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# Health 2020: Agriculture and health through food safety and nutrition

## Synergy between sectors: working together for better agriculture and health outcomes

### Summary

The Health 2020 policy framework has been adopted by all Member States of the WHO European Region in order to address Europe's great social and health challenges, calling upon the health sector to reach out to, and work with, all the various sectors and parties in the continuous work of improving people's health and well-being. Today, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases and their behavioural risk factors, which include unhealthy diets, overweight and obesity, account for the most preventable diseases and death in the European Region. We are also facing an emergence of new pathogens and the re-emergence of infectious

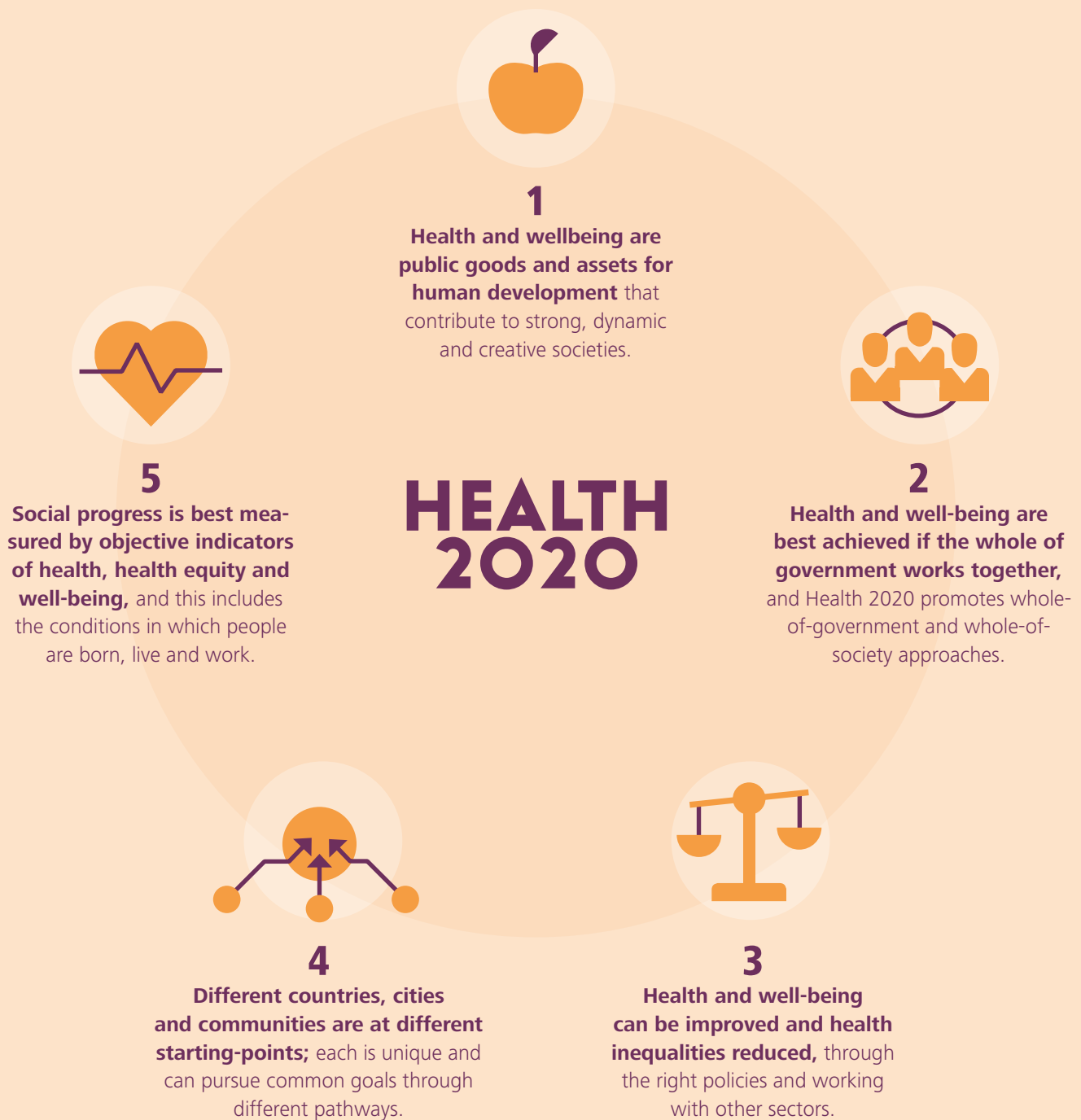
diseases, including antimicrobial resistance (AMR). By working together, the health and agriculture sectors can ensure policy coherence and deliver a safe and nutritious food supply that not only contributes to good health and well-being but also fosters healthy communities and economies.

The agriculture sector can help to create healthier people and communities through:

- working together with the health sector and other areas of government to ensure that safe and nutritious foods are available and affordable for all;
- promoting healthy sustainable rural communities, including by exploring the potential of short and sustainable supply chains and by addressing food and nutrition insecurity;
- ensuring policy coherence in the production and supply of food and goods that are key to addressing one of Europe's greatest health challenges – noncommunicable diseases (NCDs);
- working with the health sector on international food trade issues to ensure the best outcomes for people and communities; and
- strengthening the prevention of foodborne and zoonotic diseases, including AMR.

## Key messages

The goal of Health 2020 is to significantly improve the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality.





## Strengthening the link between health and agriculture through food safety and nutrition

In 2012, all 53 Member States in the European Region adopted Health 2020, the new common European health policy framework, and committed themselves to developing integrative policies that engage with all sectors in addressing the social and economic determinants of health and well-being. The poorest members of our communities carry the greatest burden of food-related diseases in terms of both nutrition and food safety.

Linking with the agriculture sector presents an opportunity for the health sector to increase the supply of and demand for healthier and safer food. Agriculture policies can assist by ensuring the greater availability and affordability of a diverse range of healthier food and food products.

Ensuring the wider availability of minimally processed foods through changes to production and supply chain practices has the potential to contribute significantly to creating healthy and sustainable food systems. In addition, linking with the agriculture sector is essential in preventing and controlling foodborne and zoonotic diseases. This is most cost-effective when addressed early in the food chain. Strengthening the surveillance of foodborne and zoonotic disease in humans is critical to informing risk-based monitoring and action in the agriculture sector. Furthermore, collaboration among the human and animal sectors and the environment sector is also crucial to addressing AMR.

# Health 2020: a framework for action

The goal of Health 2020 is to significantly improve the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality.

All Member States of the WHO European Region have agreed to monitor progress against six common targets:

1. Reduce premature mortality in the European Region by 2020
2. Increase life expectancy in the European Region
3. Reduce health inequalities in the European Region
4. Enhance the wellbeing of the European Region population
5. Ensure universal health coverage and the right to the highest attainable level of health
6. Set national goals and targets related to health in Member States.

What makes societies prosper and flourish can also make people healthy, and policies that recognize this have more impact. Building awareness and capacity to make health objectives part of society's overall socio-economic and human development is essential. All policy fields, including health, need to reform their ways of working and use new forms and approaches to policy at the global, national and local levels.

# Synergy between sectors: agriculture policy as a tool to benefit health

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## Strengthening the link between agriculture and health through food safety and nutrition

Unhealthy diets, overweight and obesity are the leading risk factors for disease and disability in the European Region, in particular NCDs. Over 50% of the population is overweight in 46 of the 53 countries of the Region. On average, one in three children are overweight or obese, and the European population rarely meets nutrition goals for fruit, vegetable and wholegrain consumption, while ingesting too much saturated fat, salt and free sugar. Low socioeconomic groups are the most affected. Agriculture, including fisheries policies, can help to address these issues by ensuring the greater availability and affordability of a diverse range of healthier food and food products.

Ensuring the wider availability of minimally processed foods through short supply chains has the potential to contribute significantly to creating healthy and sustainable food systems and to support local economies, while ensuring that agriculture policies are consistent with overall sustainable development goals and factor in the health impact. The goal is to ensure that minimally processed foods, such as fruits and vegetables, reach the consumer before they go bad or are damaged. At the same time, opportunities for agriculture exist through possible incentives for the production of healthier crops (e.g. healthier

oil crops and more fruit and vegetables and whole grains) and the identification of new markets for healthier and minimally processed products through logistics support and public procurement policies.

While everyone is exposed to foodborne health risks, it is the poor who are the most exposed and vulnerable to such risks. Microbiological, chemical and other hazards in food result in significant illness and death throughout the Region, particularly among infants, children and the elderly. Foodborne diseases can also have severe economic consequences for individuals, families, communities, businesses and countries. These diseases impose a substantial burden on health-care systems, trade and tourism, markedly reduce economic productivity and threaten livelihoods. We need food safety systems with a whole-food-chain and risk-based approach that can prevent, detect and respond to food safety and zoonotic events in an effective and cost-efficient way. The agriculture sector has a crucial role in the monitoring and control of foodborne hazards in the food chain and in collaborating and information exchange with the public health sector on its surveillance of foodborne diseases in order to ensure that the prevention and control of foodborne diseases is both more cost-efficient and risk-

based. Agriculture also plays an essential role in the fight against AMR, since the use of antimicrobial agents in food animals can promote the development and spread of AMR, a major challenge for Europe with devastating consequences.

Agriculture policies can contribute to good health, for example by supporting the production of the staple foods that have sustained populations for generations, including vegetables and fruits, whole grains, pulses, nuts and seeds, in addition to promoting the consumption of fish, modest amounts of lean meat and low-fat dairy products and to ensuring the safety of all such essential foods. However, some agriculture policies can also contribute to unhealthy diets and unsafe food, including policies that do not address the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry and the use of harmful chemicals in pesticides, as well as specialization in outputs that are readily transformed into processed foods high in saturated fats, trans fat, salt and/or free sugars. The health sector needs to work more closely with the agriculture sector to address these issues.

# Synergy between sectors: collaboration to support people and communities

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## How can the sectors work together?

Health 2020 provides a platform for such joint working between the agriculture and health sectors. Working together, we have the power to intervene in order to address some of today's greatest health challenges, including NCDs, communicable diseases and AMR, and to support sustainable development, while ensuring that those living in urban and rural communities are able to access affordable safe and nutritious food.


### KEY AREAS TO EXPLORE TOGETHER INCLUDE:

- how to ensure policy coherence between agricultural policies and health objectives?
- how to increase the availability, affordability and safety of fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains for consumers at all income levels, including in key settings, such as schools?
- how to work holistically with other sectors/disciplines to detect, prevent and control foodborne and zoonotic diseases, including AMR?

## How can agricultural policy make a difference to health in the areas of nutrition and food safety?

- Support, through increased production and minimal processing, the availability and affordability of a diverse range of nutrient-dense foods (fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, lean meats and lowfat dairy products)
- Share data on trends in production, processes, food prices and commodity use by food supply chain actors
- Apply a holistic and risk-based whole-food-chain approach
- Prevent foodborne disease and zoonoses, as well as AMR
- Ensure the hygienic production, processing and distribution of foods
- Establish relevant monitoring systems in the food chain





## Collaborating to improve food safety and nutrition

### THE CHALLENGE

Leveraging the role of agriculture in tackling NCDs and infectious diseases

Ensuring food security and addressing food insecurity

Ensuring that consumer protection, fair trade for foods, and health and wellbeing are central considerations in international trade

Supporting the availability of fresh, safe and nutritious food

Strengthening the detection, prevention and control of foodborne and zoonotic diseases, including AMR

### THE RESPONSE NEEDED

Increase coordination among supply chain actors and activities to increase the supply of and demand for safe and nutritious foods. This includes how foods are produced, processed, distributed and marketed  
Reduce the supply and demand of key determinants that increase the risk of NCDs, for example tobacco, alcohol and food products

Joint working to increase the availability and affordability of safe and nutritious foods and to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups

Support the work of Codex Alimentarius. Ensure effective collaboration in matters concerning trade and investment policy

Collaborate across the agriculture, health and education sectors and local municipalities to ensure markets for fresh produce through institutional procurement policies

Improve monitoring and surveillance systems through intersectoral information sharing and collaboration and ensure up-to-date information on the food chain and on animal and human populations

### How can health make a difference to agriculture in the areas of nutrition and food safety?

- Provide opportunities to promote fresh agricultural produce as part of healthy public procurement
- Clearly identify and articulate, through dietary surveys, the nutritional gaps (e.g. low fruit and vegetable consumption) and, thereby, opportunities for new/expanded markets for the agriculture sector
- Strengthen the surveillance and control of foodborne diseases so as to inform and implement risk-based actions in the agriculture sector in order to better prevent and respond to the most important foodborne

# Using Health 2020 as a platform for joint work: a political mandate and evidence base

# HEALTH 2020

The Health 2020 policy framework has a political mandate. It has been adopted by all European Member States and can be adapted to the various settings and realities that make up the European Region. It describes how health and well-being can be advanced, sustained and measured through action that creates social cohesion, security, a good work–life balance, good health and good education. It calls on the health sector to reach out to the many different actors within and outside government and provides inspiration and direction on addressing the complex health challenges of the 21st century. The framework confirms values, is based on evidence and identifies strategic directions and essential actions. It builds on the experiences gained through previous Health for All Policies and guides the actions of both Member States and the Regional Office.

The framework addresses Europe's big social and health challenges; including inequalities, NCDs and infectious disease threats. Health 2020 has been informed by unprecedented research and review processes and serves as a distillate of the world public health knowledge.

A safe and nutritious food supply is essential for good health. The joint FAO/WHO World Declaration on Nutrition of 1992 states that "... access to nutritionally adequate and safe food is a basic individual right". Unfortunately, both malnutrition and food-borne diseases, including the rise of NCDs, constitute a significant challenge to the European Region.

Research has demonstrated that aspects of agriculture and food supply chain policies can affect people's diets and their risk of NCDs by influencing the availability and affordability of food, both as an input for the food industry and as an endproduct offered to consumers. This can encourage a

substitution effect between close alternatives (which may be more or less healthy), whereby producers and consumers could be incentivized to shift towards healthier options. This potential for substitution provides the mechanism by which targeted agriculture policies could be used to encourage a shift towards a healthy diet.

In the European Union (EU)/European Economic Area alone, there were more than 310 000 reported cases of bacterial food-borne disease in 2013, of which 322 were fatal. This represents only the tip of the iceberg, as most cases of foodborne disease are not reported due to limitations of the surveillance systems. Evidence from both research and practice demonstrates that addressing foodborne and zoonotic diseases early in the food chain can have a significant impact on these diseases appearing in the human population. In 2010, FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health and WHO jointly agreed on a concept to share responsibilities and coordinate global activities to address health risks at the animal-humanecosystems interfaces. AMR is an area where there has been evidence of successful collaboration between sectors, including health and agriculture. For example, an EU-wide ban on the use of antibiotics as growth promoters in animal feed entered into effect on 1 January 2006 because of public health risks. Such intersectoral assessment and action should continue and be strengthened in future collaboration.

Health 2020 sees agriculture as a co-producer of health; a policy area with ownership over consumable goods that are key determinants of health; an employer of a workforce that is too often vulnerable and at risk; a key influencer on the immediate and wider environment; and a partner in striving for investment in governmental policies that are coherent in their policy goals.

## Reducing health inequalities

To reduce health inequalities, addressing the following is a good start:

### LIFE-COURSE STAGE

- Social protection for women, mothers-to-be and young families
- Universal, high-quality and affordable early-years education and care system
- Eradication of unsafe work and access to employment and high quality work
- Coherent and effective intersectoral action to tackle inequalities at older ages

### WIDER SOCIETY

- Improved social protection, according to need
- Co-creation and partnership with those targeted, civil society and civic partners
- Action to reduce social exclusion
- Gender equity approach

### BROADER CONTEXT

- Promoting equity through tax and transfer payments
- Long-term planning through links with other policies

### SYSTEMS

- Greater coherence across sectors
- Comprehensive responses
- Regular reporting and public scrutiny

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