocacy Office · CUES