



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 19 October 2020
(OR. en)

12099/20

AGRI 367
ENV 645
PESTICIDE 33
PHYTOSAN 24
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RECH 407
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FAO 24
WTO 279

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
On: 19 October 2020
To: Delegations

No. prev. doc.: 11822/20

Subject: Council Conclusions on the Farm to Fork Strategy
- *Council Conclusions* (19 October 2020)

Delegations will find in annex the Council Conclusions on the Farm to Fork Strategy, as approved by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 19 October 2020.

Council Conclusions on the Farm to Fork Strategy

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING :

- The Council Conclusions of 29 November 2019 on the updated Bioeconomy Strategy - A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: strengthening the connections between economy, society and the environment'
- The Council Conclusions of 16 December 2019 on animal welfare - An integral part of sustainable animal production (doc 14975/19)
- The Council Conclusions of 16 December 2019 on the next steps how to better tackle and deter fraudulent practices in the agri-food chain (doc 15154/19)
- The Council Conclusions of 28 June 2016 on food losses and food waste (doc 10730/16)
- The Council Conclusions of 14 June 2019 on the next steps towards making the EU a best practice region in combatting antimicrobial resistance (doc 10366/19)
- The Council Conclusions of 18 June 2018 on the EU and its Member States' medium-term priorities for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (doc 10277/18)

ACKNOWLEDGES that the Farm to Fork Strategy, hereinafter "the F2F Strategy" is at the heart of the Green Deal and that it comprehensively addresses the challenges of sustainable food systems and recognizes the links between food, healthy societies and a healthy planet.

I. ACTION NEEDED FOR A TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

- (1) **WELCOMES** the European Commission Communication ‘A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’.
- (2) **EMPHASISES** that the measures envisaged in the Strategy should contribute to implementing the United Nations Agenda 2030 with its Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the goals set out in the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- (3) **AGREES** with the Commission that European food is already a global standard for food that is safe, plentiful, nutritious and of high quality, and that this is the result of years of EU policymaking and of the efforts made by farmers, fishermen and aquaculture producers.
- (4) **ENDORSES** the goal of developing a European sustainable food system, from production to consumption. The measures envisaged in the F2F Strategy should contribute to achieving EU climate neutrality by 2050 as well as biodiversity goals and targets, to preserving natural resources and cultural¹ landscape and to reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience to climate change. **EMPHASISES** the vital role of pollinators for healthy ecosystems and food security.
- (5) **STRESSES** that the environmental and climate footprint of the current EU food system should be reduced and that the planetary boundaries and the precautionary principle have to be duly taken into account. Furthermore, the measures envisaged in the F2F Strategy should lead to greater appreciation of food and to improved health. In this context, **WELCOMES** the Commission’s intention to propose, at the latest by the end of 2023, a legislative initiative setting out a framework for sustainable food systems, and looks forward to the deliberations on the respective proposals.

¹ UNESCO definition: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

- (6) **AGREES** with the Commission that the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the vital role of the single market supply chains and the importance of robust and resilient food systems, while **NOTING** the complexity of food supply chains. Furthermore, **AGREES** that European citizens' access to a sufficient and varied supply of high-quality, nutritious, safe and sustainably produced food at reasonable prices must constantly be ensured in order to achieve food security and nutrition. A common European response to crises affecting food systems is needed to mitigate their socio-economic impact in the EU, to ensure food security, nutrition and safety, and to safeguard public health. **EMPHASISES** that there is a need to move towards a smart integration of global, regional and local food systems including shorter supply chains, in such a way that these strengthen one another and increase food security, in accordance with the principles of the single market.
- (7) **WELCOMES** the Commission's intention to develop a contingency plan designed to ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis.
- (8) **HIGHLIGHTS** the importance of the precautionary principle, a risk-based approach and biosecurity in safeguarding food safety, animal health, soil and plant health within EU and globally, as well as in supporting livelihoods and food security. **WELCOMES** the Commission's objective to better protect plant health. **CALLS ON** the Commission to achieve this while maintaining a high level of protection for the environment and public health.
- (9) **POINTS OUT** that special importance needs to be given to animal health, biosecurity and animal welfare in the implementation of the F2F strategy. **STRESSES** the fact that animal health and welfare are a precondition for sustainable livestock production, and that animal health is a precondition for a reduced need for antimicrobials. **RECALLS** in this context three sets of Council conclusions adopted in 2019.²³⁴

² Council Conclusions on biosecurity, an overall concept with a unitary approach for protecting animal health in the EU (doc 10368/1/19 REV1)

³ Council Conclusions on the next steps towards making the EU a best practice region in combatting antimicrobial resistance (doc 9765/19)

⁴ Council Conclusions on animal welfare - an integral part of sustainable animal production (doc 14975/19)

- (10) **DRAWS ATTENTION** to the wide range of policy areas, legislation and non-binding instruments influencing the implementation of the F2F Strategy and **STRESSES** the need for a cooperative and coherent approach with mutual support, focusing on synergies. **RECALLS** the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making and **CALLS ON** the Commission to base legislative proposals on thorough impact assessments. **CONSIDERS** it necessary to ensure consistency and coherence between the measures envisaged by the F2F Strategy and the Common Agriculture and Fisheries Policies, the trade policy, the EU-Biodiversity Strategy 2030, as well as other related EU policies and strategies.
- (11) **RECALLS** the Council Conclusions of 29 November 2019 on the updated Bioeconomy Strategy 'A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: strengthening the connections between economy, society and the environment'⁵ and **POINTS OUT** that the food system is an integral part of a circular and sustainable bio economy, which significantly contributes to environmental and climate goals. In this context, efforts need to be made to strengthen the bio-based sectors, including by unlocking investments and markets, as well as fostering sustainable biomass production and processing.
- (12) **STRESSES** that, with regard to the realisation of the objectives and measures proposed in the F2F Strategy, adequate attention needs to be given to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable food systems, including with regards to the competitiveness of EU agricultural and related sectors.
- (13) **EMPHASISES** that ensuring a fair income for primary producers is of paramount importance for a successful transition towards a sustainable food system. **STRESSES** the importance of further strengthening the position of primary producers, their cooperatives and producer organisations in the food supply chain and of performance-based incentives for sustainable practices in order to ensure food security and public goods such as ecosystem services. **WELCOMES** the Commission's intention to monitor the implementation of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive.

⁵ Council Conclusions on the updated Bioeconomy Strategy "A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment (doc 14594/19)

- (14) **WELCOMES** the fact that the F2F Strategy also highlights research and innovation as a means of achieving sustainable food systems. That includes green and digital innovation and biotechnology, provided that they are safe for human health and the environment, which should contribute to a wide-scale change of food production practices. In this regard, many EU and regional initiatives, such as the Horizon Europe programme and the BIOEAST initiative, play a key role. As far as digital innovation is concerned, the expansion of fast broadband in rural areas is also essential.
- (15) **RECOGNISES** the role of the Standard Committee on Agricultural Research in promoting definition and implementation of ambitious target-oriented EU-wide research and innovation programmes and partnerships. **STRESSES** furthermore the need for better and stronger dissemination of the research results in order to create stronger links between the scientific community, governments, farmers, fishermen, business operators and consumers, so as to promote innovation and development. **EMPHASISES** the importance of research in behavioural insights as a core driver for successful policy making and implementation.

II. ENSURING SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION IN THE EU

- (16) **ACKNOWLEDGES** that the measures envisaged in the F2F Strategy should contribute to the resilience of the farming sectors through promoting alternative sustainable business models for EU farmers, while preserving the existence of different production forms and facilitating the availability of resources for production, including land, to primary producers.
- (17) **TAKES NOTE** of the reduction targets for pesticides, antimicrobials and fertilisers as well as the other targets set out in the F2F Strategy. **POINTS OUT** that achieving those targets will require efforts from Member States and all stakeholders and intensive co-operation, consultation and collaboration.

REQUESTS THE COMMISSION, in this regard,

- to base legislative proposals on scientifically-sound ex-ante impact assessments describing the methods of calculation of the targets and the baselines and reference periods of each individual target, after consultation with the Member States. The cumulative effects of the legislative proposals should be taken into account.
- to ensure that these targets are EU targets to which all Member States must contribute through action at national level. In this context, successes already achieved, as well as Member States' different starting points, circumstances and conditions must be taken into account, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.
- to ensure that the guidance and recommendations to the Member States are clear, comprehensive, transparent, science-based and performance-oriented.
- to ensure cost-effective implementation and monitoring of the targets, while ensuring a level playing field on competitive agri-food markets and compatibility with WTO rules.
- to continue promoting the prudent and responsible use of antimicrobials in order to preserve their efficacy for the treatment of infections in humans and animals.

(18) **CALLS FOR** emphasis to be placed on the need for efficient and cost-effective administration and implementation of the F2F Strategy, efficient coordination, the development of credible control measures and mechanisms, including by digitalisation and a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework.

(19) **WELCOMES** the Commission's intention to facilitate the placing on the market of sustainable and innovative feed additives which are safe for animals, humans and the environment.

(20) **CONSIDERS** that the further development of plant protein production and alternative sources of animal protein in the EU is a way of effectively addressing many of the environmental and climate challenges that EU agriculture is facing, as well as preventing deforestation in countries outside the EU.

- (21) **CALLS ON** the Commission to present an EU protein transition strategy that encourages the cultivation of plant proteins for food and feed in the EU, as well as the use of other sustainable protein sources. **POINTS OUT**, in this regard, the Commission report on the development of plant proteins in the European Union⁶.
- (22) **CONSIDERS WITH INTEREST** the Commission's intention to bring forward a new EU carbon farming initiative as part of the Climate Pact and to develop a regulatory framework for the certification of greenhouse gas reduction and carbon removal based on robust and transparent carbon accounting, with a view to verifying and monitoring greenhouse gas reductions in accordance with the EU reporting and accounting requirements. **CALLS FOR** special emphasis in this context on the sustainable character of carbon storage, while avoiding leakage effects and adverse impacts on the environment. Consideration also needs to be given to the consequences for soil organic matter and the co-benefits for certain sustainable agricultural practices. **NOTES** that the EU carbon-farming initiative could be an important contribution to the EU climate ambition.
- (23) **CALLS ON** the Commission to take concrete actions for ensuring the protection, restoration and sustainable use of plant and animal genetic resources. **INVITES** the Commission to present a EU strategy for genetic resources for aquaculture, forests and agriculture that is based on the work of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture of the FAO. As a result, primary producers should benefit from easier market access to cultural, climate and locally adapted varieties and breeds. **WELCOMES**, in this context, the Commission's objective of facilitating the registration of seed varieties, including varieties used for organic farming.

⁶ Communication (COM (2018) 757 final)

- (24) **WELCOMES** the Commission’s observation that new innovative ingredients and techniques may play a role in increasing sustainability, provided that they are safe for humans, animals and the environment, while bringing benefits for the society as a whole. **LOOKS FORWARD** to the Commission's study⁷ in light of the Court of Justice’s judgement in Case C-528/16 regarding the status of novel genomic techniques under EU legislation.
- (25) **WELCOMES** the Commission’s objective to reduce the adverse effects of the use of plant protection products on the environment, such as by supporting the development of more comprehensive plant protection approaches based on the principles of integrated pest management. **HIGHLIGHTS** in this regard the importance of ensuring adequate and scientifically-sound integrated pest management measures and the promotion of the use of sustainable alternative plant protection products and methods.
- (26) **NOTES** that the recently adopted regulations on veterinary medicinal products and medicated feed provide measures that will help fight more effectively the global threat of antimicrobial resistance in a One Health approach. **INVITES** the Commission to prepare, as soon as possible, the necessary delegated and implementing acts.

⁷ In November 2019, The Council of the European Union requested the Commission (Council Decision (EU) 2019/1904) to submit, by 30 April 2021, “a study in light of the Court of Justice’s judgment in Case C-528/16 regarding the status of novel genomic techniques under Union law” (i.e. Directive 2001/18/EC, Regulation (EC) 1829/2003, Regulation (EC) 1830/2003 and Directive 2009/41/EC).”

- (27) **WELCOMES** the announcement in the F2F Strategy that the existing animal welfare legislation is to be reviewed in the light of the latest scientific knowledge, so that legislation can be made more comprehensive and easier to implement. This should ultimately ensure a higher level of animal welfare and improved consumer confidence throughout the EU. **CALLS ON** the Commission to carry out this review as promptly as possible in order to revise existing animal welfare legislation as soon as possible, in particular on the transport of animals, and propose new rules for animals that are not yet covered by specific EU legislation. **INVITES** the Commission to cooperate with other partners in international fora in line with policy positions established by the Council, so as to promote further development of international standards on animal welfare by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), as well as establish and implement the best possible animal welfare practices.
- (28) **RECALLS** the Council Conclusions of 16 December 2019⁸ and **INVITES** the Commission to assess the impact of an EU regulatory framework with criteria for an animal welfare labelling scheme which would contribute to enhanced animal welfare, greater market transparency, better consumer choice and fairer compensation for livestock under higher animal welfare levels, as well as a level playing field. **POINTS OUT** that national experience should be taken into account and that additional administrative burden should be reduced as much as possible.
- (29) **CALLS ON** the Commission to maintain a high level of food safety within the EU and welcomes further actions that strengthen the food safety system and combat food fraud at all stages at all stages from farm to fork. **RECALLS** in this regard the Council Conclusions of 16 December 2019 on next steps how to better tackle and deter fraudulent practices on the agri-food chain⁹.

⁸ Council Conclusions on animal welfare - An integral part of sustainable animal production (doc 14975/19)

⁹ Council Conclusions on the next steps how to better tackle and deter fraudulent practices in the agri-food chain (doc 15154/19)

- (30) **EMPHASISES** the fact that the transition to a circular economy significantly contributes to environmental and climate goals. Therefore **CALLS ON** the Commission to facilitate, in compliance with sanitary rules and waste legislation, the re-use and recycling of resources which are locally recovered from waste, manure or by-products.
- (31) **POINTS OUT** that the future CAP Strategic Plan Regulation and the Member States' CAP Strategic Plans will be able to contribute to the greening of the CAP and thus to some of the objectives envisaged in the F2F Strategy. **WELCOMES** in this regard that the future CAP is expected to strengthen the principle of subsidiarity and give due consideration to the diverse national conditions and respective assessments of Member States' needs, and **LOOKS FORWARD** to the Commission's forthcoming non-legally-binding recommendations which may serve as additional guidance for the elaboration of the strategic plans.
- (32) **RECALLS** that the Council's position on these instruments is in the process of being formulated as the post-2020 CAP proposals are currently under negotiation by the Council and European Parliament.
- (33) **WELCOMES** the EU objective for EU's agricultural land under organic farming and a significant increase in organic aquaculture. **RECOGNISES** that organic farming can make an important contribution to sustainable food systems. **CALLS ON** the Commission to also assess other possible farming models that may deliver similar environmental benefits.
- (34) **INVITES** the Commission, in the context of the ambitious objective it has proposed for the development of organic farming in the EU by 2030, to advance work on its announced Action Plan on organic farming together with the Member States and stakeholders. The work needs to ensure a balance between supply and demand. **CALLS ON** the Commission to promote the exchange of experience between all Member States and to speed up the work on equivalence agreements with third countries in order to promote EU exports of organic products.

- (35) **HIGHLIGHTS** the importance of maintaining and restoring soil fertility and agronomic productivity in order to ensure economic, social and environmental sustainability. **RECOGNISES** that excess nutrient loading resulting from certain agricultural practices has a negative impact on ecosystems, the climate and biodiversity. **WELCOMES** the Commission's initiative to develop, in close consultation with the Member States, a nutrient management plan. **POINTS OUT** in this regard the potential of nutrient recycling which uses, for instance, the possibilities offered by digital technologies and precision agriculture.
- (36) **WELCOMES** the Commission's ambition to promote effective Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), involving all food chain actors and relevant stakeholders.
- (37) **UNDERLINES** the significant potential of fisheries and aquaculture for the production of food for sustainable healthy diets and feed in the EU and **ACKNOWLEDGES** the progress made in moving towards sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the EU. At the same time, the work in this area needs to focus on preserving a sustainable balance of natural fish stocks, to adopt a zero-tolerance approach in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, to combat overfishing and limit the negative impact on the environment. **CALLS FOR** the preservation of traditional and sustainable aquaculture practices and the improvement of their competitiveness and resilience. **WELCOMES** the announcement of the review of the EU 2013 strategic guidelines on aquaculture¹⁰.
- (38) **WELCOMES** the Commission's plans to revise the food contact materials legislation to improve food safety and public health. **ENCOURAGES** the Commission to develop harmonised rules for specific types of material used for food contact in the light of the increasing demands for circularity, while ensuring food safety. In addition, as a common EU requirement, **CALLS FOR** a declaration of compliance for all food contact materials in order to document materials' safety, give relevant information to the next user in the supply chain and improve the recyclability of food contact materials.

¹⁰ COM/2013/0229: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0229&from=EN>

III. PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN FOOD PROCESSING AND THE FOOD INDUSTRY

- (39) **AGREES** with the Commission that the resilience and sustainability of food systems at all levels, including at regional and local level, must be enhanced.
- (40) **WELCOMES** a better integration of sustainable development into European quality policy. **INVITES** the Commission to reaffirm the relevance and importance of European quality schemes and to strengthen the legislative framework on geographical indications.
- (41) **ACKNOWLEDGES** the essential role of the food industry and the retail sector, which should be among the leaders in reducing the environmental footprint of food systems. **WELCOMES** the Commission's announcement that it will draw up a EU code of conduct and an accompanying monitoring framework.
- (42) **SUPPORTS THE COMMISSION** in its commitment to facilitating a healthier and sustainable diet. **STRESSES** the importance of promoting the reformulation of foods in line with guidelines on a healthy and sustainable diet (e.g. for salt, sugar and saturated fat). **CONSIDERS WITH INTEREST** the resumption of discussions with a view to setting-up nutrient profiles to restrict the use of nutrition or health claims regarding foods high in fat, sugar or salt, in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 on nutrition and health claims.
- (43) **WELCOMES** the fact that the Commission is seeking to enhance the contribution of the EU promotion programme for agricultural products to sustainable production and consumption, including organic products and products under quality schemes.

(44) **REAFFIRMS** the Council's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 (halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply lines). **WELCOMES**, therefore, the Commission's proposals to prevent or reduce food losses and food waste, in particular through the revision of EU rules so as to prevent the misunderstanding or misuse of date marking. **RECALLS** the Commission's obligation in the Directive 2008/98/EC¹¹ (EU Waste Framework Directive), as revised by Directive (EU) 2018/851¹², to consider in 2023 the feasibility of establishing an EU-wide food waste reduction target to be met by 2030 on the basis of the data reported by Member States and in accordance with the common methodology established.

IV. STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF CONSUMERS

- (45) **HIGHLIGHTS** that food labelling, marketing practices, pricing, easy access, nutrient quality, nutrition education and awareness-raising campaigns play an essential role in supporting healthy and sustainable diets. **CONCURS** that healthy and sustainable choices must become easy for consumers. **HIGHLIGHTS**, in this context, the role of suitable and easily understandable consumer information as an integral part of an improved food environment. **STRESSES**, in this regard, the need to include behavioural insights in these matters.
- (46) **WELCOMES** that the Commission's intention to present guidance for sustainable food procurement in institutional catering.
- (47) **SUPPORTS THE COMMISSION** in its ambition to counter the increased incidence of cardiovascular diseases, overweight and obesity. **AGREES** with the Commission that the current food consumption patterns need to become more sustainable from both a health and environmental perspective.

¹¹ Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste and repealing certain Directives (OJ L 312, 22.11.2008, p. 3).

¹² Directive (EU) 2018/851 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste (OJ L 150, 14.6.2018, p. 109).

- (48) **WELCOMES** the fact that the Commission is seeking a harmonised science-based front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme, taking into account existing national experience and will propose a harmonised framework for the labelling of sustainable food.
- (49) **WELCOMES** the Commission's initiative in seeking improved labelling of origin or provenance for certain products. **EMPHASISES** the need for an impact assessment, including, for instance, the benefits for consumers and producers and the impact on the single market, of a harmonised approach to mandatory declarations of origin or provenance.

V. PROMOTING THE GLOBAL TRANSITION

- (50) **RECOGNISES** the importance of promoting sustainability of food systems at a global level and of improving the competitiveness of EU primary producers and to ensure a level playing field. **STRESSES** that the EU trade policy should contribute to enhancing cooperation with third countries and should seek to obtain ambitious commitments from them in key areas such as the implementation of the Paris Agreement, biodiversity conservation and protection and sustainable food systems, including plant health and animal health and welfare, the sustainable use of pesticides and antimicrobials, while ensuring their effective implementation.
- (51) **RECOGNISES** free trade agreements as one of the ways to promote EU standards and raise standards globally. **WELCOMES** that the EU will seek to ensure an ambitious sustainability chapter in all EU bilateral trade agreements, and that it will ensure full implementation and enforcement thereof, including through actions of the EU Chief Trade and Enforcement Officer. **REQUESTS** the Commission to perform impact assessments for those agreements such that their results are available well before the final phase of the negotiation of a trade agreement.
- (52) **WELCOMES** the Commission's intention to review import tolerances for pesticides and to take into account environmental aspects when assessing import tolerances applications, in accordance with WTO standards and obligations.

- (53) **POINTS OUT** the great importance of international cooperation and of the EU trade policy in relation to imported food and feed. **RECALLS**, in this context, that imported food and feed must fully comply with the relevant EU legislation.
- (54) **SUPPORTS** the Commission's proposal to reduce global deforestation and forest degradation. **WELCOMES** the Commission's intention to present in 2021 a legislative proposal and other measures to avoid or minimise the placing of products associated with deforestation or forest degradation on the EU market.
- (55) **RECOGNISES** the important role of imports in the carbon and biodiversity footprint of the EU's food system and invites the European Commission to propose appropriate measures to reduce the impact of imports, while complying with international rules.
- (56) **WELCOMES** the fact that the Commission cooperates with partner countries on halting deforestation and promoting sustainable forests management, as well as sustainable land use management.
- (57) **AGREES** that the EU should promote the global transition to sustainable food systems in international standardisation bodies, relevant multilateral fora and at international events such as the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021. **INVITES** the Commission to promote the establishment of fair production and environmental certification schemes. **STRESSES** the importance of global cooperation in the fight against antimicrobial resistance.
- (58) **REAFFIRMS** the EU's commitment to global cooperation on sustainable food systems with due respect for the different challenges worldwide and **ENCOURAGES** the inclusion of sustainable food systems as an objective of the EU external policies and the inclusion of specific chapters on sustainable food systems in all new alliances and agreements with all partners. **REAFFIRMS** the importance of the EU's support for sustainable African rural development and, in this respect, **RECALLS** the declaration of the third conference of agricultural ministers from the African Union and European Union¹³.

¹³ Declaration and the Action Agenda adopted by the third African Union - European Union Agriculture Ministerial Conference on 21 June 2019 in Rome (doc 12072/19)

(59) **NOTES** that the COVID-19 pandemic has put the spotlight on the importance of the correlation between animal and human health, nutrition and food, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and their link with the environment and climate change (the One Health approach). **WELCOMES** the existing cooperation between the so-called "Tripartite" international organisations (OIE, WHO and FAO) in this field and **STRONGLY ENCOURAGES** its strengthening and the extension of their collaboration to international organisations competent in the field of biodiversity and environment, with a view to better understand, control and prevent the current and future pandemics.
